

The Metaphorical Construction of Cultural Identity in Malay Proverbs

Balazs Huszka¹, Hajah Zurinah Haji Ya'akub¹, Rabi'atul Adawiyah Haji Hassan¹, Siti Ifwah Fauzani Haji Chuchu², Alexander Stark³

¹(Language Centre, University of Brunei Darussalam, Brunei Darussalam)

²(Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Brunei Darussalam, Brunei Darussalam)

³(Faculty of Language Studies and Human Development, University Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia)

ABSTRACT : This study examines how traditional Malay proverbs (*peribahasa*) metaphorically construct and transmit cultural identity. Using Cognitive Metaphor Theory alongside the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, the research analyses Malay proverbs across eight thematic domains: family kinship, caution and danger, social harmony, wisdom and experience, human emotion, moral character, nature and the environment, and fate and life journey. Each proverb is presented in Malay with an English translation and dissected to identify source and target domains, underlying conceptual metaphors, entailments, and cultural significances. The analysis reveals that Malay proverbs draw heavily on concrete imagery—such as water, flora, fauna, food, and celestial phenomena—to explain abstract concepts like unity, caution, humility, and destiny. These metaphors encapsulate core Malay values, including strong familial bonds, communal cooperation, respect for nature, acceptance of fate, and moral integrity. Recurrent patterns of metaphorical mapping demonstrate how language and thought intertwine: linguistic expressions not only reflect cultural worldview but actively reinforce it. The findings suggest that the Malay language's rich proverbial repertoire serves as a cognitive-cultural repository, perpetuating a collective identity that prioritises harmony, humility, and resilience. In conclusion, the study affirms that Malay proverbs function as potent vehicles of cultural knowledge, and that their metaphorical frameworks subtly shape habitual thought in line with cultural norms.

KEYWORDS -Cognitive Metaphors, Cultural Identity, Malayness, Proverbs, Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

I. INTRODUCTION

Malay cultural identity is deeply rooted in the Malay language (*bahasa*), traditions (*adat*), and the Islamic faith (*agama Islam*), which have been preserved and transmitted across generations. The traditional process of inculturation within the Malay community is deeply embedded in the (predominantly oral) transmission of a highly sophisticated value system. This encompasses not only the above-mentioned language, customs, and religion but also distinctive literary genres and forms such as folk tales (*cerita rakyat*), epics (*hikayat*), narrative poems (*syair*), humorous stories (*cerita jenaka*), incantations (*mantera*), quatrains (*pantun*), didactic (*gurindam*) and satirical verses (*seloka*), proverbs (*peribahasa*), melodic sung verses (*tembang*), among others. These cultural elements form a robust foundation for the collective identity of the Malay community, while safeguarding its essence from external influences.

Identity is a multidimensional concept that reflects a group's shared values and cultural markers, ideally fostering a sense of belonging and collective consciousness. Identity enables members of the group to recognise both themselves and others as belonging to something greater than the individual, while building a

sense of connection and solidarity. In the Malay context, metaphors play an essential role in expressing this collective identity, connecting the individual with the community and vice versa. For instance, *seperti menatang minyak yang penuh* (“like cradling [a cup of] oil to the brim”) symbolises the care and responsibility required in child-rearing, while *langit tak selalunya cerah* (“the sky is not always clear”) highlights the inevitability of adversity, emphasizing resilience and patience as virtues. These metaphors extend beyond linguistic expression: they serve as cognitive and cultural tools that help shape and conserve the Malay worldview.

Language is not merely a tool for communication but also shapes how we think, understand, and engage with the world. Metaphors function as lenses through which abstract concepts are rendered more comprehensible, particularly by linking the intangible to tangible realities. For example, metaphors such as *air tenang jangan disangka tiada buaya* (“Don't think still waters do not have crocodiles” or “still waters run deep”) caution against underestimating hidden dangers, while *bagai air dicincang tidak akan putus* (“like water that cannot be severed”) reflects the strength of familial bonds. These expressions reflect the Malay community's deep connection to nature and its collective memory, which continues to influence its cultural practices and identity.

Metaphors are not merely linguistic decorations but are foundational to how individuals and communities conceptualise and store their lived experiences. In the Malay cultural context, metaphors offer unique insights into the intricate interplay of language, cognition, and societal values. These expressions encapsulate the very essence of “Malayness”, where faith, communal harmony, respect for nature, and resilience are prioritised over individualistic pursuits. For instance, while the Western metaphor *time is money* emphasises economic efficiency and (mostly individual) productivity, Malay metaphors often highlight the importance of patience, balance, and collective responsibility.

Despite their significance, the role of metaphors in constructing and preserving Malay cultural identity has been largely underexplored in scholarly discourse. Research on metaphors often focuses on their universality [1] or their contribution to linguistic diversity [2]. Few studies, however, delve into the specific cultural nuances of Malay metaphors as carriers of philosophical, social, and religious values. This oversight is particularly concerning in an era of globalisation, where cultural homogenisation threatens to erode local identities [3], [4]. The introduction of Western academic frameworks during the colonial and post-colonial periods opened avenues for analysing the intricate interplay between language and culture. However, these approaches often struggled to reconcile the deeply contextual and collective nature of Malay metaphors with external theoretical frameworks.

The current paper addresses this research gap by examining key metaphors in the Malay language and exploring how they articulate and preserve-maintain cultural identity. It draws on theories such as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis and Cognitive Metaphor Theory to analyse the cognitive structures underlying these fixed expressions. Furthermore, it investigates how metaphors preserve communal values such as familial unity, respect for tradition, and spiritual depth, which are essential to the Malay worldview.

This study also highlights the pedagogical importance of metaphors in understanding Malay culture and thought. Furthermore, the analysis illustrates how metaphors serve as bridges between tradition and modernity, enabling the Malay community to withstand the powers of globalisation and preserve its unique identity.

II. BACKGROUND

THE MALAYS ANTHROPOLOGY AND ORIGINS

The Malays, an Austronesian ethnolinguistic group, can be traced through both archaeological and genetic evidence. Linguistic and archaeological data indicate that the ancestors of the Malays were part of the broader Austronesian migratory movements that originated in Taiwan around 3000–2500 BCE. These Austronesian-speaking populations are thought to have migrated southward through the Philippine archipelago, subsequently reaching Borneo, Java, and Sumatra by the first millennium BCE [5]. A proto-Malayic language likely emerged in western Borneo within the broader context of Southeast Asia. From there, Malay-speaking communities expanded to the coastal regions of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula prior to the beginning of the Common Era [6], [5].

This early maritime mobility facilitated the formation of trading communities that came to be identified as Malay. By the 7th century CE, a significant Malay polity known as *Srivijaya* had emerged in Sumatra, exerting influence over the Melaka Straits and contributing to the dissemination of Malay language and culture. The subsequent rise of the Melaka Sultanate in the 15th century further reinforced a distinctly Islamic Malay identity [5].

Anthropologists commonly refer to a “two-layer” model of population history in the Malay region, comprising an indigenous stratum of early foragers and a later Austronesian stratum formed by subsequent migratory groups [6], [7]. The earliest inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula—Orang Asli groups such as the Negritos—are thought to have arrived tens of thousands of years ago. They were subsequently joined by Austronesian-speaking agriculturalists, often termed the Proto-Malays, around 2000 BCE [6].

Genetic evidence substantiates this model of mixed ancestry within contemporary Malay populations. Mitochondrial DNA analyses reveal deep maternal lineages linking the Malays to ancient Southeast Asian aboriginal groups, alongside lineages indicative of more recent East Asian (Austronesian) ancestry [7]. Genome-wide studies further demonstrate that divergent migratory histories have resulted in distinct genetic profiles among various Malay sub-ethnic communities. For instance, Malays in Peninsular Malaysia exhibit considerable genetic differentiation: those in the south and west—such as populations of Minangkabau, Javanese, or Bugis descent—display greater genetic affinity with groups from the Indonesian archipelago, whereas north-eastern Malays, such as the Kelantanese, form a separate genetic cluster, reflecting a greater degree of local continuity [8].

These findings suggest that the contemporary Malay population emerged through multiple waves of migration and admixture, rather than from a single, homogeneous ancestral group [8], [6].

CONTEMPORARY GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION AND SOCIOPOLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

In the contemporary period, the Malay ethnic group is primarily concentrated across Southeast Asia, particularly within the region commonly referred to as the “Malay World” (*Alam Melayu*). Malays constitute a demographic majority in Malaysia—comprising approximately fifty to sixty per cent of the population, depending on definitional parameters—as well as in the Sultanate of Brunei, thereby rendering both states Malay-majority polities [9].

In Malaysia, Malays—alongside other indigenous communities—are classified as *bumiputera* (literally, “sons of the soil”), a status that accords certain preferential policies and privileges, particularly in education, economic opportunity, and political representation [9]. The Malaysian Federal Constitution formally defines a “Malay” as an individual who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, and adheres to Malay customs and traditions [10]. This constitutional definition reflects the centrality of Malay identity in the nation’s postcolonial state-building and socio-political framework.

Similarly, in Brunei, Malay identity is institutionally reinforced through the national ideology of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (“Malay Islamic Monarchy”), which upholds the Malay language, Islam, and monarchy as foundational pillars of the state. This tripartite philosophy underscores the role of Malayness not only as an ethnic identity but as a central axis of national cohesion and governance.

Indonesia is home to substantial Malay communities, particularly along the eastern coast of Sumatra (notably in the provinces of Riau and Jambi) and in the coastal regions of Borneo (Kalimantan). Although Indonesia is a multi-ethnic nation in which the Javanese and other major groups predominate, ethnic Malays—historically referred to as *Melayu*—constitute a significant component of the national ethnolinguistic landscape and have contributed meaningfully to the development of the Indonesian national identity. Reflecting the historical influence of Malay traders, scholars, and administrators throughout the archipelago, the official language of Indonesia, *Bahasa Indonesia*, is derived from a variant of the classical Malay lingua franca [11].

Long-established Malay populations are also found in Singapore and southern Thailand. In Singapore, Malays are recognised as the indigenous population, and Malay is constitutionally designated as the national language. Malay culture remains a vital aspect of the nation’s multicultural heritage, with Malays comprising approximately 15 per cent of the total population. In southern Thailand, particularly in the Patani region, ethnic Malays—primarily Malay-speaking Muslims—form the demographic majority in several provinces. Their

distinct identity, rooted in the Malay language, Islamic faith, and customary practices, continues to carry sociopolitical significance, particularly in the context of minority rights, national integration, and historical episodes of ethnic conflict and separatist sentiment [9].

Beyond these principal areas, smaller Malay diaspora communities can be found in countries such as Sri Lanka and South Africa. In Sri Lanka, the Malay population traces its origins to soldiers, exiles, and officials brought during the colonial period, while in South Africa's Cape region, the so-called "Cape Malays" are descended from enslaved individuals transported from the Malay-Indonesian world. Despite geographic displacement and varying degrees of assimilation, these diasporic communities have retained salient elements of Malay cultural heritage, including culinary traditions, religious practices, and linguistic traces—thus reflecting the remarkable geographical diffusion and enduring resilience of Malay identity [5].

"MALAYNESS": IDENTITY, LANGUAGE, AND CULTURE

Malayness denotes the shared cultural-linguistic identity that defines Malay communities across diverse geographical contexts. At the heart of this identity lies the Malay language (*Bahasa Melayu*), which belongs to the Malayic sub-branch of the Austronesian language family and has historically functioned as a regional lingua franca. Following the Islamisation of the Malay world, Classical Malay—written in *Jawi* (a modified Arabic script)—emerged as a prominent medium for trade, administration, and literary expression throughout the Malay Archipelago.

In its modern standardised forms, Malay now serves as the official language of Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore, holds co-official status in parts of southern Thailand, and constitutes the linguistic foundation of *Bahasa Indonesia*, the national language of Indonesia. This shared linguistic tradition, spoken by millions, remains a key marker of Malay identity and facilitates a transnational sense of cultural cohesion [11], [12].

Religion constitutes another central pillar of Malayness. The overwhelming majority of Malays are Muslim, and Islam has been integrally linked to Malay culture since at least the fifteenth century. Historically, conversion to Islam was colloquially described as *masuk Melayu* (literally, "to enter Malayness"), reflecting the close association between Islam and Malay cultural belonging [13]. This notion underscores that Malay identity has been shaped less by strict genealogical lineage than by cultural affiliation, particularly through language, religion, and customary practices.

As King [13] notes, within the island Southeast Asian context, non-Malay individuals who embraced Islam and adopted Malay sociocultural norms were often regarded as Malay. Consequently, *Malayness* may be conceptualised as an inclusive and dynamic cultural framework—one capable of encompassing diverse ethnic origins under a shared linguistic and Islamic civilisational identity [9].

In addition to language and religion, Malays are also unified by a range of shared customs and traditions. Broadly speaking, Malay societies are shaped by the *adat* (tradition)—a system of customary law and practice that regulates social behaviour and governs key life-cycle events. This normative framework is deeply embedded in communal life and plays a central role in reinforcing social cohesion and cultural continuity.

Core elements of Malay cultural expression include traditional performing and literary arts such as *silat* (a form of martial art), *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry, also found in other regional cultural traditions), *dikir barat* (a choral performance art), and literary genres such as *pantun* (a form of quatrain poetry) and the epic *Hikayat* narratives. Many of these cultural forms were historically patronised by Malay courts and have since been absorbed into the broader corpus of folk tradition.

A further defining feature of Malayness is the institution of kingship or the sultanate. The concept of *kerajaan* (kingship) traditionally situated the Malay monarch at the symbolic and functional centre of both cultural and political life—an ideal that continues to inform the constitutional monarchies of the contemporary Malay world [9].

Moreover, Malays across national boundaries participate in a common set of festive and ceremonial practices. These include major Islamic observances, such as *Hari Raya Aidilfitri* (Eid al-Fitr), as well as culturally significant rites of passage, particularly marriage ceremonies, which are often marked by elaborate *adat* protocols. Although localised variations exist—such as those between Malay subgroups in Sumatra and

Peninsular Malaysia—these shared customs cultivate a broader sense of *persaudaraan Melayu* (Malay brotherhood), contributing to the maintenance of a transregional and enduring Malay cultural identity.

In conclusion, *Malayness* is defined by a constellation of interrelated features: a shared language (Malay) of Austronesian origin, a predominantly Islamic religious affiliation, and a rich repertoire of common traditions, artistic forms, and social customs. Although historically fluid and inclusive, Malay identity has been continually reconstituted through processes of migration, intercultural exchange, and socio-political transformation. Nevertheless, the literature, normative structures, and collective memory of the Malay world reflect a discernible continuity at the core of Malay cultural identity.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

SAPIR-WHORF HYPOTHESIS: LANGUAGE, THOUGHT, AND WORLDVIEW

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (SWH), also referred to as the theory of linguistic relativity, asserts that the language individuals speak influences—and, in its more extreme interpretation, determines—their perception and conceptualisation of reality. Emerging from early twentieth-century linguistic and anthropological scholarship, the hypothesis draws intellectual lineage from nineteenth-century thinkers such as Wilhelm von Humboldt and Johann Gottfried Herder, who contended that language is intimately linked to the *Geist* or worldview of a given people.

The hypothesis is most closely associated with the work of Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Lee Whorf. Although they never co-authored a formal statement of the hypothesis, their respective writings laid the conceptual groundwork for the claim that “the worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels” [14]. Sapir argued that no two languages are sufficiently similar to represent the same social reality, thereby implying that speakers of different languages experience reality in qualitatively different ways.

Nevertheless, Sapir [14] cautioned against an overly deterministic interpretation of linguistic influence. He explicitly warned that it would be naïve to assume that all cognitive experience is entirely shaped by linguistic structures. In this respect, Sapir rejected strong linguistic determinism in favour of a more moderate position—one that acknowledges the formative role of language in shaping thought, without asserting that cognition is wholly constrained by linguistic form.

This balanced perspective—recognising the influence of language on conceptual frameworks while rejecting absolute determinism—offers a nuanced foundation for engaging with the broader implications of linguistic relativity.

LINGUISTIC DETERMINISM VS. LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY

Within the framework of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (SWH), also known as the theory of linguistic relativity, scholars commonly distinguish between two interpretative extremes: *linguistic determinism* (the strong form) and *linguistic relativity* (the weak form). These formulations are central to debates concerning the extent to which language influences thought and perception.

Linguistic determinism maintains that language entirely shapes the way individuals think. According to this perspective, the grammatical and lexical structures of a language constrain the conceptual and perceptual possibilities available to its speakers. Taken literally, this would imply that speakers of different languages inhabit mutually incommensurable cognitive worlds, rendering certain ideas inconceivable if not encoded within their linguistic system. However, neither Edward Sapir nor Benjamin Lee Whorf explicitly advocated such a deterministic view. Sapir, in particular, rejected the notion that language wholly governs cognition. Both theoretical reasoning and empirical evidence have increasingly challenged strong determinism. The possibility of translation between languages, as well as the capacity for second-language acquisition, strongly suggests the existence of language-independent cognitive frameworks [15]. If thought were entirely bound by language, such cross-linguistic phenomena would be implausible [16], [17].

In contrast, *linguistic relativity* proposes a more moderate stance. It asserts that language influences habitual patterns of thought and directs attention toward particular features of experience, without entirely delimiting cognitive capacity. Different languages encode distinct semantic categories, which may predispose

speakers to attend more readily to certain aspects of reality. Importantly, this influence is not absolute; speakers are capable of understanding concepts even if their language does not provide a direct lexical counterpart.

Empirical studies have supported this weaker version of the hypothesis. For instance, research comparing English and Yucatec Maya speakers revealed differences in object categorisation strategies. English, which places emphasis on count nouns and pluralisation, tends to encourage categorisation based on shape. Yucatec Maya, by contrast, emphasises material classifiers and does not obligatorily mark number, leading speakers to group objects more often by substance. Such findings suggest that linguistic features—such as noun classification and number marking—can shape cognitive preferences without imposing rigid constraints [18].

The prevailing view among contemporary linguists and cognitive scientists tends towards a qualified form of linguistic relativity. While language is recognised as shaping certain mental patterns, it is widely accepted that thought is not wholly determined by linguistic form. As Whorf famously observed, speakers of different languages are “not equivalent as observers” of the world, as their languages predispose them to perceive certain phenomena more readily than others [14]. Recent neo-Whorfian studies have provided further evidence for this position across a range of cognitive domains, including spatial orientation, temporal reasoning, colour perception, and object categorisation [19]. Nevertheless, these influences are constrained by universal cognitive abilities that transcend linguistic diversity.

To interpret the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis accurately, it is essential to address widespread misconceptions. One common misunderstanding is the belief that the absence of a specific word in a language renders the corresponding concept unthinkable. In reality, linguistic expression is highly adaptable; speakers routinely use paraphrasing, metaphor, or descriptive constructions to articulate unfamiliar or novel ideas. Conceptual understanding is therefore not contingent upon lexical availability.

Another frequently misrepresented example concerns the assertion that Inuit languages have an exceptional number of words for snow, suggesting a radically different perceptual experience. This idea, initially introduced by Franz Boas and later popularised by Whorf, has been widely exaggerated in popular discourse. Subsequent linguistic research has shown that while Inuit languages do contain multiple terms for snow, the diversity is comparable to the snow-related vocabulary found in English. This example has since become a cautionary tale about the misapplication of anecdotal evidence in support of linguistic determinism [20].

A further misconception is the claim that translation between languages is either impossible or radically transformative of one's worldview. While some concepts may be more easily expressed in one language than another, and may require shifts in framing or perspective, translation remains not only possible but frequently successful [21]. The routine achievement of translation and cross-cultural communication provides strong evidence against a deterministic interpretation of SWH.

What the hypothesis does suggest is more nuanced: languages encourage certain habitual modes of thinking, making specific distinctions more salient or intuitive for their speakers. For example, languages that grammatically distinguish between inclusive and exclusive forms of “we” encourage their users to attend to this distinction in social interaction. In contrast, speakers of languages without such grammatical differentiation may not consider the distinction unless contextually prompted. These patterns illustrate how language can influence attention and thought in subtle yet meaningful ways, without confining cognitive capacity.

EVIDENCE AND DEBATES SURROUNDING SWH

Since the late twentieth century, a substantial body of empirical research has reinvigorated scholarly debate surrounding the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (SWH) by examining how speakers of different languages perform across various cognitive domains. Investigations into temporal reasoning, spatial orientation, and colour perception have been central to assessing the extent to which language shapes human thought.

Initial challenges to linguistic relativity emerged from research on colour terminology. Berlin and Kay's [22] landmark study suggested that colour categorisation follows a universal hierarchy, thereby contradicting strong Whorfian claims. However, more recent empirical studies have provided compelling support for moderate interpretations of linguistic relativity. Lucy's [15] work, among others, has demonstrated

that linguistic structure influences thought in subtle but measurable ways, shaping habitual cognitive patterns without precluding alternative conceptualisations.

In the domain of spatial cognition, Levinson [23] and colleagues found that speakers of languages employing absolute spatial frames of reference—such as those in certain Australian Aboriginal languages, which use cardinal directions—exhibited different strategies for navigation and spatial recall compared to speakers of languages using egocentric (relative) reference systems. These variations appear to result not merely from cultural practices, but from the habitual linguistic encoding of spatial information.

Temporal cognition provides further illustration. While English speakers typically conceptualise time along a horizontal axis—speaking of “looking forward to the future” or “putting the past behind”—Mandarin Chinese speakers often employ vertical metaphors, associating earlier events with an upward orientation and later events with downward positioning [24]. Aymara speakers of the Andes reverse the typical metaphor: they conceive the past as in front (visible) and the future as behind (unseen), aligning linguistic metaphor with epistemological perspective. Such findings echo Whorf’s early observations on the Hopi language, which characterised time in ways markedly different from English.

Experimental data corroborate these patterns. For instance, Mandarin speakers have been shown to respond more swiftly to vertically oriented temporal tasks, while English speakers more readily engage with horizontally framed scenarios. These outcomes lend robust support to the weaker form of the SWH: linguistic structures influence attention and cognitive preferences, though they do not restrict access to alternative modes of reasoning.

Grammatical structures further illustrate the cognitive impact of language. English, for example, marks progressive aspect explicitly (e.g., “I am running”), whereas German lacks a direct equivalent and Malay or Indonesian mark aspect optionally, often relying on contextual cues or adverbials such as *sedang*. Research indicates that German learners of English may misinterpret or underuse the continuous aspect, while Malay speakers exhibit fewer difficulties due to the flexible aspectual framework of their native language. These findings suggest that the grammatical architecture of a speaker’s first language can shape how temporal and dynamic events are cognitively processed in a second language [16], [17].

Despite the growing body of supportive evidence, the SWH has faced enduring criticism. Steven Pinker [25], for instance, argues that language exerts no significant influence on thought. He proposes that humans think in an abstract mental code—“mentalese”—and that spoken language merely encodes pre-existing concepts rather than generating them. Pinker contends that Whorf’s claims were often based on anecdotal rather than empirical evidence, and he cautions against conflating linguistic correlation with cognitive causation.

This scepticism aligns with Noam Chomsky’s theory of Universal Grammar, which posits that all humans share an innate set of grammatical principles underpinning a universal cognitive structure [26]. From this perspective, linguistic variation is largely superficial, with little bearing on the underlying mechanisms of thought. Cognitive differences attributed to language are thus viewed as minor and easily overridden by shared human faculties.

Others have argued that observed cognitive variation is better explained by cultural rather than linguistic factors. While linguistic form may reflect particular cognitive biases, it does not necessarily determine them. Such critiques emphasise the need for caution when attributing causality to linguistic structures alone.

The contemporary academic consensus supports a nuanced interpretation of the SWH. Most scholars now accept that language does not determine cognition in an absolute sense, but rather influences it in contextually and culturally specific ways. Language shapes habitual patterns of attention, memory, and categorisation, thereby guiding—but not dictating—cognitive processes.

Empirical studies confirm that speakers of different languages may exhibit distinct cognitive tendencies, yet retain the capacity to adopt alternative conceptual perspectives when necessary. Crucially, while some critiques rely heavily on abstract reasoning about the nature of cognition, proponents of linguistic relativity have amassed extensive experimental evidence demonstrating measurable linguistic influence on thought.

Evans and Levinson [27] highlight the significance of linguistic diversity, challenging the universalist paradigm that has often dominated cognitive science. They argue that the pursuit of universal structures has at times marginalised the richness of cross-linguistic variation—a phenomenon they describe as “the most amazing quality” of human language from both cognitive and biological standpoints.

Adopting a moderate view of linguistic relativity carries profound implications. It suggests that understanding a culture’s worldview requires close attention to how its language encodes and constrains conceptual frameworks. Recurrent linguistic features—grammatical categories, metaphors, and idiomatic expressions—can reveal the cognitive and cultural schemas that underpin collective perception. Metaphor, in particular, serves as a striking example of how language can shape conceptual thought, embedding cultural values in the most fundamental ways of seeing and articulating the world.

COGNITIVE METAPHOR THEORY

Whereas the Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis (SWH) addresses the broader implications of language on cognition, Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT) concentrates on a specific and pervasive linguistic-cognitive phenomenon: metaphor. Emerging from the seminal work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), CMT reconceptualised metaphor not as a mere rhetorical flourish but as a fundamental mechanism of human cognition. Lakoff and Johnson argued that metaphors are primarily conceptual in nature; they structure the way individuals think and reason, rather than functioning solely as ornamental features of language.

CMT posits that abstract concepts are frequently understood through more concrete or embodied experiences, giving rise to what are known as *conceptual metaphors*. For instance, expressions such as “grasping an idea” reflect the underlying metaphor IDEAS ARE OBJECTS, while phrases like “moving on” after a significant event stem from the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY. These metaphorical expressions reveal systematic mappings between source and target domains in the conceptual system, shaping both thought and discourse.

Lakoff and Johnson [1] demonstrated that such conceptual metaphors are pervasive in everyday language and play a central role in structuring our understanding of complex domains such as time, emotion, and interpersonal relationships. Subsequent scholarship has further elaborated on these insights, examining the cultural variability and cognitive significance of metaphor in shaping worldviews and influencing patterns of reasoning [28].

FROM RHETORIC TO COGNITION: THE CONCEPTUAL REFRAMING OF METAPHOR

The study of metaphor has a long intellectual tradition. One of the earliest definitions is attributed to Aristotle, who in his *Poetics* described metaphor as “the application of an alien name by transference: from genus to species, from species to genus, from species to species, or by analogy” [29]. He categorised metaphors based on the nature of semantic transfer, viewing them primarily as rhetorical devices used to enhance clarity or embellish discourse. For centuries following Aristotle, metaphor was largely regarded as a feature of literary or oratorical style, rather than as a mechanism central to cognition.

This perception underwent a significant transformation with the emergence of Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT), particularly in the groundbreaking work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). CMT redefined metaphor as a core cognitive process, asserting that metaphorical thought underpins not only language but also fundamental patterns of reasoning and conceptualisation. According to this framework, abstract concepts are frequently understood in terms of more concrete, embodied experiences, giving rise to what Lakoff and Johnson termed *conceptual metaphors*.

An illustrative example is the conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY, evident in expressions such as “save time”, “spend time”, “waste time”, and “budget your time”. These pervasive phrases reflect an underlying cognitive model in which time is conceptualised as a valuable, quantifiable resource—an idea that aligns with capitalist cultural values emphasising efficiency, productivity, and time management. As Lakoff and Johnson argue, such metaphors not only structure how we talk about time, but also how we act with respect to it [1], influencing both perception and behaviour.

A central claim of CMT is that these conceptual mappings are grounded in embodied experience. Foundational metaphors are often derived from sensorimotor correlations experienced early in life. For instance, the metaphor AFFECTION IS WARMTH may stem from the infant's experience of being held closely by caregivers, leading to expressions such as "a warm person" or "a cold response". Similarly, the metaphor IMPORTANCE IS SIZE is rooted in perceptual experience, whereby larger entities attract more attention and are often interpreted as more significant—hence, phrases like "a big problem" or "a huge impact".

In their later work *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999), Lakoff and Johnson elaborated the theory of embodiment, contending that "the mind is inherently embodied, thought is largely unconscious, and abstract concepts are mostly metaphorical" [30]. They posited that while many conceptual metaphors are near-universal—particularly those derived from spatial orientation, such as GOOD IS UP and BAD IS DOWN—others are shaped by cultural context, making metaphor an important focus for cross-cultural and cognitive linguistic research.

KEY CONCEPTS IN COGNITIVE METAPHOR THEORY: SOURCE-TARGET MAPPINGS AND THE INVARIANCE PRINCIPLE

Within Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT), a conceptual metaphor is defined as a systematic mapping between two conceptual domains: the *source domain*, typically more concrete or experientially grounded, and the *target domain*, which is usually more abstract or complex. The source domain provides structural and imagistic resources that shape our understanding of the target domain. For example, in the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, elements from the domain of warfare—such as attack, defence, victory, and defeat—are projected onto the domain of argumentation. This metaphorical structure is reflected in common expressions such as "defending a position", "attacking an argument", or "winning a debate".

These mappings are not arbitrary; rather, they preserve specific relational structures between the two domains. According to Lakoff [31], metaphorical mappings maintain the image-schematic organisation of the source domain, but only to the extent that it coheres with the internal logic of the target domain. In other words, only those structural aspects of the source that are compatible with the target are transferred. For instance, the conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY gives rise to expressions such as "spending time" or "wasting time", which represent time as a quantifiable and allocatable resource. However, not all features of monetary systems are applicable; expressions like "counterfeit time" or "exact change in time" do not emerge, as they conflict with our experiential understanding of time. The Invariance Principle, as articulated by Lakoff, thus serves to constrain metaphorical projection by preserving structural consistency and ensuring conceptual integrity across mappings. It also explains why some metaphors resonate more intuitively than others [31].

Lakoff and Turner [32] further elaborated on this principle, demonstrating how abstract reasoning patterns can be grounded in more concrete, image-schematic structures without disrupting the coherence of the target domain.

Another key concept within CMT is that of *entailments*. Once a metaphorical mapping is established, it often gives rise to a set of logical inferences that shape our understanding of the target domain. For instance, if an argument is metaphorically construed as a form of war, then the participants become adversaries and the unfolding of the argument resembles a strategic confrontation. This metaphorical framing influences not only linguistic expression but also patterns of thought and social behaviour, encouraging individuals to approach disagreement in competitive, oppositional terms rather than as collaborative problem-solving.

Such entailments demonstrate the profound role that metaphor plays in shaping cognition and interaction. When conceptual metaphors become entrenched, they reinforce particular cultural attitudes and behavioural tendencies. In the case of ARGUMENT IS WAR, the metaphor may predispose speakers to adopt adversarial discourse practices, a stance influenced more by unconscious metaphorical framing than by deliberate rational reflection.

METAPHORS, COGNITION, AND CULTURE

Metaphors function as cognitive instruments that shape perception, evoke emotional responses, and influence behaviour; they are not merely decorative elements of language. Research in cognitive neuroscience

has shown that metaphor comprehension activates sensory and motor regions of the brain associated with the metaphor's source domain. For instance, processing spatial metaphors related to time has been found to stimulate brain areas involved in spatial reasoning, underscoring the point that metaphorical thinking is not simply rhetorical but cognitively embodied [16], [17].

Metaphors also play a crucial role in collective memory and social consciousness. Frequently embedded in proverbial expressions and figurative language transmitted across generations, metaphors encapsulate historical narratives, cultural beliefs, and moral frameworks. These expressions create a cognitive bridge between individual thought and collective knowledge, thereby fostering a sense of cultural identity. In Malay culture, for example, proverbs often draw on imagery from nature and village life—such as water, rice, buffaloes, and boats—to convey ethical principles and social values. These metaphorical expressions are deeply woven into the cultural fabric, and familiarity with them constitutes a marker of cultural literacy.

While certain metaphors may exhibit universality due to shared human embodiment, each culture develops its own repertoire of salient metaphors shaped by ecological conditions, historical experience, and cultural values. Kövecses [33] emphasises that although many conceptual metaphors—such as EMOTIONS ARE NATURAL FORCES (e.g., ANGER IS A STORM)—are widespread across languages, their specific expressions vary significantly depending on cultural context. For instance, conceptions of time differ notably between English and Indonesian. In the latter, the metaphor TIME IS RUBBER (*jam karet*) reflects an understanding of time as elastic and adaptable, whereas in English, time is commonly conceptualised as a valuable resource—TIME IS MONEY—emphasising precision and productivity. These divergent metaphors inform cultural norms: *jam karet* reflects tolerance for fluid scheduling, while the economic framing in English promotes punctuality and time management [16], [17].

Kövecses [33] refers to this phenomenon as universality and variation, whereby universal bodily experiences provide the basis for metaphor, while specific cultural settings determine which metaphors are foregrounded. This interplay renders metaphor an effective analytical tool for exploring cultural identity. Because metaphors encode both cognitive and ideological content, they help shape a community's understanding of itself and its place in the world. In political discourse, religious texts, and everyday language, metaphors frame issues in ways that resonate with cultural values. For example, in Malay political rhetoric, the nation may be metaphorically depicted as a *bunga bangsa* (flower of the nation) and the people as *akar umbi* (grassroots or root fibres), symbolising organic growth, resilience, and deep communal roots—imagery intimately tied to the agrarian heritage of the region.

An important theoretical extension of CMT is Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT), developed by Fauconnier and Turner [34]. CBT explains how individuals mentally integrate elements from multiple conceptual domains—referred to as *input spaces*—to produce emergent meaning in a *blended space*. Unlike one-to-one domain mappings in CMT, blending theory accounts for the imaginative fusion of several conceptual inputs. For example, the metaphor TIME IS A THIEF combines the domains of time and theft to produce the emergent meaning that time surreptitiously deprives individuals of life's moments. Similarly, TIME FLIES blends the concept of time with that of a flying entity (e.g., bird or insect), evoking the perception of time passing rapidly. These blends offer vivid, culturally resonant representations of abstract experiences, and CBT has proven valuable in examining the development of culturally specific metaphors, religious symbols, and mythological narratives. It provides insight into how complex symbolic expressions evolve from simpler cognitive structures.

Cognitive Metaphor Theory, therefore, maintains that metaphor is central—not peripheral—to human cognition. Metaphors influence how individuals perceive ambiguous concepts (e.g., viewing the future as “dark” or “foggy”), how they behave (e.g., treating time as a budget, or love as a journey), and how societies encode shared understandings of abstract ideas through culturally salient imagery. As such, metaphors serve as a vital link between language and thought. By analysing the metaphors embedded in a society's discourse—across literature, conversation, rituals, and media—researchers can uncover the foundational cognitive models, values, and worldviews that define that culture.

INTEGRATING THE SAPIR-WHORF HYPOTHESIS AND COGNITIVE METAPHOR THEORY IN THE STUDY OF MALAY CULTURAL IDENTITY

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (SWH) and Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT) offer complementary theoretical frameworks for examining the intersection of language and cultural identity. While CMT focuses on metaphor as a core cognitive mechanism through which language encodes conceptual structure, SWH provides a broader epistemological foundation, positing that language and cognition—and, by extension, *Weltanschauung* (worldview)—are intimately connected. When applied to Malay cultural expression, these frameworks encourage an investigation into how the Malay language may channel thought in culturally specific ways and how metaphor serves as a medium through which the Malay perspective is both expressed and sustained.

A Whorfian analysis of Malay, for instance, might explore linguistic features such as the rich system of kinship terminology or the absence of grammatical gender in pronouns, and consider how these elements may influence habitual cognitive patterns regarding social relationships and gender roles. In contrast, a CMT-based approach would focus on the metaphorical structures embedded in Malay discourse. Consider the proverb *bagai aur dengan tebing* (“like the bamboo and the riverbank”), which metaphorically describes mutual interdependence. This expression reflects an underlying conceptual metaphor such as COOPERATION IS NATURAL SYMBIOSIS, grounded in a culturally familiar environmental scene. Such metaphors encapsulate and transmit core cultural values—in this case, harmony and reciprocity. A comprehensive analysis of metaphorical expressions in Malay—exploring recurring source domains such as nature, kinship, food, or religion—can reveal the cultural schema that underpins Malay cognition.

Utilising SWH and CMT in cultural analysis does not imply that Malay speakers are cognitively constrained by their language or metaphors. Rather, it acknowledges that over generations, certain linguistic and metaphorical patterns become naturalised as carriers of cultural meaning. These patterns function as vehicles for transmitting collective memory and worldview, reinforcing a distinctly Malay conceptual orientation. In particular, metaphors act as repositories of cultural knowledge, condensing complex social and ethical ideas into accessible and culturally resonant forms. The idiom *melentur buluh biarlah dari rebungunya* (“to bend bamboo, start with the shoot”), for example, metaphorically conveys the importance of early education or discipline. Its cultural relevance is heightened by the symbolic significance of bamboo in the local environment, aligning pedagogical advice with indigenous ecological imagery.

Many Malay expressions map abstract moral and social principles onto tangible elements drawn from local ecology and material culture. In doing so, they do not merely facilitate communication but reinforce a shared cultural worldview through recurrent linguistic patterns. These metaphorical expressions thus play a formative role in cultural identification and continuity.

Ultimately, the understanding of cultural identity is inextricably linked to the analysis of language and metaphor. The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis underscores the idea that language can shape cognitive orientation, drawing attention to the ways in which linguistic structures may influence perception and reasoning. Cognitive Metaphor Theory complements this view by demonstrating that metaphor is not a peripheral rhetorical device but a central organiser of conceptual thought. When applied to Malay, these perspectives highlight that language is not a neutral conduit of meaning but an active agent in the construction of experience—manifest through its lexicon, grammatical structures, and metaphorical imagery, all of which are imbued with cultural and historical significance.

This integrated analytical approach offers valuable insights for scholars, students of linguistics and anthropology, and speakers of Malay themselves. It reinforces a central premise in both anthropological and cognitive linguistics: that our engagement with the world is mediated by the structures of language, and that metaphor remains one of the most fundamental tools through which this imaginative and cultural engagement takes place.

IV.METHODOLOGY

In the context of Malay language and culture, *peribahasa* are conventionalised fixed expressions—typically metaphorical in nature—that convey moral instruction, cultural wisdom, social norms, or philosophical reflection. Deeply rooted in oral tradition, customary law (*adat*), and the lived realities of Malay society, these proverbs function as succinct repositories of collective knowledge and shared experience. Unlike other literary forms such as the *pantun*, which are primarily poetic, *peribahasa* are predominantly didactic. They frequently employ imagery drawn from nature, familial structures, and everyday life to articulate ethical or societal values in a concise and memorable figurative form.

Characteristically structured through metaphorical mappings that relate tangible domains—such as water, fire, animals, or the natural environment—to abstract concepts including kinship loyalty, emotional regulation, caution, or moral conduct, *peribahasa* operate as both cognitive and cultural artefacts. Their transmission across generations has embedded them deeply within the cultural fabric of Malay society, offering a distinctive lens through which to examine Malay thought, worldview, and systems of value.

DATA COLLECTION AND SOURCE VALIDATION

This study does not rely on a pre-compiled digital corpus. Instead, it adopts a qualitative and curated approach, sourcing *peribahasa* from a diverse range of materials accumulated through prolonged scholarly engagement and cultural immersion. The primary sources include:

- Printed anthologies of traditional Malay proverbs;
- Malay-language novels;
- Spoken media—such as interviews, public debates, newspapers, and films;
- Oral recollections and culturally embedded expressions encountered in everyday discourse.

To ensure the authenticity and cultural validity of the material, each *peribahasa* has been cross-referenced using <https://maksudperibahasa.com>, a publicly accessible and widely recognised online database of Malay proverbs. This platform serves as a standard reference point, offering definitions, and hence, contextual usage. Its inclusion in the validation process guarantees that all proverbs examined in this study are traditional, widely recognised, and culturally appropriate

THEMATIC CATEGORISATION

The *peribahasa* selected for this study have been organised into eight thematic categories, each reflecting key cultural dimensions embedded in Malay metaphorical thought. These themes have been determined based on their salience within Malay sociocultural life and the frequency with which they appear in metaphorical expression. The categories are as follows:

- Family and Relationships
- Danger and Caution
- Social Harmony and Cooperation
- Knowledge and Experience
- Human Relationships and Emotions
- Moral Conduct and Character
- Nature and the Environment
- Destiny and Life's Journey

Each theme illustrates how metaphors within *peribahasa* encode societal values, communal norms, and culturally specific modes of interpreting human experience. Although the number of proverbs varies across categories, the objective is to present a representative and analytically meaningful selection from each domain, thereby enabling a coherent and substantive exploration of Malay metaphorical frameworks.

ANALYTICAL PROCEDURE

This study adopts an analytical procedure grounded in the framework of Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT), supported by interpretive insights from the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (SWH). The analysis proceeds in two principal stages:

1. Conceptual Mapping and Metaphor Identification: In the initial phase, each *peribahasa* is examined to determine whether it involves metaphorical projection from a concrete source domain to a more abstract target domain. Drawing on CMT's domain mapping methodology, the analysis seeks to identify the underlying conceptual metaphor. For example, the proverb *air tenang jangan disangka tiada buaya* ("do not assume calm water contains no crocodiles") illustrates the conceptual metaphor DANGER IS A HIDDEN ANIMAL.

Each proverb is analysed according to the following components:

- Source domain – such as natural elements, animals, objects, or embodied experiences;
- Target domain – typically encompassing social interaction, moral reasoning, emotional states, or behavioural expectations;
- Conceptual metaphor – for instance, EMOTION IS FIRE or FAMILY IS WATER;
- Metaphorical entailments – where applicable, inferred implications relating to behaviour, identity, or values that are logically extended from the metaphorical structure.

2. Cultural Interpretation: In the second phase, the identified metaphor is interpreted within the cultural context of Malay society. This involves an exploration of how each expression encapsulates culturally embedded values, including filial loyalty, respect for the natural world, humility, patience, and collectivism. The metaphor is treated not merely as a rhetorical device, but as a cognitive-cultural artefact that both shapes and reflects shared modes of understanding. The analysis aims to demonstrate how metaphor functions as a conduit for transmitting cultural identity, ethical norms, and worldview.

Where relevant, the study also considers the symbolic and ecological grounding of the metaphor—such as references to bamboo, fire, rice, or rivers—which frequently represent elements of the local environment and material culture within Malay communities.

LIMITATIONS

This study employs a purposive, non-exhaustive sampling of metaphorical *peribahasa*, guided by salient cultural motifs and recurrent cognitive patterns. The approach prioritises analytical depth and cultural insight over statistical generalisability or quantitative scope. While the selected proverbs are culturally representative and have been validated through recognised sources, the absence of a fully digitised corpus may limit both the replicability and comprehensiveness of the findings.

Additionally, given the interpretive nature of the analysis, cultural readings are subject to variation depending on regional contexts or shifts in contemporary usage. Interpretations may also evolve over time as linguistic and sociocultural dynamics change.

Nevertheless, the methodology adopted provides a robust and theoretically grounded framework for investigating how metaphor contributes to the construction and transmission of Malay cultural identity through the enduring medium of *peribahasa*. It aligns with established practices in cultural linguistics and cognitive metaphor research, supporting a culturally sensitive and cognitively informed exploration of figurative language.

V.DISCUSSION: METAPHORICAL THEMES IN MALAY PERIBAHASA

Proverbial metaphors constitute a highly effective medium for encoding and conveying fundamental cultural concepts and worldviews within Malay society. This study examines eight thematic domains of traditional *peribahasa* (proverbs) through the framework of Cognitive Metaphor Theory, incorporating supplementary insights from the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis where relevant. Each proverb is presented in its

original Malay form, followed by a literal English translation and an analysis of its metaphorical structure—comprising source and target domains, the underlying conceptual metaphor, relevant entailments—and its broader cultural significance.

The analysis demonstrates that Malay metaphors characteristically draw upon familiar and culturally salient source domains—such as nature, animals, food, and family life—to conceptualise abstract target domains, including interpersonal relationships, danger, morality, and social order. In doing so, these figurative expressions encapsulate and transmit collective values, ethical norms, and culturally specific modes of experience, embedding them deeply within the structure of the language.

KINSHIP AND FAMILY

Proverbs in Malay culture vividly reflect the centrality of kinship and familial bonds. Emphasising the indissolubility of family ties and the importance of harmony, many Malay *peribahasa* conceptualise familial relationships as natural forces or physical substances that cannot be easily severed. These metaphors support and reinforce a worldview in which blood ties are paramount and virtually unbreakable—a position consistent with the linguistic relativity suggested by the Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis. Numerous proverbs portray sibling relationships as entities which, even if disrupted or harmed, naturally cohere again, thereby suggesting that familial discord is inherently transitory. Additional metaphors based on physical proximity and inheritance further highlight the perception of children as reflections or extensions of their parents. The following representative *peribahasa* illustrate these themes:

Air dicincang tidak akan putus

“Water, though chopped, will not separate”

This proverb suggests that conflicts between siblings are temporary and reconciliation is inevitable. The source domain is water being sliced, and the target domain is the bond between siblings. The underlying conceptual metaphor may be rendered as KINSHIP IS AN UNDIVIDABLE FLUID or FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS ARE WATER. While one may attempt to divide water, it naturally flows back together. The entailment here is that familial bonds, like water, cannot be severed; disagreements merely disturb the surface. Culturally, this metaphor expresses the deeply held Malay belief that kinship is resilient and must be preserved. Although water is the medium used, the sentiment parallels the Western adage “blood is thicker than water”. In terms of Whorfian implications, such linguistic imagery may reinforce the notion among Malay speakers that familial relationships must endure conflict and are ultimately reconciliatory by nature.

Carik-carik bulu ayam, lama-lama bercantum juga

“Shredded chicken feathers will eventually come back together”

Similar in sentiment, this proverb conveys that family disputes do not result in permanent division, as reconciliation occurs over time. The source domain here is the scattering of bird feathers, which over time drift back together; the target domain is family relationships strained by conflict. The conceptual metaphor can be expressed as FAMILY DISCORD IS SCATTERED FEATHERS. The entailment is that familial bonds, like feathers sharing static charge or lightness, possess an intrinsic tendency to re-cohere. Culturally, the use of village imagery (i.e., chicken feathers) situates the metaphor in a rural Malay context, reinforcing values such as *kemaafan* (forgiveness) and *perpaduan* (unity). The parallel usage of both water and feather metaphors to express the same concept signals how strongly the ideal of familial cohesion is embedded in Malay cultural cognition. Linguistically, repeated exposure to such metaphors may socialise individuals to perceive family unity as natural and inevitable.

Bagaimana acuan, begitulah kuihnya

“As the mould is, so is the cake”

This proverb asserts that a child’s character mirrors that of their parents. The source domain is the mould and the cake it forms; the target domain is the parent-child relationship. The conceptual metaphor is PARENTS SHAPE CHILDREN, more specifically, PARENTAL EXAMPLE IS A MOULD, AND A CHILD’S

CHARACTER IS THE RESULTING CAKE. Entailments include the belief that children inherit not only physical traits but also values, behaviours, and mannerisms. Culturally, this reflects the Malay emphasis on lineage (*baka*) and the continuity of identity through family. The proverb also conveys a moral undertone: parents are advised to model good conduct, as their influence will inevitably imprint upon their offspring. From a Whorfian perspective, such use of concrete domestic imagery—such as cake moulds, familiar in traditional *kuih*-making—may influence Malay speakers to view character formation as an environmental process, reinforcing a nurture-based interpretation of personality development.

Ke nasi tumpah kuahnya, kalua tidak ke nasi

“Gravy, when spilled, will fall on the rice if not elsewhere”

This saying similarly implies that children inevitably reflect the traits and behaviours of their parents. The source domain is gravy flowing onto rice; the target domain is parental influence upon children. The conceptual metaphor here is FAMILY INFLUENCE IS GRAVY; CHILDREN ARE RICE. The entailment is that just as rice absorbs the gravy it sits beneath, children naturally absorb the traits of those closest to them. The use of culinary imagery rooted in the everyday experience of Malay households (e.g., rice and curry) embeds this cultural understanding in an accessible and evocative form. The metaphor may also carry a degree of fatalism: the transmission of traits is seen as inevitable. In collectivist Malay culture, this reinforces the belief that a child’s success or failure reflects upon the family as a whole. Through daily language use, such metaphors may subtly shape expectations regarding inherited responsibility and familial honour.

Kasih ibu sepanjang jalan, kasih anak sepanjang penggalan

“A mother’s love stretches the length of the road; a child’s love only the length of a pole”

This proverb communicates that maternal love is enduring and unconditional, while a child’s affection may be comparatively short-lived. The source domain is spatial length (a long road versus a short segment); the target domain is the endurance of emotional bonds. The conceptual metaphor may be articulated as LOVE IS DISTANCE; LONG IS ENDURING, SHORT IS FLEETING. The implication is that maternal love is lifelong, while filial love is sometimes limited or conditional. Culturally, the proverb affirms the revered status of the mother in Malay society and highlights the concept of *berbakti* (repaying kindness). Whorfian interpretation suggests that expressing love in terms of physical length may shape how speakers conceptualise emotional obligations—not merely in terms of intensity but of duration and perseverance. The related expression *syurga di bawah tapak kaki ibu* (“paradise lies beneath a mother’s feet”) similarly reinforces the sanctity of maternal love in Malay Islamic culture.

Cubit paha kiri, paha kanan terasa

“If you pinch the left thigh, the right feels it too”

This *peribahasa* implies that pain or suffering experienced by one family member is felt by the others. The source domain is the human body’s nervous system, where referred pain in one area is registered in another; the target domain is the interconnectedness of family or close-knit social groups. The conceptual metaphor is CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS ARE ONE BODY. The entailment is shared emotional and moral responsibility: harm to one is experienced by all. Culturally, the proverb highlights the values of *gotong-royong* (communal assistance) and *seia sekata* (solidarity), aligning with the collectivist orientation of Malay society. The metaphor linguistically blurs individual boundaries, encouraging a shared, group-based identity. Through such language, empathy is not merely encouraged—it is naturalised as a social reflex.

Synthesis

Metaphors within the domain of kinship and family translate abstract social values into concrete, relatable imagery—such as water, feathers, food, roadways, and the human body. While the target domains—e.g., sibling bonds, hereditary influence, parental love, and family empathy—are intangible and conceptual, the source

domains are rooted in everyday sensory experience. Analysis through the lens of Cognitive Metaphor Theory reveals recurring conceptual mappings, such as:

- FAMILY UNITY IS A PHYSICAL CONTINUUM
- CHILDREN ARE REFLECTIONS OF PARENTS
- A MOTHER'S LOVE IS LONG DISTANCE
- THE FAMILY IS A SINGLE BODY

These metaphors carry significant cultural implications. They suggest that family bonds are enduring, character is inherited, maternal devotion is supreme, and relatives are emotionally indivisible. Viewed through the lens of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, these metaphorical framings likely influence cognitive and emotional orientations within Malay society—promoting values such as inherited honour, filial piety, and collectivist identity. In this sense, *peribahasa* serve not only as expressions of cultural wisdom but as repositories of intergenerational knowledge, linguistically encoding and perpetuating the primacy of family in Malay thought.

CAUTION AND DANGER

Many traditional Malay *peribahasa* are rich in metaphorical content that encourages caution, vigilance, and foresight. These expressions frequently draw upon the natural and cultural environment—calm rivers concealing crocodiles, looming storm clouds, or simple everyday knowledge such as preparing an umbrella before it rains—to communicate lessons about unseen threats and prudent conduct. Through metaphor, abstract notions such as risk, betrayal, or preparedness are grounded in concrete, relatable imagery, thereby rendering such moral instruction both accessible and memorable.

Malay cultural values have historically emphasized *berjaga-jaga* (watchfulness) and the avoidance of unnecessary harm, and these values are reflected in the succinct and evocative language of proverbs. In this context, metaphor functions as a social and cognitive regulator, consistently reinforcing the message that appearances may deceive and that foresight is preferable to reactive behaviour. The following *peribahasa* illustrate these principles:

Air tenang jangan disangka tiada buaya

“Do not assume that still water is free of crocodiles”

This proverb warns that seemingly calm environments may conceal hidden dangers, or that a quiet person may possess unexpected strength or threat. The source domain involves a tranquil water surface and the presence of an unseen crocodile; the target domain encompasses situations or individuals whose benign appearance belies underlying risk. The conceptual metaphor may be framed as HIDDEN DANGER IS A CROCODILE UNDER STILL WATER, with the entailment that serenity should not be mistaken for safety. Culturally, this reflects the Malay emphasis on humility and the avoidance of overt self-promotion. A reserved person (*pendiam*) should not be underestimated; they may possess latent intelligence, capability, or even threat. In Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT), the crocodile—stealthy, lethal, and patient—is metaphorically mapped onto human characteristics and situational risk. From a Whorfian perspective, frequent exposure to this expression may predispose Malay speakers to view calm circumstances with scepticism, fostering a cultural disposition toward vigilance. The metaphor also encodes environmental knowledge—crocodile-infested rivers—as part of the cultural lexicon, underscoring the intersection of ecology and cognition.

Sediakan payung sebelum hujan

“Prepare an umbrella before it rains”

This proverb conveys the importance of anticipatory action in the face of potential adversity. The source domain involves preparing for a rainstorm; the target domain generalises this to the notion of planning ahead for challenges. The conceptual metaphor can be expressed as FORESIGHT IS CARRYING AN UMBRELLA or, more broadly, PREPARATION IS PROTECTION FROM STORM. The message resonates in a region

frequently affected by monsoons, making the literal image both familiar and persuasive. More broadly, the expression supports the cultural virtues of *berjimat-cermat* (thriftiness) and *bersedia* (readiness). From a linguistic and cognitive standpoint, the metaphor may promote habitual preparedness by embedding a weather-based frame for conceptualising adversity. It closely parallels the English idiom “better safe than sorry”, and may shape proactive behavioural tendencies among Malay speakers by highlighting the functional value of readiness.

Harapkan pagar, pagar makan padi

“Rely on the fence, but the fence eats the rice”

This *peribahasa* warns that those entrusted with protection may become a source of harm or betrayal. The source domain involves an agricultural setting where a protective structure (the fence) is expected to safeguard a rice field, yet paradoxically becomes the cause of its destruction. Some interpretations note a pun on *pegar* (a type of bird) instead of *pagar* (fence), adding a further layer of semantic richness. The target domain concerns individuals in positions of trust who abuse their authority. The metaphor may be rendered as A TRUSTED GUARDIAN IS A BETRAYER. This metaphor functions by leveraging cognitive incongruity—fences are not meant to consume. The shock value of the metaphor makes the message more impactful. Culturally, it reflects a pragmatic wariness towards authority and a social memory of betrayal, whether interpersonal or political. The proverb continues to resonate in a postcolonial context where exploitative leadership may be seen as a recurring motif. Linguistically, its presence in the shared lexicon encourages a degree of critical awareness and guardedness toward those in positions of power.

Sudah terhantuk baru tengadah

“Only after bumping one’s head does one look up”

This saying suggests that people often become cautious only after experiencing misfortune. The source domain is the act of physically striking one’s head; the target domain is the delayed awareness or realisation that follows an adverse event. The conceptual metaphor is LEARNING THROUGH COLLISION, or more broadly, AWARENESS IS PAIN. The proverb discourages complacency and promotes proactive thinking. It is often used to critique those who act without foresight. The vivid imagery of bodily harm ensures its memorability, while the alliterative *t* sounds in Malay enhance its rhetorical effect. Cognitively, it frames wisdom as a reactive process, highlighting the shortcomings of post-hoc awareness. From a Whorfian lens, it may function as a cognitive warning, shaping behavioural expectations and reinforcing the cultural value of early discernment.

Sesal dahulu pendapatan, sesal kemudian tiada berguna

“Regret beforehand is a gain; regret afterwards is of no use”

This proverb affirms that pre-emptive reflection and constructive doubt are valuable, while post-failure regret holds little worth. The metaphor relies on economic language: REGRET IS TRANSACTIONAL. Anticipatory regret is akin to income (*pendapatan*), while belated regret is a wasted expense (*tiada berguna*). This framing implicitly promotes a rational, deliberative mindset. The metaphorical association between cognition and economics parallels Lakoffian conceptual metaphors, such as TIME IS MONEY, though with culturally distinct nuance. In practice, this saying is frequently abbreviated to *sesal dahulu pendapatan* to encourage prudent decision-making. Its usage reinforces a cognitive style that prioritises foresight, aligning with broader Malay values of contemplation and measured action.

Bagai telur di hujung tanduk

“Like an egg on the tip of a horn”

This expression denotes a state of extreme instability or imminent danger. The source domain is a vividly precarious image—an egg balanced on the tip of an animal’s horn—while the target domain is any situation on the brink of collapse. The conceptual metaphor is RISK IS A FRAGILE BALANCE, with entailments of urgency, delicacy, and the potential for irreversible damage. The image is highly accessible within a rural

agrarian context, drawing on familiar experiences with livestock and household objects. Its function as a cognitive frame is to heighten the speaker's or listener's awareness of instability. Much like "walking on thin ice" in English, the expression vividly conveys the threat of sudden failure or breakdown. Linguistically, the metaphor creates a mental schema for conceptualising danger in immediate, physical terms, which may affect how Malay speakers respond to precarious conditions—particularly in social or political contexts.

Synthesis

Proverbs categorised under the theme of danger and caution function as cognitive-linguistic instruments for warning, advising, and regulating behaviour. Their source domains—deceptively calm waters, broken protective mechanisms, natural elements, economic transactions, and delicate balances—are metaphorically mapped onto abstract domains including trust, foresight, risk, and betrayal.

Through the lens of Cognitive Metaphor Theory, the following mappings are evident:

- A CALM APPEARANCE IS HIDING A CROCODILE (danger)
- PREPARATION IS SHIELDING FROM RAIN
- TRUSTED GUARDIAN IS BETRAYER
- LATE REGRET IS A LOSS
- HIGH RISK SITUATION IS A TEETERING EGG

These metaphors carry profound cultural implications: they caution against complacency, highlight the perils of misplaced trust, reinforce the virtue of foresight, and promote strategic awareness. From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, the frequent use of such vivid metaphors may influence habitual thought patterns among Malay speakers, fostering a cognitive predisposition toward vigilance and interpretive scepticism. Moreover, the persistent invocation of natural and domestic imagery situates these expressions firmly within the local ecological and cultural landscape. In doing so, Malay proverbs encapsulate not only moral guidance but also the lived environmental experience, thereby blending language, culture, and cognition in a uniquely expressive form.

SOCIAL HARMONY AND COOPERATION

Malay cultural values are deeply anchored in the preservation of *harmoni* (harmony) and *kerjasama* (cooperation) within the community—principles that are strongly reinforced through proverbial wisdom. A wide range of traditional *peribahasa* (proverbs) eloquently advocate unity, mutual support, consensus, and peaceful conflict resolution. These expressions frequently utilise imagery of natural symbiosis or the cohesion of physical elements to symbolise the strength and virtue of collective living. Implicit in these metaphors is the notion that individuals, like elements of nature, flourish in cooperation and suffer in isolation. They also reflect and promote key cultural attitudes such as *muafakat* (consensus) and *tolong-menolong* (mutual assistance).

When examined through the lens of Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT), these proverbs reveal how physical cohesion serves as a conceptual model for social harmony. Their metaphorical entailments contribute to reinforcing conformity, collective identity, and shared responsibility. The following examples provide insight into how metaphor shapes and reflects the social fabric of Malay culture:

Bagai aur dengan tebing

"Like the bamboo and the riverbank"

This proverb refers to close cooperation and mutual dependence. The source domain is the ecological relationship between the *aur* (a type of bamboo) and the *tebing* (riverbank). The bamboo typically grows alongside riverbanks, stabilising the soil and preventing erosion, while the bank provides a suitable environment for the bamboo's growth. The target domain is interpersonal or communal cooperation, particularly between parties that complement each other. The conceptual metaphor can be expressed as COOPERATION IS NATURAL SYMBIOSIS. Entailments include interdependence (each element benefits the other) and resilience

(together they withstand external challenges such as flooding). This metaphor encapsulates the Malay ethos of *gotong-royong* (mutual cooperation), encouraging harmonious and reciprocal relationships. Rooted in lived experience and the natural environment, this metaphor provides a mental model through which the value of unity is perceived not only as pragmatic but also as intrinsically beautiful. From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, the repeated use of such imagery may naturalise the notion of interdependence, embedding it within the cognitive framework of Malay speakers.

Bersatu teguh, bercerai roboh

"United we stand, divided we fall"

This widely known saying conveys the message that unity ensures strength, whereas division leads to collapse. The source domain involves structural integrity: unity (*bersatu*) is associated with strength (*teguh*), while division (*bercerai*) leads to disintegration (*roboh*). The target domain is the stability of a community or collective enterprise. The conceptual metaphor can be articulated as A COMMUNITY IS A STRUCTURE, where cohesion serves as the binding element. The entailments stress the importance of *perpaduan* (unity) and *persefahaman* (mutual understanding) for societal wellbeing. This proverb is often invoked in nationalistic discourse, especially in the context of Malaysia's multi-ethnic society, and is frequently employed in political or civic education. Its rhythmic structure contributes to its memorability and pedagogical efficacy. Linguistically and cognitively, it instils a binary mental frame—unity is good; disunity is dangerous—which may condition behavioural responses and strengthen group allegiance.

Berat sama dipikul, ringan sama dijinjing

"Heavy burdens are carried together, light burdens are lifted together"

This proverb advocates collective responsibility regardless of the magnitude of the task. The source domain refers to physically carrying burdens: heavier loads are shouldered (*dipikul*), while lighter ones can be carried by hand (*jinjing*), but in both cases, the emphasis is on shared effort. The target domain is communal responsibility in both adversity and everyday matters. The underlying metaphor can be stated as COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY IS SHARED CARRYING. The entailment is that all members of a community should contribute equitably, regardless of circumstance. This reflects a foundational aspect of traditional Malay village life, where *gotong-royong* guides both major undertakings (e.g., house-building) and minor chores. The proverb reinforces moral values such as fairness, justice, and solidarity. Cognitively, it constructs a strong association between cooperation and moral duty, encouraging internalisation of egalitarian ethics. From a linguistic relativity standpoint, such metaphors may predispose speakers to interpret group participation as a normative and even automatic expectation.

Hati gajah sama dilapah, hati kuman sama dicecah

"The elephant's heart is divided equally; the microbe's heart is dipped into together"

This colourful expression conveys that regardless of abundance or scarcity, resources should be distributed fairly among all. The source domain draws on hyperbolic imagery: if the resource is vast (an elephant's heart), it is divided and shared; if it is minimal (a microbe's heart), it is at least tasted collectively. The target domain is communal sharing in both prosperity and hardship. The conceptual metaphor is COMMUNAL SHARING IS JOINT FEASTING. The proverb promotes equity, selflessness, and compassion. By exaggerating the size contrast—*gajah* versus *kuman*—it underscores the principle that inclusion and fairness are expected in all circumstances. The term *hati*, which also symbolises emotion or conscience in Malay, adds a layer of moral resonance. Cognitively, this metaphor conditions attitudes towards distributive justice and shared fate. In contemporary usage, it can be applied in contexts ranging from team management to national resource allocation, reinforcing a collectivist ethic. From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, the repeated invocation of such imagery may cultivate deep-seated expectations of social equity.

Masuk kandang kerbau menguak, masuk kandang kambing mengembek

“Enter the buffalo pen and moo, enter the goat pen and bleat”

This proverb encourages contextual adaptation and alignment with social norms. The source domain involves animal behaviour within their respective enclosures, symbolising the appropriateness of behaviour in differing settings. The target domain is human social conduct, particularly the ability to adjust to varying cultural or communal contexts. The metaphor may be framed as SOCIAL ADAPTATION IS ECHOING LOCAL BEHAVIOUR. The entailment is that respectful conformity fosters harmony. This reflects Malay cultural values of *menyesuaikan diri* (self-adjustment) and *toleransi* (tolerance), which prioritise social cohesion over individual assertion. Cognitively, it positions behavioural adjustment as a communicative act—a way of “speaking the group’s language”. From a Whorfian perspective, the internalisation of such metaphors may foster cultural sensitivity, encouraging individuals to anticipate and accommodate local expectations instinctively. The related saying, *Di mana bumi dipijak, di situ langit dijunjung* (“Where the earth is trodden, there the sky is upheld”), reinforces a parallel cultural norm: deference to local customs.

Synthesis

The metaphors associated with the theme of social harmony and cooperation predominantly draw from imagery involving symbiotic relationships, collective labour, equitable sharing, and behavioural conformity. These are metaphorically mapped onto social values such as unity, mutual assistance, egalitarianism, and adaptability. Key conceptual metaphors identified include:

- UNITY IS SYMBIOSIS
- A COMMUNITY IS A STRUCTURE (THAT CAN STAND OR COLLAPSE)
- SHARING BURDENS IS SHARING PHYSICAL WEIGHT
- EQUALITY IS FAIR DIVISION
- SOCIAL ADAPTATION IS IMITATING LOCAL BEHAVIOUR

These metaphors function not merely as rhetorical devices but as cognitive and social tools. They foster cultural expectations surrounding group cohesion, cooperation, and egalitarian ethics. As educational mechanisms, Malay *peribahasa* encapsulate core principles of communal life and translate them into accessible, memorable forms.

From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, these entrenched linguistic expressions likely influence social cognition. They construct a worldview in which interdependence, modesty, and adaptability are internalised as moral imperatives. The metaphorical framing of cooperation in naturalistic and embodied terms—e.g., bamboo on a riverbank, the carrying of burdens, or the mimicking of animal calls—grounds abstract social values in concrete experience, reinforcing their salience and promoting behavioural conformity.

These proverbs transmit core values of the Malay culture: harmony and reciprocity. These values are not merely reflected in metaphor but actively produced and sustained by it. The result is a linguistic system that both mirrors and shapes the collective ethos of Malay society.

WISDOM AND EXPERIENCE

Malay proverbs often communicate values of humility, lifelong learning, and the passage of time. They function as repositories of collective wisdom (*kebijaksanaan*) and lived experience (*pengalaman hidup*), encapsulating ethical teachings and practical insights in concise, metaphorical form. Proverbs in this thematic category typically draw upon imagery related to travel, ageing, durability, and gradual labour—each serving as a metaphorical vehicle for knowledge acquisition and personal growth.

The underlying messages include reverence for knowledge (particularly from elders), the virtue of patience in learning, and the importance of maintaining humility regardless of one’s success. Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT) provides a valuable framework for analysing how abstract domains—such as wisdom and maturity—are structured through concrete experiences. In parallel, the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (SWH)

suggests that such metaphors, embedded in the Malay language, may influence the ways in which speakers perceive and value knowledge, status, and moral conduct.

Jauh perjalanan, luas pemandangan

“The farther the journey, the broader the view”

This proverb expresses the notion that greater exposure leads to greater understanding. The source domain is physical travel and the expanded visual field that accompanies it; the target domain is life experience and intellectual breadth. The relevant conceptual metaphors are LIFE EXPERIENCE IS A JOURNEY and KNOWLEDGE IS SEEING. The entailment is that extensive travel—whether literal or metaphorical—broadens one’s perspective, while restricted experience yields a narrow outlook. Culturally, this expression reflects both the agrarian and maritime dimensions of Malay society. While many communities were rooted in agriculture, others were historically engaged in maritime trade and exploration. This proverb likely originates from the latter context, emphasising experiential learning through exploration. The conceptualisation of seeing as knowing aligns with embodied cognition, in which perception is a metaphor for comprehension. The parallel structure and rhyme (*jauh / luas*) further reinforce its memorability. For Malay speakers, this expression promotes curiosity and the idea that knowledge is best gained through direct, wide-ranging experience.

Sejengkal tali takkan sampai ke lautan

“A six-inch rope will not reach the ocean”

This proverb advises against attempting tasks beyond one’s current knowledge or capacity. The source domain involves using a short fishing line to plumb the depths of the sea; the target domain is human ambition, ability, or intellectual reach. The underlying metaphor is ABILITY IS LENGTH, and CHALLENGES ARE DEPTH. The entailment is that awareness of one’s limitations is a mark of wisdom. Rather than discouraging effort, the saying promotes realistic self-assessment and gradual improvement. It aligns with other Malay expressions such as *ukur baju di badan sendiri* (“measure one’s clothes to one’s own body”), which also advocate proportionate action. It implicitly acknowledges the authority of elders and those with more experience, reinforcing a cultural hierarchy in the acquisition of knowledge. Cognitively, the metaphor equates depth with complexity and length with capability—constructs widely supported by image schemas in CMT. Linguistically, this vivid spatial metaphor encourages caution, preparation, and deference to expertise.

Ikut resmi padi, makin berisi makin tunduk

“Follow the nature of the rice plant: the more it bears, the more it bows”

This proverb teaches that genuine wisdom and success should be accompanied by humility. The source domain is the rice stalk, which bends under the weight of ripened grain; the target domain is human character, particularly modesty in proportion to one’s knowledge or status. The relevant conceptual metaphors are ACHIEVEMENT IS WEIGHT, and HUMILITY IS BENDING DOWN. The entailment is that individuals of substance naturally demonstrate deference, while those who are boastful are likened to empty stalks standing upright. The metaphor is culturally significant, especially given the centrality of rice (*padi*) in Malay agrarian life. Unlike the typical Western metaphor of high status being associated with vertical height, this expression inverts that mapping: in the Malay worldview, greatness is shown through humility. From a Whorfian perspective, this metaphor may predispose speakers to perceive modesty not as weakness, but as a natural and dignified response to achievement. It encourages *rendah diri* (humility) and *tawaduk* (modesty), values central to Malay social ethics.

Tak lapuk dek hujan, tak lekang dek panas

“Not decayed by rain, not cracked by heat”

This expression conveys the idea that certain values, practices, or truths remain relevant regardless of changing circumstances. The source domain is a material’s resistance to weathering; the target domain includes moral principles, cultural customs (*adat*), or timeless wisdom. The metaphor can be articulated as ENDURING

TRADITIONS ARE WEATHER-RESISTANT OBJECTS. Entailments emphasise the resilience and longevity of core cultural practices. The proverb is frequently cited in reference to *adat Melayu*, asserting that Malay customs remain intact despite external influences or modernisation. Cognitively, this metaphor aligns with embodied experience—rain and sun symbolising time and adversity, and resistance indicating permanence. Linguistically, the rhythmic duality of the phrase enhances its persuasive force. From a Whorfian standpoint, such expressions may support a conservative worldview, wherein the legitimacy of longstanding traditions is preserved and justified through metaphor.

Sehari selembar benang, lama-lama menjadi kain

“A thread a day, and eventually it becomes cloth”

This proverb asserts that persistence, even in small amounts, leads to significant outcomes over time. The source domain is the process of sewing or weaving, where daily efforts accumulate into a finished product; the target domain is personal development, long-term goals, or the fruits of diligence. The metaphor may be formulated as SMALL EFFORTS ARE THREADS, and ACHIEVEMENT IS WOVEN CLOTH. The entailments support patience (*sabar*), perseverance (*ketekunan*), and the virtue of consistent, gradual progress. In traditional Malay contexts, weaving and textile production were familiar activities, rendering the metaphor accessible and culturally resonant. The saying also discourages impatience and promotes delayed gratification. Linguistically, this image provides a tangible frame for understanding time and effort. CMT reveals that incremental labour is often metaphorised through the accumulation of discrete elements—here, threads—resulting in a meaningful whole. A Whorfian interpretation would suggest that such metaphors help speakers internalise a mindset that values steady, long-term investment over immediate success.

Synthesis

Malay proverbs concerning knowledge and experience map abstract concepts—such as wisdom, humility, and perseverance—onto concrete, culturally embedded source domains. These include: journeys (experience as travel and visual exploration), measurement and limitation (fishing line versus ocean), agriculture (rice stalks bowing under weight), material durability (weather-resistant objects), and weaving and accumulation (threads forming fabric). Conceptual metaphors identified include:

- LIFE EXPERIENCE IS A JOURNEY
- KNOWLEDGE IS SEEING
- ABILITY IS LENGTH
- ACHIEVEMENT/KNOWLEDGE IS WEIGHT (leading to humility)
- TIME-TESTED CUSTOMS ARE WEATHER-RESISTANT OBJECTS
- PATIENCE AND PERSISTENCE IS SLOW WEAVING

Each metaphor encodes culturally valued behaviours: learning through exploration, recognising one's limits, adopting modesty in success, preserving heritage, and remaining diligent over time. These expressions serve not only as linguistic artefacts but as educational tools, transmitting ideals across generations.

From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, such metaphors may shape perception and behaviour. For instance, the metaphor of the bowed rice stalk may prime Malay speakers to associate intellectual maturity with humility, rather than with self-promotion. Likewise, framing labour as thread-weaving may help to normalise slow progress and sustained effort.

Ultimately, these proverbs demonstrate how Malay metaphor functions as both a cognitive mechanism and a cultural transmitter, grounding abstract ethical ideals in tangible experiences such as fishing, farming, travelling, and crafting. Through such expressions, the Malay language preserves and promotes a worldview in which true knowledge is measured not by assertion but by modesty, and in which meaningful outcomes are achieved through patience, resilience, and quiet discipline.

HUMAN EMOTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Malay proverbs employ metaphor extensively to express emotional states and the nuances of interpersonal relationships, extending beyond the familial frameworks already discussed. These expressions often rely on vivid analogies of physical fragility, yearning, and embodiment to articulate emotions such as love, longing, sorrow, and empathy. A distinctive feature of the Malay linguistic and cognitive framework is the central role of the *hati*—literally “liver”, but functionally analogous to the “heart” in English idiom—as the seat of emotion. Both linguistically and culturally, Malay locates affective experiences within the *hati*, a concept that is frequently reflected in its proverbs and idiomatic expressions.

In contrast to the Western tradition, which typically associates the heart with emotional experience, Malay conceptualisations reflect a culturally specific emotional schema. Proverbs such as *makan hati* (to eat one’s heart) or *besar hati* (to be proud or pleased) reflect this embodied metaphorical understanding. Research suggests this represents a form of cultural relativity in emotional conceptualisation, whereby emotion is somatised and framed through organ-based metaphor.

Bagai kaca terhempas ke batu

“Like glass shattered against a rock”

This proverb describes a heart broken by deep sorrow or disappointment. The source domain evokes the image of delicate glass shattering upon contact with a hard surface; the target domain is an individual’s emotional state following psychological trauma. The conceptual metaphor is EMOTIONAL BREAKDOWN IS SHATTERED GLASS. The entailments include irreversibility and absolute loss—much like shattered glass, the heart, once broken, cannot be restored. Culturally, the phrase is often used to describe the devastation of betrayal or the emotional collapse resulting from personal tragedy. From a cognitive metaphor theory (CMT) perspective, this metaphor maps the physical experience of breaking onto the internal sensation of emotional pain, reinforcing the idea that such pain is as real and debilitating as physical injury.

Makan hati berulam jantung

“Eating one’s heart, garnished with the heart”

This evocative expression conveys the idea of silent suffering and internalised emotional pain. The source domain draws from the imagery of consuming one’s internal organs—*hati* (heart/liver) and *jantung* (heart or lungs)—as food. The conceptual metaphor may be framed as SUFFERING IS SELF-CONSUMPTION. The metaphor suggests that sorrow consumes the individual from within, aligning with the English expression “eating one’s heart out”, though the Malay phrase places greater emphasis on internal torment and stoic endurance. This linguistic expression normalises the cultural value of patience (*sabar*) and restraint in emotional expression, thereby reinforcing a norm of enduring hardship in silence.

Bagai pungguk rindukan bulan

“Like the owl longing for the moon”

This proverb expresses unrequited love or longing for something unattainable. The *pungguk* (typically a small owl) gazes at the moon, representing the lover yearning for a beloved who is out of reach. The conceptual metaphor is UNFULFILLED DESIRE IS OWL-LIKE YEARNING FOR THE UNREACHABLE. The entailments convey futility, sadness, and poetic resignation. In Malay culture, this expression captures the melancholy beauty of unattainable aspirations. It evokes a deep cultural sensibility that accepts unfulfilled desire as part of the emotional landscape—less a source of frustration and more a theme of lyrical lamentation.

Bagai isi dengan kuku

“Like the flesh and the fingernail”

This adage symbolises deep emotional closeness and inseparability, often in reference to intimate friendships, familial bonds, or romantic relationships. The source domain is the anatomical unity between flesh and nail, entities that are distinct yet inseparably connected. The conceptual metaphor is CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

ARE ORGANIC UNITY. The entailments suggest that harm to one party inevitably injures the other, reinforcing ideals of loyalty, empathy, and mutual support. In Malay cultural contexts, this expression conveys the importance of interpersonal harmony and reinforces collectivist values.

Berat mata memandang, berat lagi bahu memikul

“Heavy to the eyes that observe, heavier still to the shoulder that bears the weight”

This proverb draws a distinction between witnessing suffering and experiencing it. The source domain compares the visual perception of weight to the physical strain of carrying it; the target domain is the contrast between external sympathy and internal experience. The conceptual metaphor is SUFFERING IS A BURDEN, with the further implication that EMPATHY IS INCOMPLETE WITHOUT EXPERIENCE. The proverb promotes humility in judgement and encourages a compassionate approach to others’ suffering, recognising that observers cannot fully comprehend another’s pain. From a Whorfian perspective, such metaphors may cultivate emotional sensitivity by framing suffering in terms of physical load, thereby shaping social responses to hardship.

Synthesis

The proverbs analysed in this section employ source domains including fragility (*kaca*), consumption (*makan hati*), unreachable beauty (*bulan*), bodily integration (*isi dan kuku*), and physical burden (*bahu memikul*) to map abstract emotional states. Corresponding conceptual metaphors include:

- A BROKEN HEART IS SHATTERED GLASS
- SILENT SUFFERING IS SELF-CONSUMPTION
- UNREQUITED LOVE IS YEARNING FOR THE UNREACHABLE
- CLOSE FRIENDSHIP IS FLESH AND NAIL
- SUFFERING IS A HEAVY LOAD

These metaphors reveal several distinctive cultural orientations. The Malay language situates emotion within the *hati*, reinforcing an embodied model of emotional life. This differs from the more cerebral or abstract conceptualisations found in some Western traditions. Such metaphors also validate emotional expression, provide culturally recognised frames for distress, and promote empathy and patience. The concept of internalised pain, expressed metaphorically through consumption or anatomical integration, reflects a collective ethic of quiet endurance and shared emotional responsibility.

From the perspective of Cognitive Metaphor Theory and the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, these linguistic structures not only reflect but also reinforce cultural values. The metaphors encode emotional scripts that guide behaviour: heartbreak is conceptualised as total destruction; suffering is borne internally; yearning is poeticised rather than pathologised; and empathy is grounded in the physicality of experience. As such, the language provides a cognitive framework through which individuals interpret, express, and manage emotion.

Malay emotional metaphors capture nuanced emotional states and culturally prescribed responses through metaphorical mappings grounded in bodily and environmental experience. They serve not only as communicative tools but also as mechanisms of cultural continuity and psychological insight.

MORAL CONDUCT AND CHARACTER

Malay proverbs frequently serve as moral lessons or critiques of personal character. Through metaphors drawn from animals, tools, and natural phenomena, they encapsulate culturally embedded judgements regarding virtue and vice. Grounded in a moral ethos that prioritises integrity (*amanah, jujur*), social decorum, and accountability, many of these proverbs address themes such as hypocrisy, honesty, pride, and moral responsibility. Animal imagery is often employed to symbolise human flaws, while physical analogies are used to illustrate abstract ethical principles. These metaphorical constructions align with what Lakoff and Turner (1989) described as the “Great Chain of Being” metaphor—whereby human behaviour is interpreted through analogical mappings to animals or elements of the natural world, thereby conveying evaluative significance. For

example, a deceitful individual may be likened to a disguised predator, while one who offers advice, they themselves disregard may be portrayed as a creature striving for the unattainable. Examining these proverbs reveals how Malay culture utilises metaphor as both a cognitive and rhetorical device to reinforce social values and caution against ethical lapses. The following examples illustrate this function in context:

Seperti ketam mengajar anaknya berjalan lurus

“Like a crab teaching its young to walk straight”

This proverb refers to individuals who offer advice or instruction that they themselves fail to follow—hypocrites who lack the moral authority to teach what they do not practise. The source domain is the image of a crab attempting to teach its offspring to walk in a straight line, despite the crab’s natural sideways gait. The target domain involves individuals who advocate ethical or correct behaviour yet act in contradiction to their own counsel. The underlying conceptual metaphor may be articulated as: A HYPOCRITE IS A CRAB TEACHING STRAIGHT WALKING.

This comparison is both inherently futile and subtly humorous; just as the crab is physiologically incapable of walking straight, the hypocritical speaker’s message is undermined by their own contradictory conduct. The proverb thus delivers a moral lesson: one must correct oneself before attempting to correct others—essentially, one should practise what one preaches.

Culturally, this speaks to a core Malay disapproval of *cakap tak serupa bikin* (“speech that does not match action”), a widely used phrase denoting behavioural inconsistency. While Malay society traditionally accords respect to elders and authority figures, it also expects them to embody the principles they espouse. The crab metaphor operates as a gentle but incisive critique of moral posturing, employing an animal’s characteristic (sideways movement) to draw a moral parallel with human hypocrisy.

This use of animal behaviour to convey human character flaws reflects what Lakoff and Turner (1989) describe as a “Great Chain” mapping from nature to human morality. The imagery of the crab, familiar in Malay coastal environments, also lends local relevance and humour to the expression, making the advice both memorable and culturally situated.

From a cognitive-linguistic perspective, the metaphor likely fosters a negative association with hypocrisy, embedding a subtle social check within the language itself. The phrase *seperti ketam mengajar anaknya berjalan lurus* may well act as a cognitive trigger for self-reflection when a speaker considers critiquing others for behaviour they themselves exhibit. At the very least, it functions as a powerful rhetorical device: to call someone a “crab teaching its young” is to highlight their moral inconsistency in a striking and metaphorically resonant manner.

Telunjuk lurus, kelingking berkait

“The forefinger is straight, the little finger is hooked”

This proverb refers to individuals who appear honest or upright on the surface but harbour deceitful intentions or hidden agendas. The source domain is a physical gesture involving the hand: while the forefinger (*telunjuk*) extends forward in a straight line—symbolising honesty, clarity, or directness—the little finger (*kelingking*) is curled or hooked, connoting something secretive or duplicitous occurring behind the scenes.

The target domain is moral duplicity or covert misconduct. The underlying conceptual metaphor equates OUTWARD HONESTY WITH STRAIGHTNESS and HIDDEN DECEIT WITH CROOKEDNESS. The entailments suggest a contrast between external presentation and internal motive: a person may act with apparent integrity in public, yet simultaneously engage in underhanded behaviour away from view. The metaphor implies that moral integrity is compromised when outer gestures of righteousness are belied by concealed wrongdoing.

Culturally, the proverb resonates with broader Malay concerns about *munafik* (hypocrites) and figures who conceal malicious intent beneath a virtuous façade—often encapsulated in the related expression *musang berbulu ayam* (“a civet in chicken’s feathers”). It reflects the Malay cultural understanding that *nampak baik*

(seeming good) can obscure *niatjahat* (malicious intent). This duality of behaviour is often discussed in political contexts, where a public figure may espouse noble ideals while engaging in corruption or betrayal in private.

From a cognitive perspective, the proverb exemplifies the use of bodily metaphors to structure moral reasoning—here, the binary between straight and crooked fingers. This mapping aligns with cross-cultural associations in which physical straightness symbolises honesty and crookedness suggests deceit (as also seen in English phrases such as “a crooked politician” or “a straight-talker”).

The striking imagery and succinct phrasing of *telunjuk lurus, kelingking berkait* likely make the metaphor cognitively salient among Malay speakers, clearly demarcating the moral categories of sincerity and duplicity. Linguistically, the expression functions as both a moral warning and a rhetorical device: it calls attention to the incongruity between appearance and intention, thereby equipping speakers with a vivid tool for ethical critique.

From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, the existence and habitual use of this proverb may heighten Malay speakers’ sensitivity to concealed motives. It reinforces a culturally informed cognitive schema in which external behaviour is not necessarily a reliable indicator of moral character. As a condensed form of collective wisdom, the proverb ultimately advises scepticism: even the hand that appears to point honestly might be concealing a hooked finger behind its back.

Ular menyusur akar tidak akan hilang bisanya

“A snake slithering along the ground does not lose its venom”

This proverb conveys the idea that a person of high status, talent, or power does not diminish their worth or capability by practising humility. The source domain is a venomous snake moving close to the ground—*menyusur akar*—yet retaining its toxic potency. The target domain is an accomplished or noble individual who chooses to act modestly or engage with those of lower rank.

The conceptual metaphor underpinning this saying may be expressed as: HUMILITY DOES NOT DIMINISH INHERENT STRENGTH OR DIGNITY. The metaphor draws on the image of a creature that, although physically lowered, retains its full potency. Thus, it communicates that power or excellence is internal and not dependent on outward display or hierarchical posturing.

Culturally, the proverb reinforces the Malay virtue of *merendah diri* (humility), a theme also evident in proverbs such as *resmi padi* (“the rice plant bows lower the fuller it becomes”). In this case, however, the message is particularly directed at individuals in positions of authority or privilege (*orang besar*), affirming that associating with ordinary people or performing menial tasks does not detract from their honour or influence. Rather, it enhances their stature by demonstrating moral integrity.

In the context of a traditionally stratified society, the saying offers a reassuring maxim: genuine authority and respect are not contingent upon maintaining distance or visible superiority. The “venom” in this metaphor symbolises latent power, strength of character, or intellectual and moral substance. It is this internal quality—not one’s position or demeanour—that defines a person’s true influence.

From a cognitive linguistic perspective, the proverb maps zoological behaviour (the snake’s movement and retained venom) onto social conduct. The snake, often associated with danger or potency, here represents a powerful individual whose capacity remains intact regardless of physical posture or social presentation. The linguistic structure—particularly the negative construction *tidak akan hilang bisanya* (“will not lose its venom”)—underscores the permanence of inner strength, even when outward appearances suggest otherwise.

In practice, this expression is often used to commend figures of high status who exhibit humility, thereby encouraging egalitarian values. It provides a culturally sanctioned model for unpretentious greatness and serves as a rhetorical resource to praise modesty among the powerful. As a moral and cognitive guide, it suggests that only those with authentic qualities can afford to be humble—those lacking substance may fear the loss of their perceived status if they step down from positions of display.

From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, such a phrase may shape Malay speakers’ perceptions of leadership and social interaction by reinforcing the notion that humility is not a sign of weakness but an affirmation of strength. The embedded metaphor offers a culturally resonant and cognitively accessible framework for

understanding the balance between modesty and authority. As a compact, zoomorphic expression, this proverb exemplifies the efficiency of proverbial language in transmitting complex moral lessons.

Harimau mati meninggalkan belang, manusia mati meninggalkan nama

“A tiger dies leaving its stripes, a person dies leaving their name”

This Malay proverb articulates the concept of legacy and the enduring nature of reputation. The source domain is the tiger, which upon death leaves behind its striped hide—its most recognisable and distinguishing feature. The target domain is the human condition, whereby a person’s metaphorical “stripes” are their *nama* (name), representing the reputation and identity formed through a lifetime of actions.

The conceptual metaphor at work here is: REPUTATION IS A LINGERING MARK, LIKE A TIGER’S STRIPES. The entailment is straightforward: just as the tiger’s stripes survive its body as a lasting symbol of its identity, so too does a person’s reputation endure beyond death. In essence, the proverb underscores the importance of *nama baik* (good name), urging individuals to uphold personal honour and integrity in life so that their memory remains untarnished.

Culturally, this expression reflects a deep-rooted Malay value system that prioritises moral conduct (*budi pekerti*), communal esteem, and the safeguarding of personal and familial honour. The phrase *jaga nama baik* is widely used in Malay society as a reminder to act in ways that preserve dignity and respect, both for oneself and one’s kin. The proverb thus functions not only as moral instruction but also as a social mechanism for shaping behaviour in accordance with collective norms.

The symbolic choice of the tiger is especially significant. As a creature historically native to the Malay Archipelago and a long-standing emblem of bravery, nobility, and power, the tiger serves as a culturally resonant figure. The stripes (*belang*) of the tiger symbolise its essence—its strength and distinctiveness—just as a person’s *nama* encapsulates their moral identity. This zoomorphic metaphor links the tangible (the tiger’s hide) with the intangible (a human’s reputation), reinforcing the idea that moral character is a visible, public legacy.

From a cognitive perspective, the mapping between a physical remnant (animal skin) and a social construct (reputation) reflects how Malay conceptual systems visualise abstract values through concrete imagery. This enables the proverb to function both mnemonically and pedagogically, embedding ethical teachings in memorable linguistic form. Its rhyme and rhythmic balance in Malay enhance its function as a didactic maxim, frequently taught to children to instil awareness of long-term moral consequences.

From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, the linguistic encoding of legacy in terms of “stripes” may encourage Malay speakers to perceive social memory and posthumous honour as vital aspects of identity. This could foster a heightened sensitivity to how one’s behaviour in life contributes to the preservation—or erosion—of one’s *maruah* (dignity) and avoidance of *aib* (shame). The language thereby shapes a worldview in which death is not the end of personal influence, but rather the moment at which one’s *true* self—as remembered by others—is most fully revealed.

In summary, the proverb succinctly communicates a cultural ethic: live honourably so that what you leave behind—your metaphorical stripes—is a testament to your character, not a source of shame. Through vivid metaphor and cultural symbolism, it enshrines the moral imperative of cultivating a name worthy of remembrance.

Berani buat, berani tanggung

“Dare to act, dare to bear [the consequences]”

This succinct Malay proverb encapsulates the principle of personal accountability. It asserts that individuals who possess the courage to undertake a particular action—often one involving risk or transgression—must also possess the fortitude to face its repercussions. In essence, the proverb functions as a moral axiom linking volition with responsibility: if one is bold enough to act, one must be equally prepared to accept the ensuing consequences.

The source domain consists of everyday expressions of agency and responsibility, while the target domain is moral accountability. Unlike metaphorical proverbs based on imagery, this saying operates within a conceptual framework of symmetrical parallelism: ACTION ENTAILS OBLIGATION. The structure reinforces a one-to-one moral logic—courage in conduct must be mirrored by courage in accepting outcomes. This binary logic between *buat* (to do) and *tanggung* (to bear) is expressed with striking simplicity, yet it delivers a potent ethical message.

Culturally, the proverb resonates with the Malay values of *tanggungjawab* (responsibility), *amanah* (trustworthiness), and *kesatria* (chivalric honour). It implicitly critiques avoidance of blame and reinforces a cultural expectation that individuals should face consequences honourably. In a society where maintaining *air muka* (face or dignity) is of high social importance, this expression challenges the tendency to deflect culpability. It is often invoked in contexts requiring moral reckoning—whether in public discourse, family reprimands, or personal reflection.

From a cognitive standpoint, the aphorism frames the moral event as a dual act: the courage to initiate must be inseparably linked with the courage to endure. The linguistic construction—*berani buat, berani tanggung*—creates a rhythmic and mnemonic parallel that reinforces the inseparability of cause and effect. This not only fosters moral foresight but also instils a preventative ethic: one should weigh potential consequences before undertaking any bold action.

Viewed through a Sapir-Whorf lens, the phrase may contribute to shaping behavioural tendencies among Malay speakers by embedding causal accountability within the language itself. The lexical pairing suggests inevitability—what is done must be answered for—thereby encouraging reflection on *niat* (intention) and *akibat* (consequence), which are culturally significant concepts in the Malay moral framework.

Ultimately, this proverb serves as both warning and exhortation. It upholds a vision of moral integrity whereby honourable individuals do not evade the repercussions of their actions. By embedding this ethic in a pithy and forceful expression, the Malay language reinforces the cultural imperative that dignity lies not only in the courage to act, but in the courage to stand by one's actions when they are put to the test.

Synthesis

The selected Malay proverbs concerning moral conduct and personal character provide a compelling insight into the ethical foundations of Malay society. Using metaphor as a primary cognitive and cultural tool, these expressions convey expectations around integrity, humility, personal responsibility, and the dangers of hypocrisy. The metaphors often employ vivid imagery from animals, physical gestures, or behavioural contrasts to articulate moral principles in a memorable and culturally resonant manner.

Central among these is the metaphor of hypocrisy, expressed in proverbs such as *Seperti ketam mengajar anaknya berjalan lurus* (“like a crab teaching its young to walk straight”) and *Telunjuk lurus, kelingking berkait* (“the forefinger is straight, but the little finger is hooked”). These proverbs illustrate how Malay culture uses animal behaviour and bodily metaphors to represent moral inconsistency and hidden malice. Through such imagery, the language cautions against instructing others while failing to uphold one's own moral standards, and warns of superficial appearances concealing deceptive intentions. These idioms serve not only as critiques but also as social correctives, urging ethical coherence between speech and behaviour.

Equally significant is the emphasis on humility and quiet strength, as conveyed by *Ular menyusur akar tidak akan hilang bisanya* (“a snake that slithers close to the ground does not lose its venom”). This proverb reinforces the Malay ideal that modesty does not compromise one's inherent value or power. It celebrates those who, despite their rank or capability, maintain a humble demeanour. The message is particularly relevant in traditional hierarchical contexts, promoting the view that true strength lies in restraint and dignity.

The concept of legacy and moral responsibility is underscored by *Harimau mati meninggalkan belang, manusia mati meninggalkan nama* (“a tiger dies leaving its stripes, a person dies leaving their name”). Here, the metaphor of the tiger's distinctive markings becomes a symbol of human reputation. The adage reflects the cultural premium placed on *nama baik* (a good name) and moral remembrance, suggesting that an individual's

conduct during life defines the respect or shame they leave behind. This focus on posthumous moral evaluation reinforces long-term ethical thinking.

Finally, the proverb *Berani buat, berani tanggung* (“dare to act, dare to bear [the consequences]”) highlights personal accountability as a key moral ideal. Framed in a binary structure, it conveys a straightforward but powerful moral expectation: that those who choose to act, especially in morally ambiguous or risky ways, must also be prepared to shoulder the consequences. This expression bolsters the Malay emphasis on honour, *tanggungjawab* (responsibility), and foresight in action.

Collectively, these proverbs exemplify how Malay metaphorical language functions as a moral compass. The consistent use of metaphor—drawn from nature, animal behaviour, embodied experience, and culturally familiar imagery—grounds abstract ethical principles in everyday life. Moreover, through their brevity and poetic form, these expressions serve as mnemonic devices, allowing for intergenerational transmission of social norms and moral expectations.

Viewed through the lens of Cognitive Metaphor Theory, we can identify clear conceptual mappings:

- HYPOCRISY IS CROOKEDNESS
- HUMILITY IS STRENGTH RESTRAINED
- REPUTATION IS A LASTING MARK
- ACCOUNTABILITY IS MORAL EQUIVALENCE

When considered alongside the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, the regular recurrence of these metaphors suggests a potential influence on cognitive and behavioural tendencies—shaping how Malay speakers perceive moral responsibility, evaluate ethical behaviour, and engage with social expectations.

In sum, Malay proverbial metaphors related to moral conduct are not merely linguistic embellishments; they are compact ethical frameworks. They guide behaviour, foster communal values, and sustain a culturally embedded moral consciousness that prioritises honour, modesty, integrity, and accountability.

NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Reflecting an intimate familiarity with *alam* (nature) and a cultural disposition towards living in harmony with the environment, Malay proverbs frequently draw upon the natural world. Many traditional expressions encode ecological knowledge and a deep reverence for nature by employing imagery of plants, animals, and meteorological phenomena as analogues for human experience. Rooted in an agrarian and maritime heritage, these metaphors reflect a historical imperative to observe and respond sensitively to natural patterns for survival.

Malay *peribahasa* often convey the idea that wisdom is derived from environmental awareness, portraying nature not merely as a passive backdrop, but as an instructive force. This view is encapsulated in the proverb *alam berkembang menjadi guru*—literally, “the unfolding universe becomes a teacher”—which expresses the belief that nature itself serves as a moral and epistemological guide. In this sense, natural events are seen to impart lessons about life, justice, and social order, thereby fostering ecological mindfulness within the culture.

From the perspective of Cognitive Metaphor Theory, the natural environment functions as a salient source domain through which abstract social and moral concepts are structured. Conceptual metaphors such as NATURE IS A TEACHER and SOCIETY IS AN ECOSYSTEM suggest that for Malay speakers, human affairs are often interpreted through ecological frameworks. This alignment also supports the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, implying that language may shape habitual thought patterns: the frequent use of nature-based metaphors could encourage Malay speakers to understand interpersonal relations, community responsibilities, and ethical values in terms of balance, adaptation, and respect for the natural order.

Alam berkembang jadi guru

"Nature unfolding becomes [our] teacher"

This traditional *peribahasa* asserts that nature itself serves as a source of instruction and moral guidance. The target domain is human knowledge and ethical development, while the source domain is the natural world—constantly “unfolding” (*terkembang*) through observable phenomena such as the growth of plants, animal behaviour, and cosmic cycles. Every natural event is imbued with pedagogical potential, encapsulated in the underlying conceptual metaphor NATURE IS A TEACHER or LESSONS ARE NATURAL EMERGENCES.

The proverb implies that careful observation of the natural environment yields both practical and moral insights—for instance, learning patience from the rhythm of the seasons or discernment from animal instincts. Culturally, this expression supports the Malay perspective that *petuah* (wisdom or counsel) need not originate solely from textual sources or elders, but may also be derived from one’s immediate surroundings. It reflects a longstanding tradition of ecological knowledge and positions the natural world as a dynamic repository of wisdom.

From a Whorfian perspective, the enduring presence of this expression in the Malay linguistic repertoire may encourage speakers to interpret their environment as inherently instructive. Language here actively directs cognitive attention, fostering a worldview in which nature is perceived as a perpetual and authoritative guide. The continued relevance of this proverb in contemporary environmental discourse further affirms its role as a cultural model for sustainable thinking—where living in harmony with nature is regarded not only as ethically sound but also intellectually judicious.

Di mana bumi dipijak, di situ langit dijunjung

“Where one treads upon the earth, there one upholds the sky”

This traditional *peribahasa* articulates the cultural imperative of respecting local customs and adapting one’s conduct to the norms of one’s environment. It conveys the idea that individuals are morally obliged to uphold (*menjunjung*) the metaphorical “sky”—symbolising the cultural values and social expectations—of the place where they reside or find themselves. The target domain involves appropriate behavioural adjustment in new sociocultural contexts, while the source domain refers to the act of standing upon unfamiliar ground beneath a different sky.

The underlying conceptual metaphor may be expressed as SOCIAL ADAPTATION IS CARRYING THE SKY or LOCAL CUSTOM IS THE FIRMAMENT TO BE UPHELD. The entailments include the expectation of loyalty, humility, and cultural flexibility: just as the sky is a constant and all-encompassing presence over the earth, so too are the customs of a place seen as overarching and obligatory. Culturally, this proverb affirms a core Malay value—conformity to *adat* (customary law and practice)—as well as reverence for authority, tradition, and situational appropriateness. It is especially resonant in the context of the Malay Archipelago’s historical patterns of migration and intercommunity coexistence, where social cohesion often relied on mutual respect and cultural observance.

Linguistically, the phrase invokes elemental imagery—earth and sky—to elevate cultural adaptation to the level of a cosmic imperative. Cognitively, this metaphor encourages a conceptual association between natural law and social ethics, promoting an understanding of cultural deference as not only moral but instinctive. In line with the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, this expression suggests that language may influence thought by embedding cultural obligations within environmental metaphors. Accordingly, Malay speakers may internalise the notion that adherence to local norms is as fundamental as adjusting to the climate or geography, reinforcing a worldview that values social harmony and respectful integration.

Sekali air bah, sekali pantai beralih

“When a flood comes, the shore changes with it”

This traditional *peribahasa* metaphorically expresses the inevitability of change and the impermanence of stability. Literally, it refers to the visible transformation of a shoreline (*pantai*) brought about by successive floods (*air bah*). Figuratively, the source domain is a natural phenomenon—flooding—while the target domain is any significant life event or societal disruption that irreversibly alters existing conditions, norms, or relationships.

The underlying conceptual metaphor can be expressed as SOCIETAL CONDITIONS ARE SHORELINES and MAJOR CHANGES ARE FLOODS. The entailment is that, just as a shoreline is reshaped by each flood, so too are the structures of personal or social life transformed by significant upheavals. Culturally, this *peribahasa* encapsulates a distinctly Malay awareness of cyclical change—recognising that equilibrium is transient and that adaptability is essential. Originating from a region frequently affected by monsoonal flooding, the proverb reflects both environmental realism and philosophical insight.

Beyond its environmental context, the expression has broader applicability: it may allude to generational shifts, political transitions, or evolving social norms. Each “flood”—whether symbolic or literal—leaves behind a newly contoured “shoreline”. From a cognitive metaphor theory perspective, this pairing of flood and shoreline offers an accessible schema for understanding instability and transformation. It fosters a conceptual framework in which disruption is not anomalous, but intrinsic to the natural order of existence.

Through the lens of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, this proverb exemplifies how language can shape habitual modes of perception. Its recurrent use may lead Malay speakers to internalise a worldview that perceives change as both inevitable and rhythmical. As such, the *peribahasa* functions not merely as a warning, but also as a cultural directive towards psychological flexibility, acceptance, and resilience in the face of change.

Gajah sama gajah berjuang, pelanduk mati di tengah-tengahnya

“When elephants fight, the mousedeer perishes between them”

This evocative proverb, rooted in the imagery of the tropical jungle, encapsulates the notion of collateral damage inflicted upon the powerless during conflicts between the powerful. The source domain features a fragile *pelanduk* (mousedeer) caught between two battling elephants—creatures whose sheer size and strength render the mousedeer helpless. The target domain refers to disputes among powerful individuals or groups—such as political elites or dominant factions—that inadvertently harm ordinary people or subordinate parties.

The underlying conceptual metaphor may be expressed as THE POWERLESS ARE SMALL ANIMALS UNDERFOOT, while CONFLICT AMONG THE POWERFUL IS A BATTLE OF ELEPHANTS. The entailments foreground themes of vulnerability, injustice, and disproportionate suffering: just as the mousedeer cannot withstand the trampling of elephants, so too are the marginalised harmed by power struggles in which they have no agency.

Culturally, this *peribahasa* serves as both a cautionary and moral reflection. It alerts society to the unintended consequences of elite conflict and implicitly advises those in positions of authority to consider the broader impact of their actions. At the same time, it encourages ordinary individuals to be wary of becoming entangled in matters beyond their control. The proverb reflects a Malay cultural ethic of empathy for the weak and an acute awareness of hierarchical dynamics—recognising that *yang lemah akan teraniaya* (the weak will be oppressed) if the strong act irresponsibly.

From the perspective of Cognitive Metaphor Theory, this expression translates abstract sociopolitical concepts into concrete, ecologically grounded imagery, making power dynamics and their consequences immediately comprehensible. The metaphorical mapping of human affairs onto a natural scene enables listeners to grasp the severity and inevitability of harm when power is misused.

Within a Whorfian framework, this linguistic construction may subtly shape cognitive orientation. The recurrent use of such metaphors could condition Malay speakers to perceive societal relationships through a lens of ecological vulnerability and power imbalance, reinforcing a cultural disposition towards cautious engagement with authority and heightened sensitivity to injustice.

Comparable proverbs exist in other cultures—such as the African saying, “When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers”—suggesting a potentially universal metaphorical structure for representing the plight of the powerless. However, the Malay version uniquely features the *pelanduk*, a native and culturally emblematic animal, thereby grounding the metaphor in a distinctly local context and reinforcing its emotional and cultural resonance.

Synthesis

The proverbs within this thematic category demonstrate how the Malay cognitive framework intricately weaves together moral instruction and environmental consciousness. Each saying draws on specific elements of the natural world to serve as metaphoric reflections of human experience: forests and animals illustrate justice and humility (as seen in the juxtaposition of elephants and mousedeer); land and sky are invoked to signify social obligation (symbolising local customs and moral codes); and water and weather phenomena represent impermanence and resilience (as in floods reshaping shorelines).

At the heart of these expressions lies the meta-metaphor NATURE IS WISDOM, encapsulating a worldview in which the environment functions as a pedagogical force. Among the primary conceptual mappings identified are:

- NATURE AS MENTOR
- COMMUNITY NORMS AS NATURAL LAW
- CHANGE AS FLOODING WATER
- SOCIAL POWER AS PREDATOR-PREY DYNAMICS

Deeply rooted in the Malay lived environment—defined by tropical biodiversity, seasonal monsoons, and riverine landscapes—these metaphors render abstract social and ethical ideas perceptible through culturally salient imagery.

From a cultural perspective, the proverbs endorse values such as adaptability, reverence for tradition, and prudent foresight. They suggest that just as natural laws must be respected, so too must societal norms; and that just as natural cycles are inevitable, so too are the fluctuations of fortune—requiring readiness and humility. The proverbs advocate an orientation to life that acknowledges the limits of human control and emphasises balance, interdependence, and resilience.

Viewed through the lens of the Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis, the frequent invocation of environmental metaphor in Malay proverbs likely cultivates a habitual worldview in which human behaviour is interpreted through ecological paradigms. The language thus promotes a cognitive model in which social and environmental order are seen as fundamentally interconnected. Regular exposure to such metaphorical constructs may shape speakers' attitudes towards cooperation, modesty, and sustainable living.

In conclusion, these proverbs serve as a cultural eco-lexicon: a repository of environmental ethics encoded in metaphor, which simultaneously conveys practical knowledge, social values, and philosophical orientation. Through such figurative language, nature is not merely background scenery but becomes an active instructor—guiding perception, shaping behaviour, and reinforcing a collective worldview in which harmony with the natural world is considered both wise and necessary.

DESTINY AND LIFE'S JOURNEY

Proverbs concerning destiny (*takdir*, *nasib*) and the human life course reveal a distinctly Malay worldview that harmonises submission to fate with an emphasis on deliberate effort. Informed by both indigenous philosophical traditions and Islamic theology, Malay culture embraces a dual outlook: an enduring belief that some outcomes lie beyond human control, and a concurrent conviction that individual conduct and personal endeavour retain considerable significance.

Metaphorical expressions that underscore the inscrutability of fate, the inevitability of life's fluctuations, and the virtues of courage and foresight articulate this conceptual dualism with notable clarity. Such proverbs often rely on imagery drawn from the natural and domestic world—floating and sinking objects, atmospheric conditions, the gait of barnyard animals, or the flight of birds—to give form to abstract notions such as fortune, misfortune, and the unfolding of life's path. These accessible and familiar source domains render complex metaphysical ideas more tangible and culturally resonant.

Typically derived from close observation of agrarian and ecological phenomena—coconut husks, rivers, poultry, or seasonal weather patterns—these metaphors anchor the concept of destiny in the immediacy

of lived experience. The corresponding target domains encompass human success and failure, personal resilience, and the broader existential trajectory. Viewed through the lens of Cognitive Metaphor Theory, recurrent metaphorical structures become discernible, including GOOD FORTUNE IS BUOYANCY, LIFE IS A JOURNEY, and DESTINY IS A PREDETERMINED COURSE. Collectively, these conceptual mappings reinforce cultural values such as *tawakkal* (trust in divine will), *reda* (acceptance of fate), and *usaha* (intentional effort), reflecting a philosophical disposition that integrates theological determinism with human agency.

From a linguistic perspective, Malay proverbs transform the abstract into the intelligible by encoding metaphysical truths in metaphors of motion, transformation, and environmental consequence. Fortune may be envisioned as something that floats, adversity as a transient storm, and life itself as a voyage shaped by unseen forces and personal navigation. According to the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, the persistent use of such metaphorical language may subtly condition thought, encouraging Malay speakers to frame life events within a schema that balances surrender and action, patience and foresight.

The following proverbs exemplify how metaphor operates within the Malay cultural imagination to express a conception of life as a dynamic interplay between destiny and moral responsibility—a conceptual tapestry woven from both inherited circumstances and cultivated virtues.

Langit tidak selalu cerah

"The sky is not always clear"

This proverb succinctly conveys the notion that life is not invariably joyous or untroubled; just as the sky—symbolic of the passage of time—inevitably experiences clouds and storms. The source domain is meteorological phenomena, specifically the contrast between clear skies and turbulent weather. The target domain comprises the vicissitudes of human experience, particularly fluctuations in fortune, emotional state, and life circumstances. The underlying conceptual metaphors can be expressed as GOOD TIMES ARE CLEAR SKIES and conversely, MISFORTUNE IS STORMY WEATHER.

The implication is that hardship (*mendung*, or "overcast skies") is a natural and expected part of life, just as inclement weather is an inherent element of the climate cycle. Culturally, the proverb aligns with the Malay philosophical values of *sabar* (patience) and *reda* (acceptance of fate), encouraging individuals to remain grounded during prosperity and resilient during adversity. It also resonates with Islamic theological concepts of *qada' dan qadar* (divine decree and predestination), which affirm that life encompasses both ease and hardship as part of a divinely ordained balance.

In colloquial usage, *langit tidak selalunya cerah* serves as a measured reminder not to become complacent in favourable circumstances or despondent during misfortune. It promotes moderation, humility, and emotional fortitude. Cognitively, the metaphor enables abstract experiences of change and uncertainty to be conceptualised through tangible, observable environmental phenomena—something universally relatable, such as the sudden shift from clear skies to a thunderstorm.

Linguistically, the proverb encapsulates a worldview that is both fatalistic and cautiously optimistic: while challenges are inevitable, they are also transient. Through a Sapir-Whorf lens, the recurrent use of weather metaphors in Malay may predispose speakers to frame personal setbacks as temporary and cyclical, rather than permanent. The metaphor thus reinforces a culturally embedded narrative of endurance and hope, suggesting that adversity, like a storm, will eventually pass, and clear skies will return.

Untung sabut timbul, untung batu tenggelam

"Fortunate like coconut husk, it floats; unfortunate like stone, it sinks"

This proverb metaphorically represents the outcomes of fate through the observable properties of natural objects. It compares the notion of *untung* (luck or destiny) to the buoyancy of a *sabut* (coconut husk), which floats, and a *batu* (stone), which sinks. The source domain is the principle of buoyancy—whether an object floats or submerges in water—while the target domain pertains to an individual's success or failure in life.

The underlying conceptual metaphor may be articulated as FATE IS BUOYANCY: favourable destiny keeps one "afloat" (prosperous and secure), whereas misfortune causes one to "sink" (to experience loss or

defeat). The entailments of this metaphor emphasise the unpredictable and, at times, seemingly predetermined nature of outcomes. Much like the inherent qualities of husk and stone, some life results are viewed as being beyond human control.

Culturally, the saying expresses a Malay worldview shaped by both traditional and religious understandings of fate. It reflects an awareness that despite equal efforts, outcomes can diverge due to an unseen force—*nasib* (destiny)—governing human affairs. While the proverb may appear to promote resignation, it is more accurately understood as a means of offering consolation or contextualising outcomes: “we have done our part; ultimately, *untung sabut timbul, untung batu tenggelam*”.

From a cognitive perspective, the stark physical contrast between floating and sinking provides a simple yet powerful mental schema. By mapping physical buoyancy onto life circumstances, the proverb renders abstract concepts of luck and destiny into accessible imagery. This framing can influence how Malay speakers conceptualise personal and communal experiences—perceiving fortune as “rising” and adversity as “submersion”.

Linguistically, the metaphor reinforces a worldview in which luck is conceived as an intrinsic property, much like mass or density. Within the framework of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, such repeated metaphorical expressions may shape cognitive patterns: Malay speakers might be more inclined to accept certain life outcomes as the result of immutable external forces, in the same way that one cannot will a stone to float.

Nevertheless, Malay proverbial wisdom does not advocate fatalism in isolation. This proverb often exists in dialogue with others that promote *usaha* (effort), self-discipline, and perseverance. Thus, *untung sabut timbul, untung batu tenggelam* should be read as part of a broader moral discourse—acknowledging the role of fate while also recognising the importance of personal agency and ethical conduct.

Tuah ayam nampak di kaki, tuah manusia tiada siapa tahu

“A rooster’s fortune is visible in its feet; a human’s fortune is known to none”

This traditional Malay proverb encapsulates the distinction between the perceived predictability of an animal’s potential and the inherent inscrutability of human destiny. The source domain derives from a common rural practice: assessing a cock’s fighting potential by examining its legs—physical attributes such as strong limbs or sharp spurs are believed to reflect its *tuah* (fortune or potential). The target domain is the trajectory of a person’s life, which is depicted as fundamentally unknowable.

The underlying conceptual metaphor may be expressed as HUMAN FATE IS INHERENTLY UNKNOWABLE, juxtaposed with the notion that certain outcomes in nature (e.g., in animal contests) may be discerned through external signs. The entailment of this metaphor encourages epistemic humility: external appearances, pedigree, or early promise are not reliable predictors of an individual’s ultimate success or failure. Within the cultural context, the proverb aligns with the broader Malay-Islamic worldview, particularly the belief expressed in the maxim *manusia merancang, Tuhan menentukan* (“man plans, God decides”).

Culturally, the saying functions as both a moral and social leveller. It discourages premature judgement and supports an ethos of modesty and restraint. The unpredictable nature of human fate emphasised in this expression echoes a Malay cultural tendency to avoid hubris and to remain open to life’s uncertainties. It is often invoked in conversations surrounding marriage, career, or social standing—contexts in which outcomes are uncertain despite apparent indicators.

From a cognitive perspective, the proverb establishes a dual epistemological framework: while empirical observation may provide insights into certain domains (e.g., animal behaviour or performance), human life is governed by a higher, inscrutable order. This conceptual separation may encourage Malay speakers to mentally differentiate between what can be evaluated and what must be left to fate, thus reinforcing a worldview that balances reason with metaphysical acceptance.

Linguistically, the expression is memorable due to its rhythmic parallelism and binary structure (*tuah ayam... tuah manusia*). It contrasts the visible with the invisible, the knowable with the unknowable. Its enduring presence in colloquial speech functions as a subtle but powerful reminder of the limitations of human foresight.

From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, the continued use of this proverb may shape habitual thought patterns among Malay speakers, fostering a cultural disposition towards patience, non-judgement, and philosophical detachment. The metaphor renders the abstract notion of destiny cognitively accessible by grounding it in concrete, familiar imagery—the legs of a rooster—while simultaneously affirming the divine mystery of human life.

Ultimately, the proverb reflects a worldview that integrates empirical observation with theological and cultural understandings of fate. It gently cautions against presumption while inviting a reflective stance on the uncertainties of human existence.

Setinggi-tinggi terbang bangau, akhirnya hinggap di belakang kerbau juga

"However high the heron soars, it ultimately alights upon the buffalo's back"

This evocative Malay proverb presents a vivid metaphor in which a heron—known for its capacity to fly at great heights—eventually descends to rest upon a buffalo, a humble and familiar domestic animal. The source domain is the heron's flight and return, while the target domain is the human life course, particularly the notion that, regardless of how far one travels or how high one rises, there is an inevitable return to one's origins or inherent nature. The underlying conceptual metaphor may be expressed as LIFE'S ASPIRATIONS ARE FLIGHTS, and INEVITABLE RETURN IS DESCENT TO ONE'S ROOTS.

The entailments of this metaphor emphasise humility and rootedness: no matter the heights one attains, one should remain conscious of their beginnings, as life often compels a return to foundational relationships or values. Culturally, the saying reflects the Malay emphasis on *asal usul* (origin) and the cyclical nature of life. It is often invoked in reference to individuals who, after achieving material success elsewhere, return to their home communities or find themselves reliant once more on familial support.

The imagery of the heron landing on a buffalo also conveys a symbolic reconciliation between the lofty and the grounded: a creature of the skies finds rest on an earthbound beast, illustrating the confluence of ambition with terrestrial reality. In this context, the proverb functions as a gentle admonition against arrogance and a reminder of the social and moral importance of maintaining ties to one's roots. It suggests that the pursuit of success should be tempered by an awareness of continuity and connection to origin.

From a cognitive perspective, the metaphor maps the abstract concept of return or inevitability onto a spatial and vertical schema—ascending and descending—thereby offering an intuitive framework through which to understand the trajectories of human life. Linguistically, the proverb's balanced structure and rhythmic alliteration enhance its memorability and pedagogical effectiveness, making it a frequent refrain in situations where someone is perceived to be overreaching or neglecting their roots.

Viewed through the Sapir-Whorf lens, such language may cultivate in Malay speakers a worldview oriented towards cyclical temporality and reintegration. Rather than promoting a linear model of success culminating in departure or escape, the proverb privileges a perspective in which life ultimately returns to the social and moral space from which it began. It underscores the belief that true fulfilment lies not in permanent transcendence, but in honouring one's origin even in the pursuit of progress.

In essence, this proverb encapsulates a cultural ethic that values ambition moderated by humility, and progress anchored in memory. It conveys that while soaring is admirable, it is the ability to return—to family, community, or inner self—that defines one's character.

Synthesis

The metaphorical representations of fate and life's trajectory in Malay proverbs articulate a sophisticated cultural worldview—one that integrates elements of fatalism, moral instruction, and the promotion of perseverance. The preceding examples reveal several recurring conceptual metaphors, including:

- LIFE IS WEATHER (encompassing both clear skies and storms)
- LUCK IS BUOYANCY

- DESTINY IS AN UNKNOWABLE DEPTH (contrasted with the apparent predictability of animal fate) AMBITION/FATE IS CYCLICAL (suggesting that ascent is inevitably followed by descent)

Through these metaphorical schemas, Malay proverbial wisdom encapsulates key cultural values. Acceptance of impermanence, as expressed in *langit tidak selalunya cerah* (“the sky is not always clear”), cultivates patience and hope in the face of adversity. The dichotomy of the floating coconut husk versus the sinking stone evokes humility and equanimity, warning against pride in success or despair in failure, as one’s fortune is perceived to be determined by immutable forces.

The juxtaposition of the rooster’s visible traits and the inscrutability of human destiny reinforces the notion that human outcomes cannot be fully anticipated—a worldview consistent with the Malay-Islamic conception of *takdir* (divine decree). The heron, despite soaring to great heights, ultimately perches on the buffalo, symbolising the return to one’s origins and the enduring importance of community and familial grounding. Together, these proverbs act as cognitive anchors, guiding individuals to navigate life’s unpredictability with composure and moral clarity.

From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, such metaphorical constructions may influence the cognitive orientation of Malay speakers, fostering a temperament characterised by acceptance rather than complacency. Repeated linguistic reference to natural phenomena—tides, weather, and vertical motion—normalises the fluctuations of fortune and frames success and adversity as part of an expected life cycle.

Crucially, these expressions are tempered by proverbs that emphasise individual effort and causality—such as “*tanam lalang, takkan dapat padi*” (“if you sow weeds, you will not harvest rice”)—thus maintaining a cultural balance between destiny and agency. This dynamic interplay of fate and endeavour reflects a worldview that values both *ikhtiar* (deliberate effort) and *tawakkal* (trust in divine providence).

In conclusion, the metaphors of fate in Malay proverbs construct a cultural identity that is spiritually grounded, ethically aware, and emotionally resilient. They present life as both a journey chosen and a path bestowed, calling upon the individual to persevere while recognising that the broader arc of life may lie beyond one’s control.

VI. CONCLUSION

Employing the frameworks of Cognitive Metaphor Theory and the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, this study has explored the metaphorical depth and cultural embeddedness of traditional Malay *peribahasa*. Organised around eight core thematic domains—Family and Kinship; Caution and Danger; Social Harmony and Cooperation; Wisdom and Experience; Human Emotions and Relationships; Moral Conduct and Character; Nature and Environment; and Fate and Life Journey—the analysis has demonstrated that these proverbs are far more than rhetorical embellishments or stylistic devices. Rather, they are deeply rooted cognitive instruments that articulate and perpetuate the worldview of the Malay people.

A recurring pattern across themes is the use of vivid metaphorical mappings from natural, physical, and material domains to render abstract social concepts and emotional states intelligible. Familial bonds are conceptualised as water—fluid and indivisible; caution is expressed through images of concealed crocodiles and precariously balanced eggs; social cohesion is modelled on the mutual reinforcement of bamboo and riverbanks; and wisdom is acquired incrementally, like distance travelled or threads slowly woven into cloth. Moral integrity is conveyed through analogies involving animals or the straightness of the human hand, while emotional experiences are articulated via somatic imagery centred on the *hati* (heart/liver).

This study affirms that Malay *peribahasa* encapsulate not only linguistic structures but also ethical norms, emotional registers, and relational expectations, and that metaphor functions as a principal conduit for the intergenerational transmission of these cultural values. The metaphors examined are not arbitrary or idiosyncratic; rather, they are grounded in shared cultural knowledge and environmental familiarity—with imagery drawn from rain, rice, rivers, animals, domestic crafts, and agricultural life—rendering them accessible, resonant, and enduring. Language, therefore, does not merely reflect thought but actively shapes it. In this regard, the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis receives cautious support, insofar as the recurrent metaphors identified here

likely influence the cognitive patterns, behavioural expectations, and perceptual frameworks of Malay speakers in everyday life.

Moreover, these metaphorical expressions are far from static. They operate dynamically in moral instruction, persuasion, conversation, and education. They serve as concise cognitive models through which speakers interpret novel situations, formulate judgements, and offer counsel. In doing so, they contribute to a shared cultural logic and a collective identity that privileges humility, responsibility, interdependence, and patience.

Ultimately, *peribahasa* are repositories of cultural memory and values, where complex worldviews are distilled into succinct and almost-poetic forms. Their continued usage in contemporary discourse attests to their lasting significance—not merely as linguistic artefacts but as living expressions of Malay cultural consciousness. As demonstrated in this study, the metaphorical fabric of Malay *peribahasa* is tightly interwoven with the threads of collective experience and identity. Each proverb, in its own way, *melukis identiti*—“paints the identity”—of its speakers.

Future research may consider how these metaphorical frameworks evolve across regional varieties or adapt within digital and diasporic Malay-speaking contexts, particularly in multilingual environments. Nevertheless, even as societies modernise and linguistic practices shift, *peribahasa* continue to function as a vital nexus between language, cognition, and the cultural soul.

Acknowledgements

Given that the authors are non-native English speakers, artificial intelligence has been employed to enhance the language of this paper.

REFERENCES

- [1] Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.
- [2] Evans, N., & Levinson, S. C. (2009). The myth of language universals: Language diversity and its importance for cognitive science. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 32(5), 429–448. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X0999094X>
- [3] Huszka, B. (2020). Metaphors of Anger in Contemporary Bahasa Indonesia: A Preliminary Study. *LingPoet: Journal of Linguistics and Literary Research*, 1(1), 26–30.
- [4] Huszka, B., Stark, A., & Aini, I. (2024). Linguistic sustainability: Challenges and strategies of preserving minority and indigenous languages – The case of Indonesia. *International Journal of Arts and Social Science*, 7(6), 147–160.
- [5] Andaya, L. Y. (2001). The Search for the “Origins” of Melayu. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 32(3), 315–330. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463401000182>
- [6] Bellwood, P. (2007). *Prehistory of the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago* (Rev. ed.). ANU E Press.
- [7] Hill, C., Soares, P., Mormina, M., Macaulay, V., Meehan, W., et al. (2006). Phylogeography and ethnogenesis of aboriginal Southeast Asians. *Molecular Biology and Evolution*, 23(12), 2480–2491. <https://doi.org/10.1093/molbev/msl124>
- [8] Hatin, W. I., Nur-Shafawati, A. R., Zahri, M.-K., Xu, S., Jin, L., Tan, S.-G., & Zilfalil, B. A. (2011). Population genetic structure of Peninsular Malaysia Malay sub-ethnic groups. *PLoS ONE*, 6(4), e18312. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0018312>
- [9] Milner, A. (2008). *The Malays*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- [10] Federal Constitution of Malaysia. (1957). Article 160 (definition of “Malay”) (Reprint 2007). Government of Malaysia.
- [11] Omar, A. H. (2004). Languages and Literature. In *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia* (Vol. 9, pp. 32–33). Kuala Lumpur: Archipelago Press.
- [12] Huszka, B., Yusof, N., Mohiel-Din Ahmed, M., & Tay, K. J. (2021). English, Arabic, and Chinese loanwords in Brunei Malay. *LingPoet: Journal of Linguistics and Literary Research*, 2(3), 1–12.

-
- [13] King, V. T. (1989). What's in a name? Ethnicity and the problems it poses for anthropologists. *Sarawak Museum Journal*, 40(61, Special Issue 4), 235–245.
- [14] Whorf, B. L. (1956). *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf* (J. B. Carroll, Ed.). MIT Press.
- [15] Lucy, J. A. (1992). *Language Diversity and Thought: A Reformulation of the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis*. Cambridge University Press.
- [16] Huszka, B., Stark, A., Aini, I., & Annisa, R. I. (2024). Maknametafora pada pembelajaran bahasa dan budaya Indonesia di kelas BIPA. *Indonesian Language Education and Literature*, 9(2), 439–459. <https://doi.org/10.24235/ileal.v9i2.16646>
- [17] Huszka, B., Stark, A., Ya'kub, H. Z. H., Abd Rahman, N. E. R. H., & Annisa, R. I. (2025). Temporal metaphors as a linguistic phenomenon: Conceptual frameworks across different languages. *LingPoet: Journal of Linguistics and Literary Research*, 6(1), 31–43. <https://doi.org/10.26594/lingpoet.v6i1>.
- [18] Lucy, J. A. (1992). *Grammatical Categories and Cognition: A Case Study of the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis*. Cambridge University Press.
- [19] Lucy, J. A. (1997). Linguistic relativity. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 26, 291–312. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.26.1.291>
- [20] Pullum, G. K. (1991). *The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax and Other Irreverent Essays on the Study of Language*. University of Chicago Press.
- [21] Huszka, B., & Stark, A. (2013). Zur (Un-)Übersetzbarkeit religiöser Texte. *Allemania: Journal of German Language Education*, 3(1), 1–9.
- [22] Berlin, B., & Kay, P. (1969). *Basic colour terms: Their universality and evolution*. University of California Press.
- [23] Levinson, S. C. (2003). *Space in language and cognition: Explorations in cognitive diversity*. Cambridge University Press.
- [24] Boroditsky, L. (2001). Does language shape thought? Mandarin and English speakers' conceptions of time. *Cognitive Psychology*, 43, 1–22.
- [25] Pinker, S. (1994). *The language instinct: How the mind creates language*. William Morrow and Company.
- [26] Chomsky, N. (2006). *Language and mind* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- [27] Evans, N., & Levinson, S. C. (2009). The myth of language universals: Language diversity and its importance for cognitive science. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 32(5), 429–448. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X0999094X>
- [28] Kövecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: A practical introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- [29] Aristotle. (n.d.). *Poetics* (I. Bywater, Trans.). In J. Barnes (Ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, vol. 2. Princeton University Press.
- [30] Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1999). *Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought*. Basic Books.
- [31] Lakoff, G. (1993). The contemporary theory of metaphor. In A. Ortony (Ed.), *Metaphor and thought* (2nd ed., pp. 202–251). Cambridge University Press.
- [32] Lakoff, G., & Turner, M. (1989). *More than cool reason: A field guide to poetic metaphor*. University of Chicago Press.
- [33] Kövecses, Z. (2005). *Metaphor in culture: Universality and variation*. Cambridge University Press.
- [34] Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2002). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. Basic Books.