



**UPM**  
UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**PUTRA**  
PERTANIAN UNTUK RAKYAT



**MICOLLAC**

**THE 13TH MALAYSIA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON LANGUAGES, LITERATURES AND CULTURES**

# **MICOLLAC 2025**

## **PROCEEDINGS**

**"BRIDGING WORDS AND WORLDS:  
DYNAMIC DIALOGUES IN LANGUAGES,  
LITERATURES AND CULTURES"**



<https://micollac.upm.edu.my>



**26 – 28 AUGUST 2025**



**ST. GILES WEMBLEY PENANG, GEORGE TOWN**

Supported by



penang  
convention &  
exhibition  
bureau



Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication,  
Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400, Serdang,  
Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia



[micollac.upm.edu.my](https://micollac.upm.edu.my)



[micollac](#)



+603 9769 8778



[micollac\\_secreteriat@upm.edu.my](mailto:micollac_secreteriat@upm.edu.my)



**THE 13TH MALAYSIA  
INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE ON LANGUAGES,  
LITERATURES AND CULTURES  
(MICOLLAC 2025)  
PROCEEDINGS**

**26<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> August 2025  
St. Giles Wembley Penang,  
Georgetown, Malaysia**

**Editors:  
Arbaayah Ali Termizi  
Nurul Atiqah Amran**

# EDITORIAL BOARD

**EDITORS:**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Arbaayah Ali Termizi  
Dr. Nurul Atiqah Amran

**EDITORIAL ASSISTANT**

Miss 'Adilatul 'Azizah Tajul Ariffin

**PUBLISHER:**

Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication  
Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor.  
Email: micollacproceedings@gmail.com  
Contact No.: 03-97698778

**The 13<sup>th</sup> Malaysia International Conference on Languages, Literatures and Cultures (MICOLLAC 2025) Proceedings**

This proceeding will be published every 2 years, following the trend of the said conference.

Copyright © Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication

**e-ISSN: 3009-0423**

# LIST OF CONTENTS

	Page
<b>Aleeya Hana Mohd Fadhlán, Naqib Azfar Azmi</b> Linguistic Expressions of Fraud in the Advertisements of Malaysian Cyber Scammers	1 - 5
<b>Farhana Bakar, Vijay Kumar</b> Supporting L2 Doctoral Students in Thesis Writing and Publishing: The Role of Supervisors in Language Socialisation	6 - 9
<b>Grecilda Augustine Tinggie, Lisbeth Sinan Lendik</b> A Preliminary Study on Epithets Among Remun Speech Community	10 - 13
<b>Huang Mingcheng, Zalina Mohd Kasim, Afida Mohamad Ali</b> Guilty or Not Guilty Media Representations of the US-China Tariff War: A Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis	14 - 17
<b>Lim Hui Woan, Yap Ngee Thai</b> English Grammatical Understanding in Malaysian Children: Are Girls More Superior than Boys?	18 - 22
<b>Liu, Chengjin</b> Acquisition and Pragmatic Functions of High Rising Terminals by Mandarin-Speaking Learners of Australian English	23 - 27
<b>Michal Schwarz</b> Language, Religion, and Environment in Mainland Asia	28 - 31
<b>Phiphawin Suphawatt Srikrai, Chirarat Khongsat</b> Sentiment Analysis of Thai Hotel Customers' English Language Reviews	32 - 36
<b>Radika Subramaniam</b> Structural and Functional Categories of Lexical Bundles in L2 Learners' Academic Writing	37 - 40
<b>Yusmahariz Ashraf Yusmaherizam, Wan Irham Ishak, Ismie Roha Mohamed Jais</b> Unlocking Malaysia's Banking English: A Keyword Analysis Study for ESP Teaching and Learning	41 - 45

<b>Zhou Chunxiang, Zalina Mohd Kasim, Halis Azhan Mohd Hanafiah</b> Conceptual Metaphor and Framing Analysis of Climate Change Discourse in Chinese News Articles	46 - 49
<b>Ankita Priyadarshini, Mohammed Akhtar Jamal Khan</b> Timeless Teachings for a Sustainable Environment: Ecological Ethics in <i>Thirukkural</i>	50 - 53
<b>Chuo Hui San</b> The Price of His Freedom: Black Female Suffering in <i>Django Unchained</i> (2012)	54 - 57
<b>Li He, Mohammad Ewan Awang, Zainor Izat Zainal</b> Interrogating Biopower and Climate Migration in Paolo Bacigalupi's <i>The</i> <i>Water Knife</i>	58 - 61
<b>Minu Sono</b> Echoes of Identity: The Role of Nyokum in Preserving Nyishi Culture of Arunachal Pradesh	62 - 65
<b>Nigamananda Das</b> Angami Naga Ecotopia in Easterine Kire's Fiction	66 - 69
<b>Siti Hawa Muhamad</b> Sacred Spaces in Zarqa Nawaz's <i>Laughing All The Way to the Mosque</i>	70 - 73
<b>Subhashis Banaerjee, Talisenla Imsong, Tiajungla Longchar</b> Sustaining Culture, Sustaining Nature: An Eco-Critical Lens on Naga Food Traditions in Literature	74 - 76
<b>Tage Monju</b> The Psychosocial Experiences of Tattooed Apatani Women in Arunachal Pradesh, India	77 - 80
<b>Wyatt, S</b> In Pursuit of "Modernity": Hongkongese Rejection of a Chinese Literary Canon	81 - 84
<b>Zoe Sim Ning</b> Television as Cultural Catalyst: An Examination of <i>The Golden Girls'</i> Sociocultural Impact	85 - 88
Author's Biodata	89 - 92
Acknowledgement	93 - 94

# PREFACE

The current compilation of MICOLLAC2025 conference proceedings showcases a culmination of diverse scholarship and dynamic intellectual exchange under the unifying theme, "Bridging Words and Worlds: Dynamic Dialogues in Language, Literature & Culture." This collection represents a vital snapshot of contemporary research and thought, exploring how language, literature and culture serve not merely as systems of communication, but as powerful conduits connecting disparate fields of human experience.

The research contained within these pages addresses the intricate relationships between language and our lived realities. Contributions on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) highlight the practical applications of language for professional and academic growth. In turn, articles on social media and speech acts examine the evolving nature of communication in the digital age, revealing new dynamics in our daily interactions.

Beyond its practical use, language is a cornerstone of identity and culture. Papers on identity and gender explore how linguistic choices both reflect and shape personal and group affiliations, while research on the broader social and cultural impact of language and literature reveals their role in shaping societal norms and values.

This volume also delves into the rich critical and creative dimensions of language. Studies on literature, metaphor, and nature offer new ways of interpreting texts and understanding our relationship with the environment. Finally, the focus on academic writing grounds these theoretical discussions, providing insights into the very craft of scholarly inquiry itself.

This collection would not be possible without the profound insights and dedication of all our contributors and reviewers. We extend our sincerest gratitude to everyone who participated in MICOLLAC2025, creating a vibrant space for intellectual dialogue. It is our hope that these proceedings will serve as a valuable resource and an inspiration for future research, continuing the conversation on how we can use words to bridge our many worlds.

Arbaayah Ali Termizi  
Nurul Atiqah Amran

Editors  
MICOLLAC 2025 Proceedings

## LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS OF FRAUD IN THE ADVERTISEMENTS OF MALAYSIAN CYBER SCAMMERS

**Aleeya Hana Mohd Fadhlan\* and Naqib Azfar Azmi**

*International Islamic University Malaysia, 53100 Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Malaysia.*

E-mail: aleeyahnmf@gmail.com

\*Corresponding author

### ABSTRACT

In the realm of digital communications, fraudulent advertisements on social media have grown increasingly sophisticated, utilizing persuasive imagery, fabricated endorsements, and deceptive narratives to manipulate user perception and enable exploitation. In Malaysia, scammers strategically manipulated language to create a sense of urgency, fear, and trust, ultimately coercing individuals into disclosing personal information and money. This study examined the persuasive discourse strategies employed in scam advertisements across digital communication platforms and applied discourse analysis insights to enhance public awareness and fraud prevention efforts. A total of 130 scam advertisements from Facebook, Telegram, and TikTok, spanning from 2020 to 2025, were analyzed using AntConc, VADER, and Natural Language Processing (NLP) to identify linguistic patterns and sentiment. The findings revealed that scammers leveraged Aristotle's rhetorical appeals which are pathos to evoke emotions, logos to create a false sense of logic through fabricated statistics, and ethos to establish credibility via false endorsements. This strategic use of rhetorical appeals underscored how scammers carefully crafted persuasive narratives to manipulate and deceive their targets, highlighting the urgent need for heightened public awareness to recognize and resist such tactics. This study confirmed the effectiveness of linguistic analysis in detecting scam strategies. Future research should incorporate Artificial Intelligence (AI) for more advanced detection, further strengthening fraud prevention and public awareness.

### KEYWORDS

scam advertisements; social media fraud; persuasive language; linguistics analysis; sentiment analysis

### ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*

Received: 31 July 2025

Accepted: 5 August 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

Online scam advertisements have become increasingly common in Malaysia, especially with the widespread use of social media. Platforms such as Facebook, Telegram, and TikTok are frequently used to spread fraudulent content aimed at vulnerable individuals (Ahmad et al., 2022). These scams often rely on persuasive and emotionally charged language that creates a false sense of urgency or trust (Wilson & Timmons, 2019).

Although many studies have examined scams from technological or psychological perspectives, the role of language in constructing these deceptive messages has not received the same level of attention (Fei et al., 2023). Language shapes how people interpret and respond to information. Scam texts are often written to sound trustworthy by imitating sincerity, authority, or logic (Chiluwa & Anurudu, 2020).

A rhetorical perspective provides a useful way of analysing how language functions in scam messages. Aristotle's concept of rhetorical appeals, which includes ethos, pathos and logos, helps explain how scammers influence behaviour through credibility, emotion and logic (Perloff, 2016). Phrases that suggest professional status reflect ethos. Emotional pleas represent pathos. Statistical claims are often used to simulate logos (Hamid et al., 2023).

In the Malaysian context, scammers often blend Bahasa Malaysia and English, sometimes including religious expressions to align with cultural values (Aziz et al., 2023). This paper explores how rhetorical strategies are used in scam advertisements to shape perception and influence decision-making.

## RELATED LITERATURE

Cyber scam research often focuses on financial fraud, technological breaches, or psychological vulnerability (Shah & Chudasama, 2021), with less emphasis on the linguistic role. Language shapes how scams influence perception and decision-making (Humă, 2023). However, studies on linguistic manipulation in scams remain limited.

Aristotle's rhetorical appeals, such as ethos, pathos, and logos, are widely used in political speeches and advertising to understand persuasion (Perloff, 2016). Their application in scam messages is less explored. Male et al. (2013) noted that language in scams often uses friendly tones to mask manipulation, yet rhetorical analysis in this context is rare.

In Malaysia, scammers blend culturally resonant terms such as "amanah" and "rezeki" to enhance persuasive impact (Aziz et al., 2023). Some studies also highlight the mix of formal and informal tones in scams (Tan et al., 2017), though few consider the role of bilingualism or religious references.

While tools like AntConc and VADER have been used for analyzing scam texts (Zhao et al., 2021), integrating these tools with rhetorical theory is still underexplored. This study aims to bridge this gap by combining linguistic analysis with sentiment and corpus linguistics to study scam language in both Bahasa Malaysia and English.

## METHODS

This qualitative study analyzed 130 scam advertisements in Bahasa Malaysia and English from Facebook, Telegram, and TikTok, using purposive sampling (Ahmad et al., 2022). The focus was on texts containing clear signs of fraud, such as requests for money or fake recruitment

offers. The sample included four scam types which includes job, donation, investment, and online shopping scams, as outlined by Wilson et al. (2024).

OCR was used to transcribe scam messages in image format, which were then cleaned and standardized using ChatGPT to correct grammar and spelling. The transcriptions were manually reviewed for accuracy. Each advertisement was categorized by language, platform, and scam type. Translations of Bahasa Malaysia texts to English were done to maintain consistency, as suggested by Aziz et al. (2023).

AntConc's KWIC function was employed for keyword analysis, enabling the identification of frequent lexical patterns in the texts (Male et al., 2013). For sentiment analysis, the VADER tool in Python was utilized, a tool well-suited for analyzing short, informal texts commonly found in digital fraud research (Zhao et al., 2021).

A rule-based NLP method was applied to detect rhetorical strategies, specifically identifying keywords associated with ethos, pathos, and logos (Perloff, 2016). These keyword sets were generated using ChatGPT and refined to ensure they were contextually appropriate, following the approach of Hamid et al. (2023).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed that emotional appeal which is pathos was the dominant strategy, especially in donation scams. Terms like "urgent", "sakit", and "tolong" stirred sympathy, shaping the perception of urgency and prompting quick decisions. As noted by Thompson and Smith (2019), emotional appeals push victims to act impulsively.

In investment scams, terms such as "guaranteed return" and "low risk" reflected logos, presenting a false sense of logic. This lowered skepticism and encouraged victims to invest without evaluating risks (Hamid et al., 2023).

Job scams used ethos with phrases like "official recruiter" and "no experience needed", establishing the scammer's credibility. This created a false sense of trust, leading victims to act without verification (Chiluwa & Anurudu, 2020).

Sentiment analysis showed that positive language like "congrats" and "free gift" shaped perception by making the scam seem rewarding. Humă (2023) argues that such positive tones lower suspicion, encouraging engagement without doubt.

The NLP analysis identified recurring keywords associated with ethos ("trusted"), pathos ("urgent"), and logos ("guaranteed"). These rhetorical appeals shaped perceptions of the scam as credible and logical, influencing victims to accept the message without questioning it (Perloff, 2016).

Cultural adaptation was evident in Malay-language scams, where religious terms like "infaq" and "rezeki" were used to align the scam with moral values, influencing decision-making through perceived virtue (Aziz et al., 2023).

Ultimately, the presence of ethos, pathos, and logos across scam types demonstrates how rhetorical strategies shape the way victims interpret messages and make decisions. Presenting messages as urgent, credible, or logically sound influences perception in ways that lower critical thinking and guide behaviour toward compliance. Connecting these insights to public awareness and fraud prevention efforts provides a practical pathway for reducing scam vulnerability. This addresses the study's objective and reinforces the value of discourse analysis as both an academic and preventive tool in combating fraudulent communication.

## CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that language is a central tool used by scammers to manipulate trust, emotion, and logic. By analysing rhetorical strategies such as ethos, pathos, and logos, this research has uncovered how scam messages are carefully crafted to fit cultural and linguistic contexts, particularly in bilingual Malaysian settings.

The integration of AntConc, VADER, and rule-based NLP allowed for both detailed textual analysis and emotional pattern recognition, reinforcing the value of combining linguistics and computational methods. These findings contribute to existing literature by filling a gap in scam discourse analysis and highlighting language as a key weapon in digital fraud.

The practical insights from this study can inform the development of scam-detection systems, particularly those designed to flag emotional or rhetorical manipulation. Public education campaigns should not only focus on identifying suspicious links, but also teach individuals how to recognise manipulative language patterns.

Future research could expand this study by incorporating scams in multiple languages, real-time scam data, or audience-based experiments. Understanding how language manipulates perception is essential not only for improving fraud prevention but also for restoring public trust in online communication.

## REFERENCES

- Ahmed, A. (2017). Religious persuasion and manipulation in online messages. *Journal of Language and Religion*, 34(2), 101–115.
- Ahmad, A., Nor, F. M., & Salleh, H. (2022). COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of online fraud in Malaysia. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(7), 812–827.
- Aziz, A. A., Karim, N. F. A., & Rahman, H. A. (2023). Linguistic cues of deception in Malaysian online investment scams. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 23(1), 52–67.
- Chiluwa, I., & Anurudu, S. (2020). Expressing uncertainty through modal verbs in advance-fee fraud emails. *Discourse & Society*, 31(5), 485–504.
- Fei, K., Dhot, T., & Raza, M. (2023). Using artificial intelligence to detect online fraud and financial scams. *IEEE Engineering Management Review*, 51(2), 29–37.
- Hamid, A. A., Nasir, S. S. M., & Yusof, M. A. (2023). Persuasive discourse in cryptocurrency scam advertisements: A rhetorical analysis. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 13(3), 456–470.
- Humă, B. (2023). Language and manipulation in digital persuasion: A discursive psychological perspective. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 17(2), e12700.
- Male, M., Nartey, M., & Dako-Gyeke, M. (2013). Linguistic expressions in deceptive advertising: A stylistic study. *Journal of Language and Communication*, 10(2), 44–56.

- Mokhsin, M., Ismail, A. Z., & Latiff, M. F. (2018). Language mimicry in online shopping scams targeting Malaysian users. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 10(4), 25–33.
- Perloff, R. M. (2016). *The dynamics of persuasion: Communication and attitudes in the 21st century* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Sari, P., Fakhri, A. R., & Widodo, D. (2024). Process types in persuasive texts among Indonesian students. *LIRE Journal*, 8(1), 14–25.
- Shah, N. K. M., & Chudasama, D. (2021). Cybercrime detection and linguistic analysis: New perspectives. *Journal of Network Security and Data Integrity*, 9(3), 73–89.
- Tan, S. K., Noor, M., & Ling, T. K. (2017). Qualitative analysis of scam narratives and victim testimonials in email frauds. *Cyberpsychology Review*, 5(1), 32–48.
- Thompson, R., & Smith, J. (2019). Emotional pressure in digital marketing: Persuasion or manipulation? *Marketing Review*, 19(3), 215–229.
- Wilson, J., & Timmons, L. (2019). Trust and deception in digital spaces: A discourse approach. *Journal of Digital Discourse*, 4(2), 150–168.
- Zhang, L., Chen, Y., & Duan, C. (2022). Emotion-driven persuasion in social engineering attacks. *Computers & Security*, 118, 102738.
- Zhao, X., Li, J., & Wang, Q. (2021). Sentiment analysis for fraud detection on social media: A VADER-based approach. *Procedia Computer Science*, 189, 398–405.

## **SUPPORTING L2 DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN THESIS WRITING AND PUBLISHING: THE ROLE OF SUPERVISORS IN LANGUAGE SOCIALISATION**

**Farhana Bakar<sup>1\*</sup> and Vijay Kumar<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 81310 UTM Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia.*

<sup>2</sup>*QUEST International University, 30250 Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.*

E-mail: farhanaabubakar@utm.my

### **ABSTRACT**

An increasing number of universities require or encourage doctoral students to publish as part of their graduation criteria. Despite the central role of doctoral supervision in guiding the writing process, little research has been published on how supervisors assist students in writing both their thesis and for publication. We draw on second language socialisation to explore the roles of doctoral supervisors in supporting L2 doctoral students with both thesis writing and journal article publication during candidature. Interviews were conducted with four supervisors from a research-intensive university in Malaysia, and their experiences were analysed and presented as case studies. The findings reveal that the supervisors encounter challenges in assessing doctoral students' academic English proficiency and navigating the complexities of advanced academic writing genres such as academic paragraphs, journal articles, and theses. In terms of language socialisation roles, all supervisors were identified as role models, discussion facilitators, feedback providers, navigators of the peer review process and mentors in the community of practice at both language and social levels. They also provided support for thesis and publication writing through various means, including telling students what to do, and revising students' work. This study offers insights into the strategies employed by supervisors to support L2 doctoral students in thesis and journal publication writing during candidature.

### **KEYWORDS**

doctoral supervision; second language socialization; publishing during candidature; doctoral student; academic discourse socialisation

### **ARTICLE INFO**

*Article history:*

Received: 10 July 2025

Accepted: 29 July 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

Doctoral education is a complex and transformative process, particularly for second language (L2) students who must navigate the dual challenges of advanced academic writing and integration into scholarly communities in a non-native language. In non-English dominant countries like Malaysia, where English is often the medium of academic communication despite not being the primary language, L2 doctoral students face unique linguistic and cultural barriers. These challenges include mastering academic English, adhering to disciplinary writing conventions, and gaining familiarity with the publishing process, all of which are critical for successful doctoral completion and academic career development. Supervisors play a crucial role in facilitating this process, serving as both linguistic and social guides to help students overcome these hurdles. This study adopts Duff's (2007) second language socialisation (L2S) framework to explore how supervisors in a Malaysian university support L2 doctoral students in their thesis and publication writing. By focusing on a non-English dominant context, this research addresses a gap in the literature, as much of the existing work on L2S has been conducted in English-dominant settings.

The L2S framework posits that language learning is not solely a linguistic process but also a social one, where novices are enculturated into discourse communities through interactions with experts. For L2 doctoral students, supervisors act as these experts, guiding students through the norms, practices, and expectations of academic writing and publishing. This study investigates the specific strategies supervisors employ, the challenges they encounter, and the implications of their roles in fostering students' academic success. By examining these dynamics in a Malaysian context, the research offers unique insights into the intersection of linguistic and social support in doctoral education.

## RELATED LITERATURE

The challenges faced by L2 doctoral students in academic writing and publishing are well-documented. Linguistic barriers, such as limited proficiency in academic English, often hinder students' ability to articulate complex ideas and meet the expectations of academic discourse (Kwan, 2016). Additionally, many L2 students lack experience with the publishing process, including understanding journal submission requirements and responding to peer reviews (Ma, 2020). These challenges are compounded in non-English dominant contexts, where students may have limited exposure to academic English outside the university setting.

Supervisors play a critical role in addressing these challenges, acting as mentors who guide students through both linguistic and social dimensions of academic writing. According to Duff's (2007) L2S framework, socialisation into academic discourse communities involves learning the language, norms, and practices of a discipline through interactions with more experienced members, such as supervisors. Feedback is a central component of this process, as it helps students refine their writing and align with disciplinary expectations (Anderson, 2020). However, the literature also highlights gaps in supervisory support, particularly in non-English dominant contexts, where supervisors may lack training in addressing L2-specific challenges (Shamsi & Osam, 2022).

While prior studies have explored L2 doctoral students' experiences, fewer have focused on supervisors' perspectives, particularly in non-English dominant settings. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how supervisors in Malaysia navigate the complexities of supporting

L2 students' writing, offering insights into effective supervisory practices and their alignment with L2S principles.

## **METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative multiple case study design to explore the experiences of four supervisors at a research-intensive Malaysian university. The participants, referred to pseudonymously as Hazel, Alison, Serena, and Dan, were selected based on their experience supervising L2 doctoral students in various disciplines. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for in-depth exploration of supervisors' experiences, strategies, and challenges. Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and was conducted in English, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

The data analysis followed a thematic approach, as outlined by King and Horrocks (2010). Transcripts were coded inductively to identify recurring themes related to supervisors' roles, challenges, and strategies. The L2S framework guided the categorization of findings, with a focus on linguistic and social support. To ensure validity, member checking was conducted, where participants reviewed the findings to confirm accuracy. The use of multiple cases allowed for a comparative analysis, highlighting both commonalities and differences in supervisory practices.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis revealed several key challenges faced by supervisors in supporting L2 doctoral students' writing. The most prominent challenge was students' limited proficiency in academic English, which manifested in frequent grammatical errors, awkward phrasing, and difficulty expressing complex ideas. Supervisors also noted students' lack of familiarity with academic publishing, including misunderstandings about journal selection, submission processes, and peer review expectations. In some cases, students submitted work to predatory journals without consulting their supervisors, leading to ethical and quality concerns.

To address these challenges, supervisors employed a range of strategies aligned with L2S principles. Providing detailed feedback was a cornerstone of their approach. For example, Hazel emphasized breaking down feedback into manageable parts, focusing on specific linguistic issues like sentence structure while also addressing broader rhetorical concerns. Alison, on the other hand, used a more holistic approach, encouraging students to revise entire sections of their work to align with disciplinary norms. Both supervisors tailored their feedback to the context of thesis versus publication writing, recognizing the distinct demands of each.

Modelling academic writing was another key strategy. Serena frequently shared examples of successful theses and published articles with her students, highlighting structure, style, and argumentation techniques. This approach helped students visualize the expectations of academic writing and adapt their work accordingly. Dan complemented this strategy by encouraging students to engage in peer review exercises, where they critiqued each other's drafts under his guidance. This not only improved their writing but also socialized them into the collaborative nature of academic publishing.

Supervisors also set realistic writing goals to maintain student motivation. Hazel and Alison noted that L2 students often felt overwhelmed by the scope of doctoral writing, so they broke tasks into smaller milestones, such as drafting a single chapter or submitting a conference

abstract. Serena and Dan adopted a more consistent approach, applying similar strategies for both thesis and publication writing to build students' confidence over time.

These strategies fostered students' integration into academic discourse communities, aligning with the L2S framework. By providing linguistic support, such as feedback on grammar and style, and social support, such as guidance on publishing norms, supervisors helped students navigate the complex terrain of doctoral writing. The findings also revealed variations in supervisory approaches, with Hazel and Alison adapting their strategies based on the writing task, while Serena and Dan maintained consistency across contexts. These differences highlight the importance of flexibility in supervisory practices to meet diverse student needs.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical role of supervisors in facilitating L2 doctoral students' thesis and publication writing in a non-English dominant context. Through strategies such as detailed feedback, modelling, goal-setting, and peer review guidance, supervisors address both linguistic and social challenges, aligning with the principles of second language socialization. The findings contribute to the L2S literature by offering insights into supervisory practices in a Malaysian university, a context that has been underexplored. The study also has practical implications for doctoral education, suggesting that supervisors in similar settings may benefit from training in L2-specific writing support and publishing mentorship.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, T. (2020). The socialisation of L2 doctoral students through written feedback. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 20(2), 134–149.
- Duff, P. A. (2007). Second language socialisation as sociocultural theory: Insights and issues. *Language teaching*, 40(4), 309–319.
- King, N., & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in Qualitative Research*. London, England: SAGE Publishers.
- Kwan, B. S. C. (2010). An investigation of instruction in research publishing offered in doctoral programs: The Hong Kong case. *Higher Education*, 59, 55-68.
- Ma, L. P. F. (2020). Writing in English as an additional language: Challenges encountered by doctoral students. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 40(6), 1176–1190.
- Shamsi, A. F., & Osam, U. V. (2022). Challenges and support in article publication: Perspectives of non-native English-speaking doctoral students in a “Publish or No Degree” context. *Sage Open*, 12(2), 1-15.

## **A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON EPITHETS AMONG REMUN SPEECH COMMUNITY**

**Grecilda Augustine Tinggie\* and Lisbeth Sinan Lendik**

*Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Malaysia.*

E-mail: grecilda@uitm.edu.my

\*Corresponding author

### **ABSTRACT**

Cultural epithets in every ethnic group are commonly used to refer to or address other family members, and they are mainly grounded on the family bond and birth order. Within the indigenous Remun speech community, members of the community are required to address their elders, particularly their parents' siblings, with specific terms of address or epithet. This depends on the hierarchical position of the individual within the family tree. In the context of the present Remun speech community, the younger generation is inclined towards practicing other mainstream languages such as English, Malay, or standard Iban. The preference for other mainstream languages could lead to a language shift. This study presents the epithets learned in the Remun language, which is not frequently applied amongst the younger generation of the Remun community in the present. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the elderly from the speech community focussing on epithets and understanding the usage of each epithet the language has to offer. The major findings indicate that the eldest aunt and uncle in a family tree should be addressed as '*tuai*', and the epithet for the youngest aunt and uncle is '*bunsu*'. These epithets hold significant cultural meaning, particularly in elucidating the hierarchies and identities within the speech community. The insights from this study highlight the potential for future sociolinguistics studies focussing on the Remun linguistic features.

### **KEYWORDS**

Remun; indigenous; epithets; terms of address; speech community

### **ARTICLE INFO**

*Article history:*

Received: 3 July 2025

Accepted: 30 July 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

The Remun language belongs to the Austronesian language stock and is categorised as an endangered indigenous language, having fewer than 10,000 speakers (Eberhard et al., 2025). As a small linguistically isolated group, macro-pressures such as migration, industrialisation and economic change, and urbanisation are affecting the multilingual Remun speakers, which could lead to a language shift (Cullip, 2003). Additionally, the isolect is not being taught in schools, unlike the Iban language (Shin et al., 2019). As a result, the younger generation is not as familiar with the language, especially those who are brought up in the cities. Other mainstream languages, such as Iban, Malay, and English, are being preferred as they serve as a lingua franca for various settings (Cullip, 2003). In particular, Akter (2008) noted that a substantial number of Remun children speak Malay when compared to Remun. When parents no longer pass the language to their children, slowly the language may become obsolete. One of the indicators of such a language shift is the use of foreign languages, such as English and Malay to replace Remun epithets. By documenting the epithets found in the Remun language, this study aims to preserve a part of the Remun language, while exploring the different types of epithets and addressing the usage and cultural significance of these epithets or terms of address.

## RELATED LITERATURE

In preserving cultural values and traditional customs, studies on naming practices reveal important information about the identity construct of a community (Shanmuganathan et al., 2021). These naming practices are important in many indigenous communities in Sarawak, including the Remun. According to Lendik and Chan (2021), epithets usage among community members reflects social structure and relationships, giving insight into how language use intersects with social relationships. Furthermore, different communities with different cultures have their own terms of address to refer to other members within the community (Wardhaugh, 2002; Dewi & Kuntjara, 2023). It is notable that every member of the Remun speech community is also required to address their elders with specific terms of address or epithet. The familial structure of the Remun defines the addressing terms within the family tree.

Despite the cultural traditions and norms of the Remun community, limited research has been done specifically on examining how this indigenous community values epithets or terms of address in their households. Most existing literature with the same focus was solely directed on other ethnic groups worldwide. For instance, previous studies on terms of address within Southeast Asia were done on the Surabayanese (Dewi & Kuntjara, 2023) of Indonesia, the Batak (Eder, 1975) of the Philippines, and the Telugu (Shanmuganathan et al., 2021) of Malaysia. This gap highlights the need to analyse and document the Remun epithets, before these terms are eroded by language shift or cultural transition. As a language that is often linked to a more dominant language such as Iban, the Remun language risked being assimilated (Shin et al., 2019). Consequently, it shed light on the differences between Remun and other closely related languages.

## METHODS

Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews. A total of eight (n=8) participants aged 50 to 90 years old were chosen from the speech community and three interview sessions were conducted. Four male and four female participants were

interviewed. The first interview involved three participants, focusing on listing the traditional terms and understanding the type and usage of each epithet used by the Remun community. In the second interview, which served as a member checking stage, two participants were involved to ensure the accuracy of the preliminary findings from the first interview. The final interview session involved three participants, discussing the hierarchical position of an individual within the Remun household, the perspectives on language use and customs, and how changes are inevitable over time. All the interview sessions were conducted in the homes of the participants in two Remun villages in Serian, Sarawak. Each interview lasted between 40 to 90 minutes and was primarily conducted in the Remun language, with the use of Iban, standard Malay, Sarawak Malay, and English to define certain details. Ethical approval for conducting the study was received from Sarawak Online Research Application System (SORAS), with reference number-(51)JPS/EPU/608-8/2/1 Vol.5.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that the Remun epithets comprise a structured hierarchy of epithets, with six (6) definite tiers. These tiers include '*tuai*', '*tinggi*', '*tengah*', '*muda*', '*biak*', and '*bunsu*'. In general, these epithets explain how a Remun household should address all their uncles and aunts appropriately. One distinctive finding gained from the interviews discovered that the epithet '*muda*' is solely used for male, whereas the other family titles are not gender specific and can be used to address both male and female family members. It is important to note that the use of certain epithets, especially '*muda*' and '*biak*' are not limited to only one person in a family. These titles may be applied repeatedly; this depends on the total number of children in a household. Additionally, it is also crucial to highlight that only the first and last children in the family have the definite epithets '*tuai*' and '*bunsu*' respectively. It is necessary to acknowledge these titles and ensure that they are passed down to the next generation of a Remun household, so that they are aware of the appropriate way to address their elders.

Each of these epithets reflects the traditional and cultural way the speech community refers to uncles and aunts within the extended family, clarifying the birth order of family members. Not only does this form of naming system signify respect towards the elderly, but it is also seen as a way to preserve the familial structures within the Remun indigenous people. This is essential in maintaining family relationships and imparting cultural values to the young ones.

## CONCLUSION

The present study explored the epithets within the Remun community, demonstrating the six definite terms used and their cultural significance. Documenting these epithets contributes to the understanding of the unique Remun linguistic traditions and cultural identity. These epithets hold significant cultural meaning, particularly in elucidating the hierarchies and identities within the speech community. The insights from this study highlight the potential for future sociolinguistics studies focussing on the Remun linguistic features.

## REFERENCES

- Akter, M. Z. (2008). Can We Save the Indigenous Minority Languages? The Case of the Remun Language of Sarawak, Malaysia. *The Asian Scholar*, 5, 1-34. [https://www.asianscholarship.org/asf/ejournal/articles/zahid\\_a.pdf](https://www.asianscholarship.org/asf/ejournal/articles/zahid_a.pdf)
- Cullip, P. F. (2003) Remun language use and maintenance. *Journal of Modern Language*, 15, 60-70. <https://ejournal.um.edu.my/index.php/JML/article/view/3443/1473>
- Dewi, I. M., & Kuntjara, E. (2023). Terms of address preferences and the role of Chineseness of two Chinese Surabayanese. *K Ta Kita*, 11(1), 67–76. <https://doi.org/10.9744/katakita.11.1.67-76>
- Eberhard, D. M., Simons, G. F. Simons, & Fennig, C. D. Fennig (eds.). (2025). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (28th ed.). SIL International. Online version: <https://www.ethnologue.com/>
- Eder, J. F. (1975). Naming Practices and the Definition of Affines among the Batak of the Philippines. *Ethnology*, 14(1), 59–70. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3773207>
- Lendik, L. S., & Chan, M. Y. (2021). A preliminary study on the use of epithets in Kenyah Long Wat. *Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology*, 3(1), 56–75. <https://doi.org/10.47298/jala.v3-i1-a3>
- Shanmuganathan, T., Sinayah, M., Ramalingam, S., & Perumal, T. (2021). Names and naming practices of the Telugu in Malaysia. *Names*, 69(2). <https://doi.org/10.5195/names.2021.2277>
- Shin, C., Gedat, R., & Mis, M. A. (2019). Bahasa Remun di Negeri Sarawak: Kajian Perbandingan dengan Bahasa Iban (A Comparative Study of Remun and Iban in Sarawak). *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 19(4), 203–218. <https://doi.org/10.17576/gema-2019-1904-11>
- Wardhaugh, Ronald. (2002). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

## **GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF THE US-CHINA TARIFF WAR: A CORPUS-BASED CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

**Huang Mingcheng\*, Zalina Mohd Kasim, and Afida Mohamad Ali**

*Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.*

E-mail: gs67926@student.upm.edu.my

\*Corresponding author

### **ABSTRACT**

The U.S.-China tariff war is not only an economic conflict but also a fierce battle for the right to define narratives. As key arenas for shaping public perception and policy legitimacy, the reporting frameworks and discursive strategies of media in both countries profoundly influence domestic and international opinion. This study collected news reports on the tariff war from February 1 to June 1, 2025, by Chinese media (China Daily and South China Morning Post) and American media (The New York Times and The Washington Post). Using Wodak's (2015) Discourse-Historical Approach and Entman's (1993) Framing Theory as the research frameworks, with the aid of the corpus tool Lanxbox, it conducted a systematic analysis of the news reports from both nations. The results show that Chinese media emphasizes national sovereignty, the necessity of countermeasures, and the right to development, primarily depicting the tariff war as a coercive economic strategy by the United States aimed at undermining global trade stability. Meanwhile, American media prioritizes frameworks of market rules, trade deficits, intellectual property protection, and national security, portraying the tariff war as a measure to "protect domestic industries" and "address unfair trade practices." These divergent frames are mainly manifested in nomination and predication discursive strategies. By demonstrating how political and economic conflicts are linguistically constructed, this research contributes to the field of critical discourse analysis and offers insights to promote more objective reporting.

### **KEYWORDS**

US-China; tariff war; media; Discourse-Historical Approach; Framing Theory

### **ARTICLE INFO**

*Article history:*

Received: 4 July 2025

Accepted: 31 July 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

After Donald Trump was re-elected as President of the United States (U.S.) in 2025, his trade policy continued to reflect the “America First” doctrine, launching an unprecedented tariff war on a global scale, particularly targeting China. In this historical context, this paper discusses how the U.S. and China are depicted in this war between February and June 2025 by mainstream media from both nations. This study collects reports on the U.S.-China tariff war from *China Daily* (CD) and *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) in China and *The New York Times* (NYT) and *The Washington Post* (WP) from the U.S. to conduct critical discourse analysis with the aid of corpus linguistics technique and Framing Theory. This study aims to answer the research questions on how Chinese and American mainstream media frame the U.S.-China tariff war, and what discursive strategies are used to construct the dominant news frames employed by each side.

## RELATED LITERATURE

Media discourse plays a pivotal role in shaping public understanding of international conflicts, particularly through the use of framing and discursive strategies. Entman’s (1993) Framing Theory has been widely applied to analyze how media define problems, assign causality, evaluate moral positions, and propose solutions, thereby influencing policy perception and public opinion. In the context of the U.S.-China relations, framing studies have revealed significant differences in how media from both nations construct trade, technology, and security issues (Yang, 2021; Qu et al., 2024; Lams & Xu, 2025). CDA, especially Wodak’s (2015) DHA, provides tools to examine how historical, political, and social contexts shape discursive practices. DHA emphasizes intertextuality and context-sensitive analysis, focusing on strategies such as nomination, predication, and argumentation. Discursive strategies are widely used to construct nation images and legitimization (Yang & Shi, 2021; Cheng, 2023).

In the context of the U.S.-China tariff war in 2025, increasing scholar attention is paid to this global issue from the perspectives of trade policy and impacts (Alessandria et al., 2025; Swenson, 2025), and politics (Dolan, 2025; Kumar, 2025). Therefore, it is a new attempt to examine the 2025 U.S.-China tariff war from the linguistics perspective. This study systematically compared how Chinese and American media discursively construct the same economic conflict.

## METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative-quantitative mixed-methods approach, integrating Wodak’s (2015) DHA and Entman’s (1993) Framing Theory within a corpus-assisted discourse analysis framework. The news articles were collected from CD and SCMP which represent Chinese perspectives, and NYT and WP which stand for American perspectives. The articles cover the period from February 1 to June 1, 2025. A total of 38 articles were retrieved through purposive sampling. The corpus was processed and analyzed using LancsBox.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis results show that China’s media emphasizes China’s national sovereignty, the necessity of countermeasures, and the right to development, primarily depicting the tariff war

as a coercive economic strategy by the US aimed at undermining global trade stability. Meanwhile, American media priorities frameworks of market rules, trade deficits, and national security, portraying the tariff war as a measure to “protect domestic industries” and “address unfair trade practices.”

Based on Entman’s (1993) Framing Theory, this study finds that CD and SCMP firstly frame tariffs as a source of economic harm (for example, rising U.S. consumer prices) and global instability (for example, supply chain disruptions in developing nations). Second, in terms of causal interpretation, China’s media attribute responsibility to U.S. unilateralism and political opportunism, and debunk those claims that China bears the costs. Then, CD and SCMP morally condemn tariffs as harmful to global welfare, and advocate for multilateral cooperation as the solution. The framing reinforces a narrative of America’s destabilization of global trade stability versus China’s protection for national security and stabilizing role, shaping perceptions of tariffs as damaging and unjust.

CD and SCMP mainly employ nomination and predication in the framing process. To be specific, the U.S. is labeled as a “unilateral hegemon” and “reckless protectionist”, while China is framed as a “champion of multilateralism”. In terms of predication, the U.S. is characterized through negative predicates such as “self-defeating”, “economically irrational”, whereas China is ascribed positive traits, including “stabilizing”, “open to dialogue”, “won the battle”.

As for media of the U.S, NYT and WP firstly frame the U.S as facing an economic threat from China’s “unfair trade practices” (for example, subsidies, IP violations, forced tech transfers), justifying tariffs as necessary protection, while China is framed as an aggressive trade actor whose policies (for example, Belt and Road Initiative, steel overproduction) distort global markets. Secondly, in terms of causal interpretation, the U.S. attributes trade deficits and industrial decline to China’s state-driven economic model, while China’s retaliatory tariffs are framed as escalatory rather than defensive. Then, on a moral level, the U.S. is portrayed as upholding fairness, benefiting the American people, and defending domestic industries such as steel and textiles, while China is criticized for exploitative practices like forced labor and overcapacity. Therefore, the recommended treatment is sustained tariffs to pressure China, alongside industry-specific exemptions to balance economic interests.

In terms of discursive strategies, NYT and WP, through nomination strategies, label the U.S. as a “defender of fair trade”, while China is designated as an “unfair trade actor” engaging in “exploitative practices,” reinforcing their respective roles as victim and aggressor. Predication further attributes moral and economic qualities—the U.S. is portrayed as “upholding fairness” and acting out of necessity, whereas China is accused of “forced technology transfers” and “market distortion,” framing its actions as inherently harmful. It is clear that the usage of nomination and predication reinforce binary identities.

## CONCLUSION

This study analyzes how Chinese and U.S. media construct divergent narratives on the tariff war. The results underscores how both sides use framing mechanisms including problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, treatment recommendation and discursive strategies mainly containing nomination and predication to construct antagonistic identities—victim versus aggressor, protector versus disruptor. In short, through these strategies, Chinese and American media thereby legitimizing their policies and delegitimizing the adversaries.

## REFERENCES

- Alessandria, G., Khan, S. Y., Khederlarian, A., Ruhl, K. J., & Steinberg, J. B. (2025). Trade war and peace: US-China trade and tariff risk from 2015–2050. *Journal of International Economics*, 155, 104066.
- Cheng, X. (2023). Inside the echo chamber: Legitimation tactics in the People's Daily commentaries about the China-USA trade dispute. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 22(4), 534-558.
- Dolan, L. R., Kubinec, R. M., Nielson, D. L., & Zhang, J. J. (2025). Tariffs and corporate political activity: a survey experiment on US businesses. *Business and Politics*, 1-22.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58.
- Kumar, C. (2025). Complexity of US-China trade war: associated threats and realities. *International Journal of Services Technology and Management*, 30(1), 58-89.
- Lams, L., & Xu, Y. (2025). Framing in Chinese and American media editorials about the Sino-US trade conflict. In *Meaning Generation in Chinese Official Media Discourse* (pp. 28-49). Routledge.
- Qu, S., Rodriguez, L., & Cork, E. (2024). Media frames and farmers' support for the 2018 US trade dispute with China. *The Journal of International Communication*, 30(1), 43-61.
- Swenson, D. L. (2025). The Effects of US Trade War Tariff Exemptions on US Trade with China and Asia. *Asian Economic Papers*, 24(1), 1-25.
- Wodak, R. (2015). Critical discourse analysis, discourse-historical approach. *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*, 1-14.
- Yang, M & Shi, Y. (2021). Discursive Legitimization of Launching the Sino-US Trade War by the US Government: A Corpus-based Historical Discourse Analysis. *Foreign Languages Research*, (03), 7-13.
- Yang, X. (2021). Competing narratives in the US–China trade war: A comparative framing analysis of mainstream media discourse. *Global Media and China*, 6(2), 174–190.

## ENGLISH GRAMMATICAL UNDERSTANDING IN MALAYSIAN CHILDREN: ARE GIRLS MORE SUPERIOR THAN BOYS?

Lim Hui Woan<sup>1\*</sup> and Yap Ngee Thai<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia.*

<sup>2</sup>*Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.*

E-mail: lim@ukm.edu.my

\*Corresponding author

### ABSTRACT

Acquisition of English grammatical understanding by Malaysian kindergarten children is an underrepresented area and population. Several studies have reported no gender effect in grammatical development; however, whenever a statistically significant gender difference is found, it is always girls outperformed boys. Knowledge about whether girls are more superior than boys in this aspect enables professionals dealing with children e.g. teachers, speech-language therapists (SLTs) to plan effective teaching strategies or speech-language therapy. This novel cross-sectional study recruited 321 Malaysian children (Malay, Chinese and Indian) that were divided into four 12-monthly age groups (3;00-3;11, 4;00-, 5;00- & 6;00-), each with approximately equal number of genders- 155 boys and 166 girls. All children were administered the newly devised Developmental English Grammatical Understanding Test (DEGUT) with 15 target structures (e.g. noun). 1 raw score was given for items that were responded correctly, and a zero score was given for items that were responded wrongly. The children were tested individually in a quiet room at their kindergarten by final year undergraduates in the Speech Sciences Programme, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia under the supervision of the first author who is a SLT lecturer. The children were asked to point to the items named by the tester (e.g. for Noun, *Which picture is apple?* out of 4 choices- orange, apple, papaya, banana). The statistical analysis results revealed no significant gender differences across age groups based on performance of DEGUT. The present finding contributed knowledge to relevant literature and professionals. The clinical implication is to exclude gender norms from DEGUT.

### KEYWORDS

English; grammar; gender; Malaysian; children

### ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*

Received: 2 July 2025

Accepted: 1 August 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

Literature review shows that child language development is subjected to factors such as age and gender. However, gender differences discerned in developmental language are commonly small; whenever a significant gender difference is found, girls are always more superior than boys (Zhang et al., 2008). One reason could be that parents talk more to girls than boys in communication (Leaper, 2002). One local study on Malaysian Chinese children has however reported no significant gender differences in English language development (Phoon & Abdullah, 2014).

## RELATED LITERATURE

Local literature review shows that English child language studies beyond examining vocabulary (Phoon & Abdullah, 2014) among multi-ethnic groups in Malaysia is under-represented. Essential structures e.g. noun phrase and embedded clause have all been neglected. Professionals such as speech-language therapists (SLTs) dealing with multi-ethnic kindergarten children are desperate for information about developmental English grammar (Ooi & Wong, 2012). In addition, they wonder if girls are more superior than boys in English language learning as subjective observation shows that girls are more talkative than boys. Information about children's English grammatical understanding will enable them to identify girls or boys who have delayed/disordered English development; and to plan for effective intervention (SLT or teaching strategies) accordingly which serves as a preventive step to minimise learning issues at primary school.

This cross-sectional study of 321 multi-ethnic Malaysian children served as an initial investigation about the effects of age and gender on English grammatical understanding using a newly devised test i.e. Developmental English Grammatical Understanding Test (DEGUT).

## METHODS

The conventional approach to child language studies i.e. design, candidate selection, age groups, data collection and analysis (e.g. Bishop, 2003) was employed. A cross-sectional study design with a decent sample size of 321 children was used to strengthen the statistical analysis power (for age and gender effects) of DEGUT.

The children recruited were all typically developing children with no hearing nor syndromic disorders. The majority of children have started to attend kindergarten between 3-4 years old. The older children received more exposure to English in the kindergarten than the younger children since age is related to input exposure: 3-4 years exposure (6;00-6;11), 2-3 years exposure (5;00-5;11), 1-2 years exposure (4;00-4;11), ½-1 year exposure (3;00-3;11). The youngest 3 year-olds have received at least 6 months of exposure to English in the kindergarten.

A total of 321 children (169 Malay, 108 Chinese & 44 Indian) were recruited. These children were divided into 155 boys and 166 girls with four 12 monthly-age groups (3;00-3;11; 4;00-, 5;00-, 6;00-). As literature review indicates that children below 4 show a relatively rapid language development than children above 4, this age group was further divided into two 6-monthly age groups (3;00-3;05 & 3;06-3;11).

The newly devised DEGUT was administered individually to all 321 children in a quiet room at their kindergarten in Klang Valley and the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. The final year undergraduate students at Speech Sciences Programme, *Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*

(UKM) conducted the testing sessions under the supervision of the first author who is a SLT lecturer. Parental consent form and head teacher consent forms were distributed and collected prior to data collection. This research has obtained ethics approval by the university (JEP-2001-169/2022-069/2023-984).

DEGUT consists of 15 sections with 14 target grammar structures plus 1 section of Grammatical Judgement:

1. Noun. (Apple)
2. Verb. (Drink)
3. Adjective. (Happy)
4. Present Progressive. (The girl is reading a book)
5. Plural. (The tables are big)
6. Possessive. (The man's car is red)
7. Past tense. (The gardener planted some flowers)
8. Third person singular. (The boy runs at the field)
9. Comparative & superlative. (Taller giraffe)
10. Noun phrase. (Small red ball)
11. Pronoun. (They sit on the floor)
12. Preposition. (The cat is under the table)
13. Embedded clause. (The girl who is wearing a red dress is crying)
14. Negation. (The box is not small)
15. Grammatical judgement. (My father was played football yesterday)

DEGUT consists of colourful hand drawn pictures. The individual child testee was asked to point to items named by the tester. For example, for target Preposition “under” as in /The cat is under the table/, the children would have to point to the target picture with “A cat which sits under the table” against three other distractor pictures: “A cat which sits on OR in front of OR beside the table”.

Two pilot studies were carried out to confirm the suitability of the test items/pictures prior to main study data collection. All test items consisted of child familiar words, phrases and sentences that were culturally and linguistically appropriate to Malaysian children.

One (1) mark was given for items that were responded correctly while a zero (0) mark was given for items that were responded incorrectly. The total mark for the test is 65. The test took about 10-20 minutes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Statistical analyses were conducted to tackle the two research questions. The performance of DEGUT by both genders is displayed below.

Table 1. Total mean percent correct by both genders.

Age	Boys	Girls
3;00-3;05	53	56
3;06-3;11	56	61
4;00-4;11	62	61

5;00-5;11	71	70
6;00-6;11	70	71

Table 1 shows that older children outperformed younger children. Further, both genders showed comparable performance. The T- test was performed to determine if there are significant differences between gender. The results indicated that there were no significant gender differences [ $t(-0.93358)$ ,  $p=0.382$ ] Two Way ANOVA was further performed to confirm if there is any interaction between age and gender effects. The result indicated that there was no significant interaction between gender and age effects [ $f(0.390, df=4, p>0.05)$ ].

One Way ANOVA was used to examine if there are significant age differences. The result confirmed that there was a significant age effect ( $df=320, p=0.000$ ).

These results showed that Malaysian girls are not superior to Malaysian boys in English grammar understanding. This finding of no gender effect is consistent with local child language studies (Phoon et al., 2014) and other Western studies. On the other hand, congruent with the previous findings that have claimed that grammatical understanding improved with age (Bishop, 2003), the present findings indicated that older children (5-6 years) showed better English grammatical understanding than younger children (3-4 years).

These findings suggest that teachers and SLTs should not have different gender expectations pertaining to achievement in English grammar understanding. There is also no need for these professionals to use different classroom teaching strategies nor therapy when tackling both boys and girls. However, age is discerned as a significant predictor for developmental grammar understanding. Older children who have performed poorly on DEGUT may have potential delayed/disordered English grammar development which require intervention to avoid literacy issues in the primary school.

## CONCLUSION

There was a general developmental trend in English grammatical understanding amongst the Malaysian children. Nevertheless, there were no gender differences in the same aspect. The present findings contributed knowledge to the literature of child language. The clinical implications were to include age norms but not gender norms in DEGUT.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the students in Speech Sciences Programme, *Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)* for involvement in the data collection for this research project: Nik Nur Hanani Bt. Nik Kub, Nurul Najihah Bt. Huslan, Irnie Batrisyia Bt. Roszaidi, Nur Athirah Bt. Tawang, Nur Husna Bt. Abd Ghani, Muhammad Taufiq B. Roslan, Syahira Bt. Mier Muzzeen and Syahzanani Aqmar Bt. Sahril. The authors are also grateful to all children who have participated in this research project and all teachers who have facilitated the data collection for this study.

## REFERENCES

Bishop, D. V. M. (2003). *Test for reception of Grammar- Version 2*. London: Pearson Assessment

- Leaper, C. (2002). Parenting girls and boys. In M.H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of Parenting, Vol. 1: Children and Parenting* (pp. 189–225). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Ooi, C. C-W & Wong, A. M.Y. (2012). Assessing bilingual Chinese-English young children in Malaysia using language sample measures. *International Journal of Speech- Language Pathology*, Early Online: 1–10.
- Phoon H. S. & Abdualh A, C. (2014). Oral Vocabulary as a Predictor of English Language Proficiency among Malaysian Chinese Preschool Children. *3L: Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 20 (1), 143-156.
- Zhang, Y, Jin, X., Shen, X. Zhang, J. & Hoff, E. (2008). Correlates of early language development in Chinese children. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 32 (2), 1–7.

## **ACQUISITION AND PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF HIGH RISING TERMINALS BY MANDARIN-SPEAKING LEARNERS OF AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH**

**Liu, Chengjin**

*The Australian National University, Canberra ACT 2601, Australia.*

E-mail: cliu9901@gmail.com

### **ABSTRACT**

High Rising Terminals (HRTs), or rising intonation at the end of declaratives, serve important interactional functions in English varieties, but their use in second language (L2) speech remains underexplored. This study investigates the use of HRTs by Mandarin-speaking learners of Australian English as a second language (ESL). Data were drawn from spontaneous conversational speech produced by eight Mandarin-speaking ESL speakers and eight native Anglo-Australian speakers. A total of 4,801 declarative intonation units (IUs) were analysed for HRT occurrence and pragmatic function. While Mandarin-speaking ESL speakers showed a higher mean HRT rate (26.49%) than Anglos (19.36%), the difference was not statistically significant. Pragmatic analysis revealed that both groups used HRTs for engagement- and comprehensive-checking, turn-holding, and stance-softening, aligning with established Australian English norms. Instances of epistemic uncertainty were rare across both groups. These findings suggest that Mandarin-speaking ESL learners can acquire both the phonetic form and the discourse-pragmatic functions of HRTs through immersion and interaction, even in the absence of equivalent features in their first language. This study contributes to understanding prosodic adaptation in L2 acquisition and highlights the need for further research on individual variation and the developmental trajectory of prosodic features in bilingual speakers.

### **KEYWORDS**

Sociolinguistics; intonation; Second Language Acquisition; pragmatics; prosody

### **ARTICLE INFO**

*Article history:*

Received: 4 July 2025

Accepted: 4 August 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

High rising terminals (HRTs), also known as "uptalk," "upspeak," or "Australian Questioning Intonation" (AQI), are the innovative intonation pattern characterized by an unusual rising terminal contour in declarative utterances, making them sound like a yes-no question (Guy et al., 1986; Ladd, 1980; Levon, 2016). While extensively studied among native speakers, their use by second language (L2) English speakers remains underexplored. This study investigates the pragmatic functions of HRTs in the speech of Mandarin-speaking learners of Australian English as a second language (ESL). Unlike English, Mandarin lacks a prosodic equivalent to HRTs, raising questions about the acquisition and use of this feature in L2 speech. Drawing on spontaneous conversational data, this study examines whether and how Mandarin-background speakers employ HRTs to manage interactional goals.

## RELATED LITERATURE

HRTs serve multiple pragmatic functions across English varieties. In Australian English, HRTs serve as an engagement and comprehensive-checking device to help maintain interactive alignment by prompting listener engagement and comprehension feedback (Guy & Vonwiller, 1984). They also function as turn-holding devices, signalling that the speaker has not finished their turn (Guy et al., 1986). In American and Canadian English, HRTs have been associated with epistemic uncertainty and self-questioning, sometimes inviting confirmation (Lakoff, 1976; Rodrigues da Mota & Herment, 2016). Additionally, HRTs function as stance-softening, helping speakers navigate sensitive or face-threatening content, particularly in storytelling or evaluative contexts (Ladd, 1980; Levon, 2016). These rising contours can express opinion while signalling openness to alternative views, thereby aligning with politeness strategies. Overall, HRTs function as versatile prosodic tools for managing interaction, stance, and speaker–listener alignment.

Recent research has begun to document the use of HRTs in L2 speech. Paunović (2022) found that Serbian EFL learners use HRTs pragmatically in L2 speech, incorporating it into academic discourse beyond L1 transfer effects. In North America, Du Steinberg (2007) observed that some international teaching assistants adopted pervasive rising intonation patterns common among local youth, likely due to immersion rather than structural influence. However, little is known about how L2 speakers acquire such prosodic features or how they function across contexts, highlighting the need for further empirical investigation into their use and development.

## METHODS

This study analysed the speech of 16 female participants: 8 Mandarin-speaking ESL speakers from the AusESL corpus (Gnevshcheva & Travis, 2024) and 8 Anglo-Celtic Australians from the Sydney Speaks corpus (Travis, 2024). Mandarin-speaking ESL speakers were aged 28–35 ( $M = 31.5$ , born 1984–1991), arrived in Australia after age 18, and had lived in the country for over five years, with an average self-rated English proficiency of 3.73/5. The Anglo participants were native English speakers aged 22–27 ( $M = 24.5$ , born 1993–1998). All participants held professional occupations.

The Sydney Speaks corpus was already transcribed, while the AusESL corpus required transcription editing in ELAN, including intonation units (IUs) segmentation and coding of

declarative IUs. Uncodable IUs were excluded, and HRTs were first identified auditorily (Levon, 2016, pp. 140-141) with a high inter-rater reliability (91% agreement), followed by acoustic verification for ambiguous cases. Logistic mixed-effects models were used to examine the influence of speaker group and year of birth on HRT frequency.

A preliminary functional analysis was conducted on data from one high-HRT user and one low-HRT user per group (N=4 speakers). Functions were coded based on contextual evidence and listener response (where available), using established categories from previous studies (Guy et al., 1986; Guy & Vonwiller, 1984; Ladd, 1980; Lakoff, 1976; Levon, 2016; Rodrigues da Mota & Herment, 2016): engagement- and comprehension-checking, turn-holding, stance-softening, and epistemic uncertainty. (Note: Examples illustrating each function are presented in the Results/Discussion). Instances of declarative IUs are underlined, and HRTs are marked with an upward arrow (↑) at the end of the declarative IUs.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There were 1,203 HRT IUs (21.31%) among 4,801 declarative IUs across the two groups. Mandarin-speaking ESL speakers showed a higher mean HRT rate (26.49%, SD = 13.55) than Anglo speakers (19.36%, SD = 7.16), though the difference was not statistically significant ( $\beta = -0.444$ ,  $SE = 0.235$ ,  $z = -1.893$ ,  $p = 0.058$ ), nor was the interaction with year of birth ( $\beta = -0.044$ ,  $SE = 0.121$ ,  $z = -0.361$ ,  $p = 0.718$ ). The larger standard deviation among ESL speakers indicates greater individual variation in HRT use. This may reflect individual differences in language exposure, proficiency, or interactional experience, though these were not directly tested in this study. Therefore, similar to Paunović (2022) and Du Steinberg's (2007) findings, L2 speakers do use HRTs in English conversations, while functional similarity requires further examination.

The pragmatic analysis showed that ESL speakers used HRTs similarly to Anglos for engagement- and comprehension-checking and turn-holding, consistent with Australian English norms (Guy & Vonwiller, 1984; Guy et al., 1986). For instance, Mingzhu's utterance "and before I just live with it? ↑" (Example 1) invited listener acknowledgement, while Yanyu's consecutive HRTs signalled continuation in Example 2.

(1) Mingzhu: *I don't like @it,*  
*and before I just live with it?* ↑  
[AusESL\_MF\_037\_Mingzhu: 10:11.0-10:17.0]

(2) Yanyu: *Yeah I like them,* ↑  
*and I feel I like Melbourne the most?* ↑  
[AusESL\_MF\_045\_Yanyu: 00:15.3-00:18.3]

HRTs are also used as stance-softening, particularly in potentially face-threatening contexts. Ladd (1980) and Levon (2016) observed that rising contours mitigate assertiveness in storytelling and evaluation. Mingzhu's utterance "realised something in China is not.. really... good? ↑" in Example 3 reflects this function, presenting a personal critique as tentative and socially cautious.

(3) Mingzhu: *but I do... find something interesting like—*  
*I never really--*

realised something in China is not.. really... good? ↑

Brett: *Mhm mhm.*

[AusESL\_MF\_037\_Mingzhu: 10:00:3-10:09:3]

Although HRTs are often linked to epistemic uncertainty in North American and Canadian English (Lakoff, 1976; Rodrigues da Mota & Herment, 2016), this function was not dominant in either group. One instance appeared in Kylie's "twenty= .. eight or something? ↑" (Example 4), where the rise marked imprecision rather than soliciting confirmation.

(4)Kylie: *they started dating when --  
.. not till they were like,  
... twenty= .. eight or something? ↑*

Daniel: *wow.*

[SydS\_AYF\_092\_Kylie: 29:12.5-29:19.4]

Overall, the findings suggest that Mandarin-speaking ESL speakers use HRTs more frequently than Anglos and employ similar pragmatic functions. This supports the view that L2 users can acquire HRTs through immersion and interaction in Australian English.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Mandarin-speaking ESL speakers not only acquire HRTs in Australian English but also employ them pragmatically in ways comparable to native speakers. While ESL speakers showed slightly higher HRT frequencies, the difference was not statistically significant. Pragmatically, both groups used HRTs for engagement- and comprehension-checking, turn-holding, and stance-softening, aligning with documented native English functions. These findings suggest that through immersion and interaction, L2 speakers can successfully acquire both the phonetic and pragmatic aspects of prosody, even when such features are absent in their first language. Further research may explore individual variation and developmental trajectories.

## REFERENCES

- Du Steinberg, W. (2007). BEST PRACTICES: The ITA Program: An Academic Bridging Program for the Changing Demographics on North American Campuses. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 55(3), 31–37.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07377366.2007.10400128>
- Gnevsheva, K., & Travis, C. (2024). *Corpus of Australian English as a Second Language (AusESL)*. <https://datacommons.anu.edu.au/DataCommons/item/anudc:6272>
- Guy, G., Horvath, B., Vonwiller, J., Daisley, E., & Rogers, I. (1986). An intonational change in progress in Australian English. *Language in Society*, 15(1), 23–51.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500011635>

- Guy, G. R., & Vonwiller, J. (1984). The meaning of an intonation in Australian English. *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, 4(1), 1–17.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07268608408599317>
- Ladd, D. R. (1980). *The Structure of Intonational Meaning: Evidence from English*. Indiana University Press.
- Lakoff, R. T. (1976). *Language and woman's place*. Octagon Books.
- Levon, E. (2016). Gender, interaction and intonational variation: The discourse functions of High Rising Terminals in London. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 20(2), 133–163.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12182>
- Paunović, T. (2022). Uptalk in L2 English: The phonetic identity and perception of final declarative rises in Serbian EFL. *Phonetica*, 79(6), 551–589.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/phon-2022-0028>
- Rodrigues da Mota, C., & Herment, S. (2016). The pragmatic functions of the final particle eh and of High Rising Terminals in Canadian English: Quite similar, eh! *International Conference on Speech Prosody*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.21437/SpeechProsody.2016-180>
- Travis, C. (2024). Sydney Speaks corpus: An overview. *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, 0(0), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07268602.2024.2386387>

## LANGUAGE, RELIGION, AND ENVIRONMENT IN MAINLAND ASIA

**Michal Schwarz**

*Masaryk University, 602 00 Brno, Czechia.*

E-mail: schwarz@phil.muni.cz

### ABSTRACT

This paper is the first published partial outline of a new concept of lingo-religious complexes with application to research past peopling patterns and language spread in mainland Asia. Multiple connections to environmental influences require interdisciplinary scientific approaches, allowing rather essayistic expressions connecting transversal themes. In its core ideas, the concept intends to describe systematically how languages and religions are evolving in mutual functional connections serving purposes of communication (language) and regulation (religion) in preliterate and literate societies. The paper mentions selected principles observable in lingo-religious complexes for further advanced research of linguistic and ethno-religious contacts of past human groups. Special attention is given to cases of replacements of language or religion. Historical examples of linguistic and religious shifts illustrate the basic rules of these changes and the impacts of the environment. Besides precipitation and waterways influencing the spread of people and languages, there is also the specific interplay between population units occupying lowlands and mountains with different exposition to sunlight, zoonotic, and other influences on neurons and social behaviour. Original inspiration from comparing past processes in Mongolia, China, Korea, and Vietnam allows us to improve comparative knowledge about the interrelation of sedentary societies and mobile groups. The differences in conditions between mountainous Inner Asia (adjacent to the Eurasian greenbelt) and the coastal lowlands of China and Vietnam stimulated past peopling processes and the emergence of multi-ethnic cultural complexes in Asia.

### KEYWORDS

linguo-religious complexes; environmental impacts; language spread; Sprachbunds; Mainland Asia

### ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*

Received: 4 July 2025

Accepted: 7 August 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## **INTRODUCTION**

Languages and religions were mutually co-evolved in human history. Earliest scripts were invented in religious institutions, and the emergence of written cultures influenced the development of human civilizations (already Schmandt-Besserat, 1982). The new concept of *linguo-religious complexes* (further LRCs) intends to contribute to the cross-disciplinary methodology, which might be used for future research of past development in highly complex Sprachbunds in Central and Southeast Asia. This outline of basic ideas will be described in more detail in subsequent publications and case studies.

## **RELATED LITERATURE**

The concept of LRCs is an output of the study of Inner Asian tributary relations with Mongolia, Korea, and Vietnam, where history (e.g., Sinor, 1998; Skaff, 2012; Wang, 2018), comparison of countries (e.g., Womack, 2009; Skaff, 2012; Wang, 2018), and mutual impacts of genetically unrelated languages (Lim, 2010; Phan, 2013) have a connection to environmental pressures on interacting societies. Past human migrations had an observable flow from the Eurasian greenbelt to more populated lowlands in the south. It was because repeated East-West migrations were not solving economic threats from climate shifts during the glacial and interglacial periods. In contrast, southward migrations were more effective in securing access to sources as precipitation grew from north to the Equator, with corresponding biodiversity growth, socio-economic variation and multilingual diversity. Also, the north-to-south growing population density is an attractor and factor of higher interactive capacity influencing evolving institutions and state (Roscoe et al., 2020). However, according to Higham, Bronze Age Southeast Asia had another public commodity: highly developed social hierarchies further enabling multilingual stratification.

## **METHODS**

The concept of LRCs requires cross-disciplinary approaches to the study of complex systems. While language is the basic communication condition, religion regulates human groups' emotional and hormonal settings when rituals help diminish the impact of stressors. While language shifts and gradual replacements of one linguistic code by another can be spontaneous, conversions of past ruling families to another religion were intentional. New religion usually supports political and economic reorientation, strengthens new alliances, provides better available optimum in balancing interests, and reduces individual and social pressures. Environmental impacts on interactions between populations in different climatic zones (cf. stereotypic, but in the medieval world, valid dichotomy between the Mongolian plateau and the lowlands of Inner China) are also the result of combined influences from the natural environment. For example, high altitude is an economic disadvantage due to lower precipitation and scarce water resources. Simultaneously, higher altitude also brings biological advantages. A lower oxygen concentration in the air requires more red blood cells, making mountain populations more effective in fights with armies from the lowlands. Similarly, higher exposure to sunlight at high altitudes stimulates more effective production of vitamins and hormones (immunity, better biological predispositions, etc.). Other factors relate to dichotomies between pastoral and sedentary groups. The pastoralists are more exposed to zoonotic influences of Toxoplasmosis, as the metabolites influence human neurons and can cause aggressive and risky

behaviour. In contrast, agricultural groups are more exposed to *Bacillus cereus*, which has opposite impacts on social behaviour. Mobility further stimulates these processes. While sedentary groups tend not to move and internalize pressures, mobile pastoralists tend to externalize pressures. The postglacial steppe landscape of Mongolia and Siberia enabled flexible movements, moderating microbial impacts in contrast to conditions among sedentary nations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The dichotomies mentioned above resulted in socio-biological dominance of the steppe people over sedentary groups, leading to specific patterns of multilingual exchanges, religious interactions, and frequent assimilations of Altaic groups with each other and with the Chinese.

The concept of LRCs applies to both preliterate and literate societies. In preliterate societies, the interferences between religion and language are flexible. However, introducing scripts significantly differs in higher institutionalisation, supported by the written religious legitimisation of power. Until the 19th century, religious institutions had higher literacy, and using scripts meant better access to influence and power. Thus, language, scripts, and religions relate; literary societies usually insist on their combined use. Linguo-religious spread was also conditioned by translations of sacred texts, deepening multilingual contacts and interactions of religions with previous traditions.

In compliance with gradual population drift from north to south, there were, for example, A) Kirghiz replacing Uyghurs, who moved southward, B) general Altaic influences on the simplification of Northern Chinese, C) influences of Chinese population and language on Vietnamese, Malay and Indonesian, D) the spread of Vietnamese population and language to the south, E) cultural shift connected to the spread of Malay to insular Indonesia.

Religions were further moderating these interactions. For example, the Uyghur conversion to Manicheism stimulated Uyghur focus on Iranian trade, the Altaic rulers used religious tolerance as a political tool, and the Manchus supported the spread of Tibetan Buddhism to Eastern Mongols to secure imperial borders, preventing the impacts of insurrections after the Yellow River Valley disasters. Besides Sino-Altaic multilingualism, similar are the cases of religious profiles in Korea and Vietnam with interplays of their languages with Chinese, animism and shamanism on the private levels, Buddhism in the village economy, and Confucian state doctrines.

## CONCLUSION

Considering multiple and changing strategies of syncretic coexistences (Manichaeism with Buddhism in the Tarim Basin; Islam with previous religions in Southeast Asia), hierarchic dominance (authority of, e.g., Latin or Arab over local vernaculars in liturgy and rituals) or gradual exclusive replacements (Buddhism locally replaced by Islam in Central Asia; linguistic authority of Tibetan gradually replaced the authority of Sanskrit in Inner Asian Buddhism), the concept of linguo-religious complexes is a promising tool for research of past processes in Asian Sprachbunds namely before changes brought by modern politics and digital electronization of written cultures in the 20th century.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This paper is an output of two projects, “*Evolutionary interferences of religion and governance in Inner Asia: comparison of mutual impacts with tributary countries: Mongolia, Korea, Vietnam*” (GA23-06953S) and “*Changing adaptive strategies of mobile pastoralists in Mongolia: dynamics in community histories and movement patterns documented through oral sources*” (GM23-07108M) supported by the Czech Science Foundation at Masaryk University – Faculty of Arts.

## REFERENCES

- Keyes, Ch. F. (1995). *The Golden Peninsula. Culture and Adaptation in Mainland Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Lim A.-K. (2010). *A Sinitic historical phonology: phonological restructuring of written Chinese under the 5th century Turkic Sinification*. Taipei: Academia Sinica.
- Meinert, C. & H. H. Sørensen. (2020). Piety, Power, and Place in Central and East Asian Buddhism. In: C. Meinert. & H. H. Sørensen (eds.). *Buddhism in Central Asia I. Patronage, Legitimation, Sacred Space, and Pilgrimage*. Leiden – Boston: Brill, 1–12.
- Phan, J. D. (2013). *Lacquered Words: The Evolution of Vietnamese under Sinitic Influences from the 1st Century BCE through the 17th century CE*. (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University). Ann Arbor: ProQuest LLC.
- Roscoe, P. et al. (2020). Population density and size facilitate interactive capacity and the rise of the state. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society – Biological Sciences* <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2019.0725> accessed 01. 07. 2025.
- Schmandt-Besserat, D. (1982). How Writing Came About. *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 47, 1–5.
- Sinor, D. (1998). *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*. Taipei: SMC Publishing.
- Skaff, J. K. (2012). *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors. Culture, Power, and Connections, 580–800*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wang, Y. (2018). *Remaking the Chinese Empire. Manchu-Korean Relations, 1616–1911*. Ithaca – London: Cornell University Press.
- Womack, B. (2006). *China and Vietnam. The Politics of Asymmetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF THAI HOTEL CUSTOMERS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE REVIEWS

**Phiphawin Suphawatt Srikrai\* and Chirarat Khongsat**

*Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand.*

E-mail: sphiph@kku.ac.th

\*Corresponding author

### ABSTRACT

This qualitative study uses sentiment analysis to investigate 144 English-language reviews of a southern Thailand hotel on two reservation websites. By analyzing the polarity of feedback from guests in Asia, Europe, North America, and Oceania, the study identifies prevalent customer opinions. The results show a predominance of positive sentiment. European and Oceanic guests expressed the highest satisfaction, praising the location, services, and facilities. Asian customers, while generally positive, noted issues with food variety and property maintenance. Overall, negative comments focused on these specific areas and service speed, possibly due to post-pandemic operational adjustments. The study suggests future analyses incorporate larger datasets and hybrid machine-manual methods.

### KEYWORDS

sentiment analysis; English language reviews; polarity

### ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*

Received: 3 July 2025

Accepted: 18 July 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a key tool for expression (Crystal, 2022), with online customer reviews becoming a powerful medium for sharing experiences and opinions in the digital age (Imatiaz et al. 2021). In the highly competitive hospitality sector, these reviews are critical for consumer decision-making (Pratama et al., 2022) and significantly shape guest perceptions (Akhtar et al., 2017; Oliveira et al., 2022). To decode the feelings within these texts, researchers use sentiment analysis to classify opinions as positive, negative, or neutral (Pang & Lee, 2004). While sentiment analysis has been widely applied to reviews (Christanto & Singgalen, 2022; Pratama et al., 2022; Nohh et al., 2019; Tian et al., 2022; Oliveira et al., 2022), a gap exists for hotels in the Thai context. In addition to traditional marketing research, combining machine and manual analysis improves data interpretation, helping Thai hotel managers identify negative feedback efficiently. Moreover, it helps address customer needs, expectations, and overall satisfaction. Furthermore, many studies rely on automated tools which may misinterpret linguistic variations (Oliveira et al., 2022). This study employs a manual approach to analyze customer sentiment in reviews for a five-star Phuket resort on websites HRWA and HRWB to identify the most dominant opinion polarity (positive, neutral, or negative).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Sentiment analysis, or opinion mining, leverages Natural Language Processing (NLP) principles along with data mining and AI to systematically extract subjective information (Zhou et al., 2021). Its core function is to determine the sentimental orientation of a text, whether it expresses approval or disapproval, and classify it (Pang & Lee, 2008). This classification typically includes positive, negative, and neutral (Alaei et al., 2017) or sometimes binary (positive, negative) (Duan et al., 2016; Han et al., 2016). The analysis can be performed at three distinct levels (Nandwani & Verma, 2021): document, sentence, and aspect levels (Wankhade et al., 2022; Lai & Raheem, 2020; Yang & Cardie, 2014). For example, a single review might state, "The room was spacious (+), but the Wi-Fi was slow (-)," containing both positive and negative sentiments tied to different aspects (Nandwani & Verma, 2021). Prior research in hotel sentiment analysis consistently points toward a dominance of positive feedback. A study of hotels in China by Tian et al. (2016) found that 78% of reviews were positive, with "the view" and "food and beverage" being the most highly praised aspects. Similarly, Nohh et al. (2019) discovered that reviews for a Kuala Lumpur hotel were overwhelmingly positive. A study by Oliveira et al. (2022) on hotels in Portugal found that positive sentiments outnumbered negative ones across all markets (UK, France, and Portugal). Studies in Indonesia by Christanto and Singgalen (2022) and Pratama et al. (2022) echoed these findings, confirming a strong trend of guest satisfaction expressed in online reviews.

## METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study analyzed 144 English-language reviews from 2022 for a five-star Phuket resort, sourced from leading travel websites HRWA and HRWB (SEMRUSH, 2022). Using stratified random sampling, reviews were categorized by the reviewer's continent to account for cultural differences in expressing satisfaction (Oliveira et al., 2022; The Culture Factor Group, 2023). The manual analysis, adapted from Bhatt et al. (2015), involved coding individual opinion words as positive, neutral, or negative. Subsequently, the polarity of each full sentence

was determined, classifying sentences with mixed feelings as neutral. Finally, the dominant sentiment of each complete review was concluded based on an aggregation of its sentence-level analysis, providing a detailed understanding of the customer's overall experience.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study's primary finding is that positive sentiment was the dominant polarity, with 61.7% positive reviews on HRWA and 67% on HRWB, indicating high overall satisfaction. When analyzed by continent, European and Oceanian guests were overwhelmingly positive. European feedback aligned with established "pull" factors like scenery and hospitality for British tourists (Sastre & Phakdee-Auksorn, 2017). Similarly, high satisfaction from Oceanians matched findings on Australian tourists' preferences for quality accommodation and leisure activities in Phuket (Promsivapallop & Jarumaneerat, 2018). Generally, Asian guests from key markets like India and Singapore were also largely positive, though some reviews reflected specific cultural needs, such as a desire for more vegetarian options (Anantamongkolkul, 2021). Significantly, North American feedback was highly polarized, with a significant number of negative reviews detailing serious service failures. This suggests service inconsistencies most severely impacted this group. In conclusion, while the resort's location, staff, and facilities were major strengths, negative themes across all groups recurring included issues with food and beverage operations and accommodation maintenance.

## CONCLUSION

This study successfully identified positive sentiment as the dominant opinion in reviews for the five-star resort, indicating that it generally meets international guest expectations. The analysis also revealed that negative feedback was consistently directed toward specific operational areas like dining and maintenance. Therefore, future research should employ a hybrid machine-manual model to analyze a multilingual dataset, allowing for a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of customer experience.

## REFERENCES

- Akhtar, N., Zubair, N. & Ahmad, T. (2017). Aspect based sentiment oriented summarization of hotel reviews. *Procedia Computer Science*, 115, 563-571.
- Alaei, A., Becken, S. & Stantic, B. (2017). Sentiment analysis in tourism: Capitalising on Big Data. *Journal of Travel Research*, 58(2), 175–191.
- Anantamongkolkul, C. (2021). Understanding the Travel Behaviors of Indian Tourists in Thailand: A Mixed Methods Research Approach: The journal of Behavioral science (TJBS), 16(2), 99-113 Retrieved from <https://so06.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/IJBS/article/view/249241/168510>
- Bhatt, A., Patel, A., Chheda, H., & Gaeande, K., (2015). Amazon Review Classification and Sentiment Analysis: International Journal of Computer Science and Information Technologies, 6(6), 5107-5110. Retrieved from <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=d443c1a2bfd49986a7482079461cfd498d3512ae>

- Christanto, H. & Singgalen, Y. (2022). Sentiment analysis of customer feedback reviews towards hotel's products and services in Labuan Bajo. *Journal of Information Systems and Informatics*, 4(4), 805-822.
- Crystal, D. (2022). language. Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved December 22, 2022, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/language>
- Duan, W., Yu, Y., Cao, Q. & Levy, S. (2016). Exploring the impact of social media on hotel service performance: a sentimental analysis approach. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 57(3), 282-296.
- Han, H. Mankad, S. Givirneni, N. & Verma, R. (2016). What guests really think of your hotel: text analytics of online customer reviews. *Cornell Hospitality Report*, 16(2), 3-17.
- Imatiaz, N., Ahmed, T. & Paul, A. (2021). Incentivized comment detection with sentiment analysis on hotel reviews. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Science and Technology*, 27(3), 1-11.
- Lai, S. & Raheem, M. (2020). Sentiment analysis of online customer reviews for hotel industry: an appraisal of hybrid approach. *International Research Journal of Engineering and Technology (IRJET)*, 7(12), 1355-1359.
- Nandwani, P. & Verma, R. (2021). A review on sentiment analysis and emotion detection from text. *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, 11(81), 1-19.
- Nohh, N., Zainunddin, N., Anuar, S., & Azmi, N. (2019). Sentiment analysis towards hotel reviews. *Open International Journal of Informatics (OIJI)*, 7(2), 1-19.
- Oliveira, A.S., Renda, A.I., Correia, M.B., & Antonio, N. (2022). Hotel customer segmentation and sentiment analysis through online reviews: an analysis of selected European markets. *Tourism & Management Studies*, 18(1), 29-40.
- Pang, B. & Lee, L. (2004). A sentimental education: sentiment analysis using subjectivity summarization based on minimum cuts. In Proceedings of the 42nd Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics (ACL-04), 271–278.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2008). Opinion mining and sentiment analysis. *Foundations & Trends in Information Retrieval*, 2(1-2), 1-135.
- Pratama, M. Sarno, R. & Abdullah, R. (2022). Sentiment analysis user regard hotel reviews by aspect-based using latent dirichlet allocation, semantic similarity, and support vector machine method. *International Journal of Intelligent Engineering & Systems*, 15(3), 514-524.
- Promsivapallop, P. & Jarumaneerat, T., (2018). A Cross-National Comparative Analysis of Destination Satisfaction and Loyalty Between Chinese and Australian Independent

- Tourists: A Study of Phuket: Article in Asia-Pacific Social Science Review, 17(3), 1-14. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323771851\\_A\\_Cross\\_National\\_Comparative\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Destination\\_Satisfaction\\_and\\_Loyalty\\_Between\\_Chinese\\_and\\_Australian\\_Independent\\_Tourists\\_A\\_Study\\_of\\_Phuket](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323771851_A_Cross_National_Comparative_Analysis_of_Destination_Satisfaction_and_Loyalty_Between_Chinese_and_Australian_Independent_Tourists_A_Study_of_Phuket)
- Sastre, R. P., & Phakdee-Auksorn, P. (2017). Examining tourists' push and pull travel motivations and behavioral intentions: The case of British outbound tourists to Phuket, Thailand. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism*, 18(4), 437–464. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1528008x.2016.1250242>
- Tian, X., He, W., Tao, R. & Akula, V. (2016). Mining online hotel reviews: a case study from hotels in China. *Twenty-second American Conference on Information Systems*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2022). The model of sentiment analysis for classifying the online shopping reviews. *Journal of Engineering and Digital Technology (JEDT)*, 10(1), 71-79.
- Wankhade, M., Rao, A. & Kulkarni, C. (2022). A survey on sentiment analysis methods, applications, and challenges. *Artificial Intelligence Review*, 55, 5731-5780.
- Yang, B. & Cardie, C. (2014). Context-aware learning for sentence-level sentiment analysis with posterior regularization. In *Proceedings of the 52nd annual meeting of the association for computational linguistics*, 1, 325-335.
- Zhou, G. & Liao, C. (2021). Dynamic measurement and evaluation of hotel customer satisfaction through sentiment analysis on online reviews. *Journal of Organizational and End User Computer*, 33(6), 1-27.

## STRUCTURAL AND FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES OF LEXICAL BUNDLES IN L2 LEARNERS' ACADEMIC WRITING

**Radika Subramaniam**

*Politeknik Sultan Idris Shah, 45100 Sungai Air Tawar, Selangor, Malaysia.*

E-mail: radika5352@yahoo.co.uk

### ABSTRACT

The structural and functional categories of lexical bundles have been extensively studied over the past two decades, and this trend continues in recent years. However, focused investigations into specific structural types of lexical bundles, particularly within the Malaysian context, remain limited. This study explores verb expressions in the form of lexical bundles found in the academic writing of Malaysian L2 learners at the post-secondary level. The data comprises an 891,919-word corpus of Final Year Project reports written by polytechnic Engineering students undertaking Diploma studies. Sketch Engine was employed to compile and generate the lexical bundles. The structural categories were analysed using Biber et al.'s (1999) framework, while the functional categories were identified using Hyland's (2008a) classification. The findings reveal that the 'pronoun/noun phrase + be' is the most frequently occurring verb phrase-based structural category in the L2 learner writing. Functionally, the research-oriented category emerged as the most prevalent discourse feature. Overall, the findings suggest that the structural patterns of non-native learners are more inclined towards conversational registers compared to academic prose, whereas the prevalence of research-oriented functions indicates alignment with the procedure-related information presented in the FYP reports. While the most frequently used structural and functional categories of bundles highlight the nature of the L2 learners' academic writing, the least frequent categories may indicate gaps in these learners' writing that need to be addressed for pedagogical purposes.

### KEYWORDS

lexical bundles; structural categories; functional categories; L2 learners; academic writing

### ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*

Received: 1 July 2025

Accepted: 31 July 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

Lexical bundles are phraseological units or sequences of words which occur repeatedly in any text. They become the “basic building blocks of a discourse” (Biber et al., 2004:371). There has been a great number of lexical bundles studies in academic writing from the past (e.g., Chen & Baker, 2010) till the present (e.g., Ku, 2025). As lexical bundles are associated with fluency, understanding their structural and functional patterns in L2 learner writing could offer valuable insights into learners’ pedagogical intervention. Despite the growing interest in lexical bundles research, there remains a paucity of focused investigations on Malaysian polytechnic students’ discipline-specific academic writing, particularly the verb phrase constructions.

## RELATED LITERATURE

A substantial body of research has investigated lexical bundles in academic writing, focusing on both structural and functional categories across learner and expert corpora (e.g., Bychkovska & Lee, 2017; Pan & Liu, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). Notable studies (see Bychkovska & Lee, 2017; Zhang et al., 2021) have reported more use of verb phrase-based (VP) bundles compared to noun phrase-based (NP) and prepositional phrase-based (PP) bundles in the writing of L2 learners. Moreover, Pan and Liu (2019) noted greater variability in VP bundle types used by learners. Functionally, non-native writers (both learners and experts) tend to underuse stance expressions or participant-oriented categories (see Adel & Erman, 2012; Chen & Baker, 2010; Pan & Liu, 2019), often favouring discourse-organising features or text-oriented functions (see Adel & Erman, 2012). However, such findings may vary depending on discipline and learner background, suggesting the importance of localised corpus studies on Malaysian polytechnic learners to fill the gap.

## METHODS

The data of this study comprises 231 Final Year Project reports gathered from final semester Malaysian Polytechnic Diploma students in the field of Electrical and Electronic Engineering. The corpus underwent a cleaning process where unnecessary features, for instance, tables, figures, diagrams and appendices were removed. The corpus was then compiled using Sketch Engine, a lexical computing online tool, which resulted in a total of 891,919-word corpus. The N-grams (multiword units, i.e., lexical bundles) list was generated via Sketch Engine and the target bundles for analysis were identified through several processes. First, the three primary criteria for bundle selection were adhered to – bundle length (i.e., 4 to 5-word bundles) (see Chen & Baker, 2010), frequency threshold (i.e., a less conservative approach by using 5 times frequency) and text dispersion to avoid skewing tendency by individual writers (i.e., 5 different texts) (see Biber et al., 2004). Then, the lexical bundles generated based on the above criteria were further screened to identify bundles with verb components. Finally, the bundles were filtered again to remove the overlapping/repeated ones. In cases where one 5-word bundle (e.g., *there are many types of*) appeared separately in two 4-word bundles, for example, *there are many types* and *are many types of*, the 5-word bundle was selected. The target bundles were then analysed using Biber et al.’s (1999) structural categories framework to identify the VP-based structures, for example ‘passive verb + prepositional phrase’, ‘verb phrase + to-clause fragment’ and ‘anticipatory *it* + verb phrase’. The functional categories were classified using Hyland’s (2008a) ‘research-oriented’, ‘text-oriented’ and ‘participant-oriented’ categories.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identified nine structural categories of VP-based bundles (i.e., anticipatory *it* + verb phrase/ adjective phrase, passive verb + prepositional phrase/other fragments, copula *be* + noun phrase/adjective phrase, (verb phrase +) *that*-clause fragment, (verb phrase +) *to*-clause fragment, pronoun/noun phrase + *be* (+...), adverbial clause fragment, *wh*-clause fragment and verb phrase with active verb) in the L2 learners' corpus. The most prevalent was 'pronoun/noun phrase + *be*' pattern (324 types and 3091 tokens), indicating a strong conversational register influence in L2 learners' writing (see Biber et al., 1999). In contrast, the 'anticipatory *it*' structure, which is typically linked to the writer's presentation of judgement or evaluation about the subject/topic of discussion, was far less utilised (27 types and 296 tokens) by these writers. Hyland (2008a) emphasises this structure's importance in disciplines like Electrical Engineering, where it signifies authorial stance compared to other disciplines (i.e., Biology, Applied Linguistics, and Business Studies). The least use of 'anticipatory *it*' in the L2 learner writing may suggest that these learners have (minimally) attempted opinionated clause-based structures in the academic writing produced, which suggests pedagogical implications. As for the functional categories, the corpus indicates the most frequent use of research-oriented (RO) categories, followed by participant-oriented (PO) and text-oriented (TO) categories. The functional categories attested to these Malaysian polytechnic L2 learners' texts are more research-based. This aligns with the procedure-related information presented in the FYP report and also reflects novice-level textual organisation as research-oriented categories are reported as a common feature of student writing compared to text-oriented functions, which are more prominent in expert research articles (Hyland, 2008b). The participant-oriented discourse features, however, are more often linked to nativity and level of text, where native learners and advanced texts employ more of this feature (Hyland, 2008b). The findings suggest that while L2 learners have demonstrated familiarity with bundles relevant to procedural writing, there is a need for pedagogical emphasis on a wider range of bundles associated with stance and engagement, and discourse organisation, displaying the features of academic prose.

## CONCLUSION

The overall analysis reveals that the structural patterns of non-native learners are more inclined towards conversational registers compared to academic prose, whereas the functional categories are mostly research-oriented. The limited use of other structural categories, such as anticipatory *it*, and functional categories like text-oriented and participant-oriented functions, highlights gaps that require attention in L2 learner writing. Incorporating corpus-based materials into writing instruction may assist learners in noticing and practising these features, thereby supporting the development of more proficient academic writing.

## REFERENCES

- Adel, A., & Erman, B. (2012). Recurrent word combinations in academic writing by native and non-native speakers of English: A lexical bundles approach. *English for Specific Purposes*, 31, 81-92.

- Biber, D., Conrad, S., & Cortes, V. (2004). *If you look at ..... Lexical bundles in University teaching and textbooks. Applied Linguistics, 25*(3), 371-405.
- Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *The Longman grammar of spoken and written English*. London: Longman.
- Bychkovska, T., & Lee, J. J. (2017). At the same time: Lexical bundles in L1 and L2 university student argumentative writing. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 30*, 38-52.
- Chen, Y. H., & Baker, P. (2010). Lexical bundles in L1 and L2 academic writing. *Language Learning and Technology, 14*(2), 30-49.
- Hyland, K. (2008a). As can be seen: Lexical bundles and disciplinary variation. *English for Specific Purposes, 27*(1), 4-21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2007.06.001>
- Hyland, K. (2008b). Academic clusters: Text patterning in published and postgraduate writing. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 18*(1), 4-62.
- Ku, Y. (2025). A corpus analysis of prepositional phrase-lexical bundles in academic writing: L2 writers from Indo-European and non-Indo-European languages. *Applied Corpus Linguistics, 5*(2).
- Pan, F., & Liu, C. (2019). Comparing L1-L2 differences in lexical bundles in student and expert writing. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, 37*(2), 142-157.
- Zhang, S., Yu, H., & Zhang, L. J. (2021). Understanding the sustainable growth of EFL students' writing skills: Differences between novice and expert writers in their use of lexical bundles in academic writing. *Sustainability, 13*(5553), 1-17.

## UNLOCKING MALAYSIA'S BANKING ENGLISH: A KEYWORD ANALYSIS STUDY FOR ESP TEACHING AND LEARNING

Yusmahariz Ashraf, Yusmaherizam<sup>1\*</sup>, Wan Irham, Ishak<sup>1</sup>, and Ismie Roha, Mohamed Jais<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah, 08400 Merbok, Kedah, Malaysia.*

<sup>2</sup>*Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.*

E-mail: harizherizam.work@gmail.com

\*Corresponding author

### ABSTRACT

Amidst increasing financial globalisation, demands for locally applicable English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in banking are at a peak. Yet, ESP bank curricula are not typically responsive to local needs, particularly in Malaysia. Drawing on Corpus Linguistics (Sinclair, 1991) and the ESP framework (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), this study explores Malaysia-specific banking lexis through keyword analysis to guide curriculum development. Using AntConc, keywords were identified and compared between the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and a target corpus of transcribed interviews with Malaysian banking professionals. Findings reveal lexical items such as *Maybank* and *Bank Negara Malaysia* that reflect distinctive local regulatory and cultural contexts that are not found in global banking English, while the rest of the terms are similar to the globally accepted banking terms. These findings have implications for developing locally relevant ESP materials and meaningful communication training. This research offers practical proof for language researchers and policymakers in designing effective ESP courses, which will finally bridge the gap between Malaysian banking industry needs and higher education.

### KEYWORDS

English for Specific Purposes (ESP); Malaysian banking sector; keyword analysis

### ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*

Received: 1 July 2025

Accepted: 18 July 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

Globalisation has a deep impact on the banking sector, where there is an increased demand for highly qualified specialists with competencies relevant to the 21st-century workforce. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses have seen considerable development worldwide (Basturkmen, 2010; Papadima-Sophocleous & Pappa, 2019). ESP is concerned with the specialisation of language teaching to address learners' specific communication requirements in academic and professional fields (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). As a result, ESP has evolved to meet the increasing demands of global communication, especially in industries such as business, technology, healthcare and finance (Hyland, 2002; Meghaghi & Bensafa, 2024; Simaremare et al., 2023). Despite its growing relevance, the majority of ESP curricula remain too general and fail to address the particular linguistic and professional requirements of local industries (Anthony, 2018; Poedjiastutie, 2017). Dalal Alsharif and Shukri (2018) state that materials utilised in the ESP classes tend to be outdated and fail to capture dynamic language evolution within specialised domains, including banking.

In Malaysia, research in banking English remains scarce and outdated, with not much recent research to counter the rapid emergence of new financial terms and technologies (Abdul Karim, 2016). E-KYC, DuitNow, Islamic fintech, and AI-driven financial services are revolutionising banking communication (Yaacob & Saad, 2020). This contrast underscores the urgency to find Malaysian-specific banking terms that reflect industry trends. ESP materials must include these developments to prepare learners to meet Malaysia's modern banking industry communication needs. The study will aim to determine Malaysia-specific bank lexical terms through keyword analysis and compare them with universally accepted banking English, and highlight individual lexical characteristics. The results will inform more applicable ESP courses, bridging the disparity between classroom learning and real-life bank practice (Pomat, 2025).

## RELATED LITERATURE

A corpus-based methodology, as advocated by Sinclair (1991), emphasises the significance of analysis of actual language patterns, and keyword analysis is thus a fertile ground for investigation of Malaysian banking English. Recent ESP research emphasises the value of corpus analysis, for instance, Alsehibany and Abdelhalim (2023) utilised COCA to address lexical challenges for Saudi EFL students, demonstrating the effectiveness of reference corpora in ESP. Pomat (2025) emphasises the role of corpus analysis and software like AntConc in detecting domain-specific vocabulary in online discourse, a process that can be applied in uncovering banking-specific terms. Similarly, Sukman et al. (2022) employed corpus analysis to identify characteristic features in online business news.

Furthermore, keyword analysis is useful in certain professional contexts. Khamis and Abdullah (2018) utilised WordSmith to identify key vocabulary in the instance of engineering English. Furthermore, Valipouri and Nassaji (2013) demonstrated the usefulness of comparing specialist corpora to general corpora in identifying academic vocabulary in chemistry. These studies collectively underscore the efficacy of corpus-based word analysis in revealing discipline-specific vocabulary for the development of focused and accurate ESP materials. Building on this established approach, this study employs keyword analysis to identify the unique lexical features of Malaysian Banking English.

## METHODS

This study utilises keyword analysis in corpus linguistics to identify Malaysia-specific banking terminology with the aim of finding lexical items that are peculiar to the financial context of Malaysia and separating them from globally accepted banking English. This study is underpinned by Sinclair's (1991) corpus-driven methodology that calls for empirical examination of naturally occurring language use. Subjects were specifically selected to cover various functions such as customer service, compliance, loan management, and legal advisory.

There are two corpora employed, a target corpus consisting of approximately 53,000 words of transcribed semi-structured interviews of eight Malaysian banking professionals, and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) as a reference corpus for international business English.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight banking professionals across various roles, including tellers, customer service officers, and general managers, to explore the specific lexical used in the banking sector. Analysis was conducted using AntConc software (Version 4.1). A contrast between the target corpus and COCA was done to produce keyword lists, applying the log-likelihood statistical test to determine words that are significantly more frequent in the Malaysian context. This enabled the determination of context-specific phrases as well as those in the emergent phase. Although this research generates useful knowledge on genuine verbal communication in workplaces, the lack of written banking records and small sample size are recognised as limitations and future research is encouraged to include written data with a larger sample size for corroboration.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The keyword analysis, sorted by keyness likelihood, indicated considerable lexical over-representation in the Malaysian banking corpus compared to globally accepted business English. *Customers*, *banking* and *clients* were among the most important phrases in the spoken language, emphasising the importance of customer connections. Following closely were larger contextual phrases like *industry* and *sector*, indicating conversations about the whole financial environment. The frequent usage of words like *forms*, *headquarters* (HQ), and *emails* demonstrates the procedural and communication characteristics present in the interviews.

*Documents*, *teller*, *presentation*, *training*, *vouchers*, *brochures*, and *letters* focused on the practical and daily language banking operations. Crucially, phrases with high keyness and strong local distinctiveness include *Maybank* and *Bank Negara Malaysia* (BNM), which relate to a large Malaysian bank and central bank, respectively. The appearance of *bankers* supports the occupational emphasis, whereas *foreigners* indicate discussions regarding the unique customer demographics and presumably associated processes.

The predominance of local institutional terminology, such as *Maybank* and *BNM*, which are lacking from international benchmarks, demonstrates the localised character of Malaysian banking English. Furthermore, given the importance of customer-related vocabulary and procedural words, ESP education should prioritise good customer service communication as well as familiarity with standard banking processes and documents. Furthermore, the frequent occurrence of workplace terms like *forms*, *headquarters* (HQ), and *emails* implies that ESP courses should incorporate task-based learning activities such as role-plays, form-filling exercises, and email writing simulations tailored to the banking context. The findings highlight

the need to use Malaysia-specific lexical elements in the ESP curriculum to improve relevance and educate graduates for the language demands of the local banking sector.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigates the Malaysia-specific banking lexis, identifying the key patterns using keyword analysis in AntConc by utilising the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) as the reference corpus. ESP curriculum designers, trainers and even the learners could benefit from the list, bridging the disparity between classroom learning and the real-world banking practices. Furthermore, the word list and the classification of collocations in each word list are especially useful for developing the material and learning activities in the ESP course, especially in the English for Banking course. This keyword list assists learners in using banking-specific English in real-world circumstances and equips learners with the language skills required to succeed in the rapidly changing business areas of the Malaysian banking sector. However, this study is limited by the absence of written banking records. While the present study focuses only on spoken discourse from interviews, future research should incorporate written banking documents to enhance the corpus representativeness and provide broader lexical insight.

## REFERENCES

- Abdul Karim bin Madasa. (2016). English language needs in the banking sector: Focus on two branches of a bank in Malaysia. *3rd International Conference on Language, Education, Humanities, and Innovation*, 89–99.
- Alsehibany, R. A., & Abdelhalim, S. M. (2023). Overcoming academic vocabulary errors through online corpus consultation: the case of Saudi English majors. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2023.2249503>
- Anthony, L. (2018). *English for specific purposes: What does it mean? Why is it different?*
- Basturkmen, H. (2010). *Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes*. Macmillan.
- Dalal Alsharif, & Shukri, N. (2018). Exploring pedagogical challenges of ESP teachers at a Saudi Arabian university. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 8(10), 841–855.
- Dudley-Evans, T., & St. John, M.-J. (1998). *Development in English for specific purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centered approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hyland, K. (2002). Specificity revisited: How far should we go now? *English for Specific Purposes*, 21(4), 385–395. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906\(01\)00028-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906(01)00028-X)

- Khamis, N., & Abdullah, I.-H. (2018). What do different word lists reveal about the lexical features of a specialised language? *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 24(3), 26–42. <https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2018-2403-03>
- Meghaghi, S., & Bensafa, A. (2024). Designing an ESP course for finance and banking: The case of 1st year master students at Abou Bekr Belkaid university. *Akofena: Revue Scientifique Des Sciences Du Langage, Lettres, Langues & Communication*, 6(14), 129–148. <https://doi.org/10.48734/akofena>
- Papadima-Sophocleous, & Pappa, G. (2019). Embedding a serious game into an ESP curriculum. In S. Papadima-Sophocleous, E. K. Constantinou, & C. N. Giannikas (Eds.), *ESP Teaching and Teacher Education: Current Theories and Practices* (pp. 111–130). Research-publishing.net.
- Poedjiastutie, D. (2017). The pedagogical challenges of English for specific purposes (ESP) teaching at the University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia. *Journal of Educational Research and Reviews*, 12(6), 338–349.
- Pomat, N. (2025). Corpus-based word usage in social media marketing and e-commerce: Developing word lists and a proposedly designed teaching. *Higher Education Studies*, 15(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v15n1p1>
- Simaremare, Y. N., Sinambela, E., & Manik, S. (2023). Students needs analysis of business English at ESP class for business administration department at Nommensen HKBP university. *Cetta: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 6(4), 687–700.
- Sinclair, J. (1991). Evaluating-instances. In J. Sinclair & R. Carter (Eds.), *Corpus Concordance Collocation* (pp. 27–36). Oxford University Press.
- Sukman, K., Triwatwaranon, W., Munkongdee, T., & Chumnumnawin, N. (2022). A corpus-based study of keywords found in online business news articles. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, 7(3), 59–72. <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejel.v7i3.4275>
- Valipouri, L., & Nassaji, H. (2013). A corpus-based study of academic vocabulary in chemistry research articles. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 12(4), 248–263. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2013.07.001>
- Yaacob, Z., & Saad, N. H. M. (2020). Acceptance of youtube as a learning platform during the covid-19 pandemic: The moderating effect of subscription status. *TEM Journal*, 9(4), 1732–1739. <https://doi.org/10.18421/TEM94-54>

## CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR AND FRAMING ANALYSIS OF CLIMATE CHANGE DISCOURSE IN CHINESE NEWS ARTICLES

**Chunxiang Zhou\*, Kasim, Z. M., and Mohd Hanafiah, H. A.**

*Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.*

E-mail: katezhou66@gmail.com

\*Corresponding author

### ABSTRACT

Exploring how conceptual metaphors and metaphor-based frames shape public understanding of climate change in China is crucial. While climate change is a constant topic in Chinese media, there is a clear gap in understanding how metaphors are specifically used to influence this discourse, especially across different types of news outlets. The research delved into this by employing a corpus-based approach to analyse climate change articles from a local and a government-backed Chinese newspaper. The critical metaphor analysis and framing analysis have been utilised to pinpoint the key metaphorical strategies at play. Findings revealed differences in how these publications metaphorically frame climate change, likely reflecting their distinct audiences and editorial goals. One newspaper tended to employ metaphors that make climate change feel more immediate and emotionally impactful, aiming to encourage public engagement. The other, however, favoured metaphors that presented climate change as a long-term, systemic challenge, aligning with broader policy discussions.

### KEYWORDS

climate change; conceptual metaphor; framing analysis; critical metaphor analysis; Chinese media discourse

### ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*

Received: 1 July 2025

Accepted: 20 July 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

As one of the most important issues in the world, climate change is being discussed across nations. Media outlets are important channels for the public to perceive this issue. To make the abstract term accessible and understandable for readers, tools of conceptual metaphors are employed by the media. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) expanded the metaphor theory that metaphors are not just language decorations, they also organize how people think and act. Metaphors in the discourse of climate change can stimulate public emotion, raise their awareness and motivate their action.

Just as Stockmann (2013) has proved that Chinese media operate in a hybrid model combining official media and nonofficial media in China. Different media outlets in China have diverse media structures. It means that climate discourses may vary in different parts of the country. Local media usually focus on getting people involved in their communities, but newspapers that are sponsored by the government usually follow the government's official policy stories. Nonetheless, research regarding the effectiveness of metaphors across various media narratives remains scarce.

This study seeks to address the research gap by comparing the metaphorical representations of climate change in two Chinese newspapers—one operated by the government and the other by a local entity. It endeavours to address the subsequent questions: 1) What conceptual metaphors are used in each outlet to frame climate change? 2) What are the differences between these metaphorical frames?

## RELATED LITERATURE

Studies have examined the role of metaphors from environmental discourse in western countries. For example, Woods and Coen (2012) discussed religious metaphors used in UK newspapers to denigrate climate change. Shaw and Nerlich (2015) examined the function of climate change metaphors in scientific and communicative fields from 63 documents in 9 international institutions. Besides that, there are some studies exploring further about the types of climate change metaphors. For example, Atanasova and Koteyko (2017) mentioned that different metaphors like war metaphors and religion metaphors have different influences on shaping public perception of climate change, particularly when used in news contexts in the UK. To address the gap of few studies concerning about non-western countries, this study enhances existing research by analyzing metaphorical framings in different media outlets in China. It is expected to provide a more nuanced comprehension of the influence of metaphor usage on climate discourse in China.

## METHODS

The research employs a corpus-assisted methodology that integrates conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) and framing theory (Entman, 1993). The articles came from two newspapers: one run by the local media and one run by the central government. The study lasted from 2020 to 2022, which included climate reporting during the pandemic.

We made two sub-corpora with the words “global warming,” “climate change,” and “carbon neutrality.” One had 98 articles from *Sixth Tone* and the other had 684 articles from *China Daily*. The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) was employed to identify potential

metaphors. After that, recurring metaphors were sorted into groups based on source domains, and their framing purposes were carefully examined.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Sixth Tone* used a lot of strong and emotional metaphors. Some of the most common metaphors were war (like “fight climate threats” and “battle against warming”) and disaster (like “the wrath of extreme weather” and “rising seas engulfing cities”). The war metaphor made people look like fighters and pushed them to act individually or as a group. And the disaster metaphors made climate change an urgent external threat that needed to be dealt with right away.

*China Daily*, on the other hand, favoured metaphors that were based on structure and policy. It used journey metaphors (like “roadmap to carbon neutrality” and “low-carbon goal”) and building metaphors (like “climate threshold” and “a pillar of global climate cooperation”). These metaphors say that dealing with climate change is a long-term project that is guided by governmental leadership and long-term strategic planning.

In terms of climate change as war metaphors, the framing process may highlight “danger” or “mobilization” based on different contexts. In the local newspaper *Sixth Tone*, the metaphorical expressions (such as, “the risk of climate change is all round us”) intends to raise public awareness by making climate risks seem more real and personal. These metaphors make people feel scared and like they need to act right away, which changes how they act and how involved they are in their communities. Thus, using the danger frame is an effective way to arouse the local community’s emotion towards climate change and encourage them to take action.

On the contrary, in the state-run newspaper, *China Daily*, metaphorical expressions within the metaphorical frame of climate change is war emphasize rallying forces to address climate change. The mobilization frame is formed by the process of selecting words, like “declared war” on pollution or “crack down” on polluters. These metaphors call on action to adopt strategies or policies to address climate change. Therefore, although the discourse of climate change in both newspapers share the same original domain of war, they frame the same issue in different ways by highlighting different aspects.

The two newspapers influence how the public understands climate change by employing different kinds of metaphors and frames. The state-run newspaper frames climate change as a strategic issue, which may be relieved through a long-term plan. In contrast, the local newspaper frames it as an urgent moral problem, using emotional metaphors to highlight the threat brought by climate change.

## CONCLUSION

This research elucidates the metaphorical framing of climate change across various media types in China. State-run media *China Daily* employs systemic, strategic metaphors that correspond with policy objectives, whereas local media *Sixth Tone* utilizes urgent, emotive metaphors to stimulate individual involvement. These trends demonstrate a spectrum of communicative techniques at different media levels.

This study enhances our understanding of how China formulates climate discourse through the analysis of metaphor usage across diverse media. The local newspaper attempts to arouse public attention by taking advantage of its close relationship with the community, which is consistent with Spence, Poortinga and Pidgeon’s study that lower psychological distance may

increase the public's concern about climate change (Spence, Poortinga & Pidgeon, 2012). Conversely, *China Daily* tries to shape climate change as a manageable issue to appeal for international cooperation. Subsequent research may further examine audience response, social media integration, or corpus expansion.

## REFERENCES

- Atanasova, D., & Kotevko, N. (2017). Metaphors in Guardian Online and Mail Online opinion-page content on climate change: War, religion, and politics. *Environmental Communication*, 11(4), 452-469.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Towards clarification of a fractured paradigm. *McQuail's reader in mass communication theory*, 390, 397.
- Group, P. (2007). MIP: A method for identifying metaphorically used words in discourse. *Metaphor and symbol*, 22(1), 1-39.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2008). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago press.
- Lakoff, G. (2010). Why it matters how we frame the environment. *Environmental communication*, 4(1), 70-81.
- Shaw, C., & Nerlich, B. (2015). Metaphor as a mechanism of global climate change governance: A study of international policies, 1992–2012. *Ecological Economics*, 109, 34-40.
- Spence, A., Poortinga, W., & Pidgeon, N. (2012). The psychological distance of climate change. *Risk Analysis: An International Journal*, 32(6), 957-972.
- Stockmann, D. (2013). *Media commercialization and authoritarian rule in China*. Cambridge University Press.
- Woods, R., Fernández, A., & Coen, S. (2012). The use of religious metaphors by UK newspapers to describe and denigrate climate change. *Public Understanding of Science*, 21(3), 323-339.

## TIMELESS TEACHINGS FOR A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT: ECOLOGICAL ETHICS IN *THIRUKKURAL*

**Ankita, Priyadarshini\* and Mohammed Akhtar, Jamal Khan**

*Nagaland University (A Central University), Kohima Campus, Nagaland, 797004, India.*

E-mail: ankitapshi06@gmail.com

\*Corresponding author

### ABSTRACT

In the contemporary era of environmental catastrophe, ancient knowledge forms a powerhouse of countermeasures to mitigate the hazardous crisis by offering profound sustainable measures and insights for the future generations. The Tamil classical manuscript called *Thirukkural*, written by the revered sage and visionary named Thiruvalluvar, also addressed as “The weaver of Mylapore” forms the apex and divine manifestation of mankind’s intellections. Additionally, it is embedded deeply within the ecological morals. This paper studies the ecoethics of *Thirukkural* translated by Rev. W. H. Drew and Rev. John Lazarus by establishing its resonance with environmental ethics. Theoretically, the paper is embedded in the modern ecological models of deep ecology and ecocentrism, driving away from the anthropocentric issues. Conceptually, the paper studies Thiruvalluvar’s teachings on self-restraint (iyalbu), non-violence (ahimsa), righteousness (aram), wealth (porul), love (inbam) and a spiritual approach drawing their parallelism to modern ecological sustainability. By endorsing the concepts of conservatism and cautious resource efficiency for the next generation, the teachings of Thiruvalluvar promise an ecotopian future deeply embedded within the ecoethical virtues. The golden verses of the *Thirukkural* present Nature as a living entity, which need to be treated with reverence, instructing the lawmakers, in building a strong foundation for a sustainable environment. This paper contributes to a discourse on the universal indigenous wisdom by emphasizing on the need of a sustainable environment which is dependent on the human attributes that colonize the environment. Hence *Thirukkural* emphasizes on the human virtues and values.

### KEYWORDS

*Thirukkural*; ecological ethics; sustainable environment; ecotopia; indigenous wisdom

### ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*

Received: 25 July 2025

Accepted: 7 August 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

Ecological devastation, weather change and habitat destruction raise questions on mankind's role in environmental conservation. The present discourses on sustainability offer technological solutions and regulatory measures but the ancient philosophical scriptures remain unexplored. This paper explains how the ancient texts align with the contemporary sustainable principles to pave the pathway for a more developed and reliable future.

## RELATED LITERATURE

Ecological Ethics has originated as a multidisciplinary field which blends theology, philosophy, sociology and environmental studies. Prominent philosophers like Arne Naess (deep ecology), Murray Bookchin (social ecology) and Vandana Shiva (Ecofeminism) have shifted their views towards ancient religious texts and criticised the anthropocentric worldviews. *Thirukkural* is an ancient Tamil masterpiece providing insights on moral wisdom, virtue, wealth and love, blending social, ethical, political and spiritual guidance for righteous living.

## METHODS

This study uses analytical and comparative approaches. Selected Kurals (couplets) from the book are critically scrutinized through five ecocritical prisms:

- **Deep Ecology** (value for all lives and non-violent simple lifestyle)
- **Spiritual Ecology** (nature's sanctity and holy interrelation)
- **Ecofeminism** (non-hierarchical ethics, compassion)
- **Ecocentrism** (moral concern, interconnectedness)
- **Assessment of anthropocentrism** (selflessness, biocentrism and co-dependence)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Ecoethics embedded in the *Thirukkural*

Ecoethics is the portmanteau term for the word Ecological ethics or Environmental ethics. It is the field that is focused on the values and morals which meet the ethical obligations of humans and their actions towards the natural environment. Ecoethics is a multidisciplinary field which encompasses various areas and their relationships like scientific, ethical, aesthetic, political, economic, and religious (Botzler and Armstrong, 2). It identifies truly that humans are linked to the environment. *Thirukkural* is divided into three parts or books and Thiruvalluvar begins the couplet of book 1 named 'Code of Ethics' (*Arathu Pal*) by saying, everything begins with the letter A in all languages, henceforth the world begins with the Eternal God in Kural 1 (Drew & Lazarus, 70). This statement not only presents the prominence of the Divine, but places nature as the supreme and the beginning of all creation.

### Deep Ecology: Respect for all living forms

Deep Ecology is a concept introduced by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess which is a movement and not merely a theoretical framework. It challenges the dominant Western philosophies and examines the assumptions that frame man's relationship with nature. Naess

expounded the ecosophy, “Ecosophy T”, based on the notion of extending the far – reaching, global enlightenment which focused on co-dependence with nature rather than controlling it (Naess, 437). Certain Kurals reflect the biocentric doctrines. Kural 321 mentions, it is the conduct of the virtuous men to not get involved in the acts of killing which leads to the destruction of life (Drew & Lazarus, 255). This suggests the ethical duties towards all sentient beings. In Kural 251, the author says, he who nourishes his own flesh by eating the meat of other living beings can never be filled with empathy and compassion (Drew & Lazarus, 195). Here, the author mentions symmetrical ecological karma and promotes vegetarianism.

### **Spiritual Ecology: Cosmic tapestry of ecosystem**

Spiritual ecology blends ecological consciousness and spiritual veneration. The idea of spiritual ecology was expounded by Matthew T. Fox and its fourfold path of Via Positiva, Via Negativa, Via Creativa and Via Transformativa can be applied to the text. Kural 559 states about how if the ruler acts in opposition to the right path, then the rains would occur irregularly and the heavens would suppress the torrent (Drew & Lazarus, 350). This statement relates to ecological destruction with moral corruption.

### **Ecofeminism and human-nature interdependence**

Ecofeminists like Karen Warren propounded how the exploitation of nature is paralleled to the transgression of deprived areas of society, especially women. She gave her own analysis of Ecofeminism and revealed the “connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature” (Warren, 471). In *Thirukkural*, women are presented as sustainers of life. Kurals 53 and 55 emphasize on women’s chastity and greatness. Men are praised for their responsibility towards family; similarly women are glorified for their devotion towards husbands. In Kural 55, “If she, who may not worship God, but on rising, worships her husband, says, “let it rain”, it will rain.” (Drew & Lazarus, 55). This parallels a virtuous woman’s role towards life-giving rains, and restorative forces of nature.

### **Ecocentrism: Non-violence and harmony with nature**

Ecocentrism is based on the concept that every being within this ecological cycle possesses some built-in or intrinsic quality. Ecocentrism is divided into two kinds: the land ethic and deep ecology. Both of these concepts, i.e., Aldo Leopold’s land ethic and Arne Naess’s deep ecology can be applied to the narrative. Aldo Leopold’s interpretation mentions everything is true and just if it conserves the morality, ethicality and beauty of the domain. The idea of Deep Ecology has been explained previously which intrinsically deals with the environmental problems (Botzler and Armstrong, 408). Ecocentrism also reflects on the basic lifestyle and minimal way of living emphasizing more on the sustainability of life. In Kural 477, a man should know the measure of his capability to give, and this is the way of conserving his wealth (Drew & Lazarus, 309). It talks about how a man should learn how to live within his natural method or means of living.

### **Critique for anthropocentrism**

Anthropocentrism refers to a man-centric environment where human needs overpower the moral environment. An important contribution in this field was made by Bryon G. Norton. According to Norton, anthropocentrism is divided into two types: weak and strong. Strong

anthropocentrism favours nature only for its usefulness and adaptability. On the other hand, weak anthropocentrism provides a more luscious and ethically sustainable doctrine. It recognizes the functional methods and values all the work that goes behind the ecological process. This leads to the enhancement of the weak anthropocentrism as it deepens and strengthens the relationship between mankind and the environment (Norton, 313-315). In Kural 327, the writer mentions that no one should do anything that leads to the end of another person's life because in doing so he is ruining his own (Drew & Lazarus, 233). This couplet acts as a need to practice non-violence amongst beings to extend their lifespan and intrinsic worth.

## CONCLUSION

*Thirukkural* is not just a guide towards a personal and moral virtue but is a powerhouse of ecological wisdom towards an ecological living. It teaches not just to live righteously but to accept and practice the righteous living. It demands for a responsible lifestyle that restores interconnectedness and empathy for all living beings. With the rise in the climatic crisis, one must turn towards the holistic ethical lens. The couplet in the narrative embraces not only the values but asks the beings to preserve the earth and environment for the welfare of humanity. They challenge the anthropocentric lifestyle and disregard human superiority and promote mutual reverence towards all.

## REFERENCES

- Botzler, Richard G. & Susan J. Armstrong. *Environmental Ethics*. McGraw- Hill, 1998.
- Drew, W.H. & John Lazarus. *Thirukkural*. Narmadha, 2023.
- Naess, Arne. (1998). "The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Perspectives" In Botzler, Richard G. and Susan J. Armstrong. Ed. *Environmental Ethics*. McGraw- Hill, pp. 437- 448
- Norton, Bryan.G. "Environment Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism" In Botzler, Richard G. and Susan J. Armstrong. Ed. *Environmental Ethics*. McGraw- Hill. 1998, p. 313-315
- Warren, Karen J. "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism" In Botzler, Richard G. and Susan J. Armstrong. Ed. *Environmental Ethics*. McGraw- Hill, 1998, p. 471

## **THE PRICE OF HIS FREEDOM: BLACK FEMALE SUFFERING IN *DJANGO UNCHAINED* (2012)**

**Chuo Hui San**

*Swinburne University of Technology Sarawak, 93350 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia.*

E-mail: adelinechuo2000@gmail.com

### **ABSTRACT**

*Django Unchained* (2012) by Quentin Tarantino reimagines the Western genre while challenging the conventional boundaries of race, violence and masculinity. Broomhilda von Shaft, as the centre of the narrative, represents a Black slave woman whose name and role reference the Germanic myth of Brünnhilde. This paper examines the ways in which Broomhilda's character both subverts and reinforces the traditional damsel-in-distress trope, a role historically portrayed by white women in Western cinema. The study delves into Tarantino's portrayals of Black womanhood through the intersection of race and gender, analysing Broomhilda's limited agency and her role as the central catalyst for Django's narrative. Through qualitative content analysis, key scenes are examined to consider how mythology depicts Broomhilda's captivity and rescue, highlighting the Western genre's inherently masculine and violent nature. The findings suggest that while the film critiques racial violence and the institutionalisation of slavery, it simultaneously upholds the historical erasure of Black women's voices by relegating Broomhilda to a passive role. The discussion highlights whether invoking the Brünnhilde myth elevates her narrative significance or merely confines her within a patriarchal framework that perceives her as a symbolic prize within a male-driven revenge fantasy. Ultimately, this study engages with the discourse on gender and race in film by interrogating how *Django Unchained* contributes to the representation of Black women in both Western and historical narratives.

### **KEYWORDS**

Western genre; racialised violence; Black womanhood; damsel-in-distress; intersectionality

### **ARTICLE INFO**

*Article history:*

Received: 3 July 2025

Accepted: 30 July 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

In a pivotal scene of Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* (2012), the audience meets Broomhilda (Kerry Washington), the enslaved wife of Django (Jamie Foxx), a free black man turned bounty hunter. At the Candyland Plantation, owned by Calvin Candie (Leonardo DiCaprio), Django discovers Broomhilda confined in an iron hot box, a punishment ordered by the house slave, Stephen (Samuel L. Jackson). The scene begins with melancholic music, establishing an emotional atmosphere as Django prepares to reunite with his long-separated wife. Four white male workers follow Candie's command to release her. The camera zooms in on Django's anxious expression before cutting to the hot box. When the lid is lifted, Broomhilda is revealed, naked and drenched in sweat and tears. One of the men splashes water onto her body, prompting a scream that reflects both physical pain and emotional trauma.

This scene exemplifies Broomhilda's role in the film as a symbol of Black female suffering. Her nakedness recalls the historical violence inflicted on enslaved women, aligning with bell hooks's observation that "the nakedness of the African female served as a constant reminder of her sexual vulnerability" (18). Yet, even as *Django Unchained* engages with the racial history of American slavery, it reproduces gendered silences. Within the Western genre, Broomhilda fits the damsel-in-distress trope: she's more an object of rescue than an agent of liberation. This reflects Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, in which women are positioned as passive visual and narrative objects (837). Washington's casting and Broomhilda's portrayal as silent, beautiful, and imperilled reinforce this framing. As Celeste Doaks notes, the trope rarely includes Black womanhood (109). Therefore, this paper argues that *Django Unchained* reinforces the damsel trope by centering Broomhilda's trauma as a catalyst for Django's revenge, rather than granting her meaningful agency. Through scene analysis, the paper demonstrates how the film's racial imagination remains constrained by gendered conventions that silence Black women's voices.

## RELATED LITERATURE

The representation of Black women in film is shaped by intersecting racial and gendered stereotypes. bell hooks argues that the erasure of Black female agency under slavery still informs cultural narratives, where Black women's suffering is often used to elevate male trauma (hooks 20–21). Laura Mulvey similarly critiques mainstream cinema for positioning women as passive subjects of the male gaze (837), a dynamic reflected in *Django Unchained* through Broomhilda's visual objectification and narrative silence. Scholars like Celeste Doaks note the rarity of the Black damsel figure in Hollywood and how Broomhilda inherits both white feminine tropes and Black female suffering (Doaks 109), while Solis argues that even revisionist stories often maintain women's objectified roles (Solis 5). Her name, referencing the Valkyrie Brünnhilde, a figure of agency and rebellion, further underscores the contrast between mythic autonomy and cinematic passivity, revealing how *Django Unchained* reimagines but ultimately recycles racial and gendered genre conventions.

## METHODS

This study employs qualitative content analysis informed by feminist film theory and intersectional critique to examine how *Django Unchained* constructs the character of Broomhilda through visual framing, narrative function, and symbolic references. Using a

comparative approach, the paper contrasts Broomhilda with two paradigms: historical enslaved women and mythic female figures. Compared to Harriet Jacobs, who authored her own liberation narrative (Foster 72), Broomhilda is denied agency and voice. Similarly, while the Valkyrie Brünnhilde actively defies divine authority (Byock 34), Broomhilda remains narratively passive, serving as Django's emotional catalyst. Key scenes such as the hot box punishment at Candyland and the Carrucan flashback are analysed for how camera work, sound, and character silence reinforce or challenge racial and gendered tropes in the Western genre.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tarantino's casting of a Black woman as the Western's damsel-in-distress in *Django Unchained* represents a surface-level innovation that ultimately reinforces, rather than revolutionizes, racial and gendered cinematic tropes. As scholar Michael Solis writes: "... ordinary damsels in the typical comic book storyline, as well as female superheroes, generally share the same objectifying fate, that is, scopophilic gratification for the male dominated audience" (5). In *Django Unchained*, Broomhilda, who is named after the Norse Valkyrie Brünnhilde, functions similarly, with her narrative revolving around Django's emotional development and masculine motivation. This aligns with Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, where the female figure is styled and framed for visual pleasure: "the male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly... coded for strong visual and erotic impact" (837). Kerry Washington's portrayal of Broomhilda emphasizes suffering through visual cues like close-ups of her tear-streaked face, exposed scars, and near-nude whipping scenes. These images heighten emotional impact, reinforcing Mulvey's claim that women are positioned as passive spectacles. As Doaks notes, this objectification is further complicated when applied to Black women, for whom the damsel trope remains critically unexamined (109).

Django's heroic arc is driven by Broomhilda's eroticized and racialized suffering, such as Candie's threats of sexual violence and her punishment in the hot box. Her body becomes a projection surface for Django's love, Candie's cruelty, and Schultz's paternalism, thus repeating intersectional oppression. Despite its revisionist framing, Tarantino's portrayal of Broomhilda reaffirms sexist-racist ideologies. As hooks explains, slavery's trauma is often centered around Black male emasculation, while Black women's pain is treated as incidental (20). Django's quest is framed not just as a love story but as a journey to reclaim manhood through rescuing his wife. Where historical figures like Harriet Jacobs narrated their own resistance, Broomhilda's silence reflects cinema's tendency to privilege male redemption over female agency.

This dynamic is clearest in the flashback during Django's first bounty hunt at Big Daddy's (Don Johnson) plantation. He recalls their failed escape from the Carrucan Plantation, where Broomhilda was whipped while Django begged for mercy. The flashback serves as emotional fuel for Django's vengeance. The camera lingers on Broomhilda's punishment; her screams dominate the soundscape, yet she is voiceless. Her pain deepens Django's humiliation, not her own narrative. This supports hooks's argument that "the subjugation of Black women was essential to the Black male's development of a positive self-concept" (20–21). Django's masculinity is reasserted through violence, while Broomhilda's trauma remains silent. Unlike Brünnhilde, the Valkyrie who defies Odin, Broomhilda never escapes her damsel role, as her suffering serves Django's empowerment, not her own liberation.

Though Django's revenge may feel empowering, it reduces Broomhilda to a symbolic role. *Django Unchained* unintentionally replicates the very structures of erasure it seeks to

critique. By centering Django's catharsis, the film continues the marginalization of Black women's trauma, even in narratives about racial justice.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Django Unchained* positions itself as a revisionist Western that challenges America's racial past, yet it ultimately falls short of reimagining gendered dynamics. While the film critiques slavery and celebrates Black male resistance, it does so by rendering Broomhilda a silent emblem of suffering. Through close analysis, this paper has shown how Tarantino's portrayal reinforces rather than subverts the traditional damsel-in-distress trope, framing Broomhilda's trauma as the emotional engine for Django's masculine journey. Her lack of voice, agency, and narrative presence echoes historical and cinematic patterns that marginalize Black women's experiences. By comparing Broomhilda to both historical figures like Harriet Jacobs and mythic counterparts like Brünnhilde, the film's failure to grant her liberation or complexity becomes stark. Although Tarantino revisits racial injustice, his depiction of Black womanhood remains constrained by spectacle and silence. Therefore, *Django Unchained* reflects the continued need for intersectional storytelling that centers, rather than sidelines, Black female subjectivity.

## REFERENCES

- Byock, Jesse L. *The Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer*. Translated by Jesse L. Byock, University of California Press, 1990.
- Doaks, Celeste. "(Dis) Robing Django Unchained: The Black Damsel in Distress as a Progressive Image." *African American Culture and Society After Rodney King*. Routledge, 2016. 109-122.
- Foster, Frances Smith. *Written by Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746–1892*. Indiana University Press, 1993.
- hooks, bell. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. South End Press, 1981.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 6th ed., Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 833–44.
- Solis, Michael A. *The damsel in distress: rescuing women from American mythology*. Diss. Rutgers University-Camden Graduate School, 2017.
- Tarantino, Quentin, director. *Django Unchained*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

## INTERROGATING BIOPOWER AND CLIMATE MIGRATION IN PAOLO BACIGALUPI'S *THE WATER KNIFE*

**Li He, Mohammad Ewan Awang\*, and Zainor Izat Zainal**  
*Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.*  
E-mail: ewan@upm.edu.my

### ABSTRACT

Biopower, a defining feature of modern governance, plays a central role in regulating populations and managing crises, including those brought about by environmental collapse. This paper examines Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* (2015), a contemporary climate novel that imagines a drought-stricken future in which survival is dictated by biopolitical control. Set in a near-future American Southwest devastated by drought, the novel depicts a society where corporate and powerful state actors, media and legal infrastructures tightly regulate access to water, movement, and identity, which further exacerbates inequalities. Using Michel Foucault's theory of biopower, this study investigates how *The Water Knife* illustrates the uneven distribution of survival and mobility under conditions of ecological breakdown. It investigates the systems that contribute to large-scale displacement in the novel, as desperate migrants attempt to cross militarised borders and face fatal conditions. Through these systems and technologies, the novel portrays climate migration as a politically engineered process that reinforces existing societal inequalities. In the novel, the legal frameworks surrounding water access are depicted as intensifying regional conflicts in the American Southwest, as well as the tension between Native American communities and incoming migrants. This study contributes to the growing scholarship on climate fiction by exploring how *The Water Knife* imagines the ethical and political dimensions of displacement in a biopolitical age. It also highlights the novel's relevance in understanding how power, policy, and environmental crisis intersect in informing the futures of migrant populations.

### KEYWORDS

Paolo Bacigalupi; *The Water Knife*; biopower; climate migration; climate fiction

### ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*

Received: 7 July 2025

Accepted: 27 July 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

Climate migration is a recurring theme in twenty-first-century climate fiction, in which environmental collapse intersects with political control and social inequality. Using Foucault's theory of biopower, this article explores how Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* (2015) reveals disparities in mobility and the struggle for survival in the context of ecological collapse. Furthermore, it examines the systems of power that contribute to large-scale displacement in the novel, as well as the ways characters and communities enact resistance and agency within these systems. Set in the arid American Southwest, Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* (2015) explores the effects of water scarcity on mass displacement, survival, and control. Migrants from Texas move northward, forced to cross militarised borders amid intensifying ecological collapse. While the narrative follows three central characters —Angel, an enforcer for the Southern Nevada Water Authority; Lucy, a Phoenix-based journalist; and Maria, a displaced Texan refugee — the novel's broader concern lies in how power operates through infrastructure, surveillance, and legal manipulation. Their intersecting stories expose the extractive logic of drought-era governance and dramatise the workings of biopower: the ability to “make live and let die” (Foucault 1975–76, trans. 2003).

Rather than focusing solely on individual heroism or agency, the novel foregrounds systemic inequality and collective precarity shaped by overlapping mechanisms of control. While previous studies examine the novel through postcolonialism, ecocriticism, and infrastructure studies, focusing on catastrophic irrealism, dystopian form, and extractivist infrastructure, there remains a gap in research on the relationship between biopower and climate migration. This study, therefore, builds on Foucault's theory of biopower to examine the governance of migrants and the resistance of displaced populations in the novel.

## RELATED LITERATURE

Previous studies on migration in climate fiction focus on narrative exploration (De Bruyn 2020), imaginative failures (Yazell 2020), and multi-species co-migrations and interdependence (Boehm-Schnitker 2024). Although scholars have emphasized the role of policies in mitigating migration, the connection between biopower and migration in climate fiction remains unexplored.

There have been many discussions on *The Water Knife* through the lenses of postcolonialism (Nayar 2024), ecocriticism (Perrin 2020), infrastructure studies (Rowan 2021), and sociological imagination (Yazell 2020). Nayar (2024) examines white people's exploitation of Native Americans and the disastrous effects of catastrophic irrealism in the novel from a postcolonial perspective. Perrin (2020) compares this novel with Benjamin Percy's *Dead Lands*, revealing its dystopian mode of depicting ecological crisis through the lens of ecocriticism. Rowan (2021) analyses how capitalism's extractivist infrastructure exploits human and environmental resources through “deep infrastructural ethics” in infrastructure studies. Yazell (2020) investigates how representations of future climate migration contribute to imaginative failure in the novel, drawing on Wright Mills's sociological imagination and Kim Stanley Robinson's “ease of representation”. Moreover, Yazell focuses on narrative methods in American climate fiction, demonstrating that readers in the Global North lag behind in recognition of climate migration. Despite Yazell's article on climate migration, there is a scarcity of research on the connection between biopower and migration in the novel. Thus, this research delves into their interplay using Foucault's theory of biopower.

## METHODS

This study adopts textual analysis as its primary method and investigates how dominant powers in the novel exert control over mobility, access to resources, and bodily autonomy through Foucault's theory of biopower. According to Foucault (1978), biopower develops along two forms: disciplinary power, exercised through institutions like schools and the military; and regulatory power, applied to populations through statistics, public health, and demography. In the novel, biopower is symbolised by the authorities' regulation of migrants through militarised borders, surveillance technologies, and movement restrictions. This study also examines how migrants react, resist, or subvert these systems of control. For historical context, it refers to Donald Worster's *Rivers of Empire* (1985) and Marc Reisner's *Cadillac Desert* (1993), which analyse the legal and infrastructural dynamics of water management in the American Southwest. These texts provide critical insights into how the novel extrapolates real-world policies to imagine a dystopian regime of biopolitical governance.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The effects of biopower on climate migration in *The Water Knife* manifest in three ways. Firstly, militarised borders function as tools of regulatory power, restricting the movement of Texans through high-security measures, such as "high-voltage warnings" and aerial surveillance by drones (Bacigalupi, 209). Secondly, technological surveillance reflects disciplinary control over individual bodies, with biometric systems, such as "security guards, swipe cards, fingerprints" (Bacigalupi, 89), which limit access to arcologies and regulate movement. Thirdly, resource hoarding exemplifies biopower's management of populations through access to life-sustaining resources. Structural inequality is reinforced through characters such as Catherine Case, head of the Southern Nevada Water Authority, who monitors "real-time data feeds" and trades water futures "via NASDAQ" (Bacigalupi, 7). While the wealthy inhabit self-sustaining arcologies, the poor are left to seek an oasis of life. These mechanisms of control, through border militarisation, surveillance, and resource management, demonstrate how the novel dramatises Foucault's biopolitical logic of the regulation of life and death.

Migrants' resistance to biopolitical control in *The Water Knife* is represented in three ways. Firstly, people smuggling networks offer alternative routes across militarised borders. The migrants bypass state regulation in response to weak federal governance and economic collapse. Texans pay coyotes to cross northward in search of survival (Bacigalupi, 87), resisting the regulatory dimension of biopower. Secondly, visual propaganda and advertisement, such as billboards featuring the Taiyang Arcology and a rising fiery bird, invoke aspirational imaginaries that stir collective desire and unrest, which challenge the narrative monopoly of dominant powers (Bacigalupi, 100). Thirdly, migrants invoke legal frameworks to claim rights and resources. The doctrine of "prior appropriation" in the Colorado River Compact grants precedence to original water users (Worster, 1985), and in the novel, Maria protects documents that symbolise Indigenous claims to water. These acts of resistance confront biopower by asserting agency within and against the authorities' systems of control used to regulate life, movement, and survival.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates how Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* portrays the dominant power's governance over climate migrants and the resistance enacted by marginalised communities in response. It shows the interplay between biopower and climate migration in the novel. On one hand, authorities exert biopolitical control through militarised borders, technological surveillance, and resource hoarding. On the other hand, climate migrants resist through people smuggling, advertisement-driven aspiration, and invocation of laws. Foucault's theory of biopower provides a lens to scrutinise the relationship between powerful entities and vulnerable communities, and to interpret the novel's depiction of unequal access to survival, mobility, and justice during ecological crisis. By linking biopower with narrative representations of displacement, control, and resistance, this research extends the theory's application and contributes to the scholarship on climate fiction.

## REFERENCES

- Bacigalupi, Paolo. *The Water Knife*. Vintage Books, 2015.
- Boehm-Schnitker, Nadine. "Trails of Erasure: Imagining the Reality of Co-Migrations in Contemporary Climate Fiction." *Green Letters*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2024, pp. 160-175.
- De Bruyn, Ben. "The Great Displacement: Reading Migration Fiction at the End of the World." *Humanities (Switzerland)*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2020, pp. 1-16.
- Foucault, Michel. *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*. Translated by David Macey, Picador, 2003.
- . *The History of Sexuality*. Translated by Robert Hurley, vol. 1, Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Nayar, Pramod K. *Vulnerable Earth: The Literature of Climate Crisis*. Cambridge University Press, 2024.
- Perrin, Claire. "Negotiating Water in Times of Drought: An Ecocritical Study of Cli-fi Novels Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* and Benjamin Percy's *Dead Lands*." *Negotiating Waters: Seas, Oceans, and Passageways in the Colonial and Postcolonial Anglophone World*, edited by André Dodeman and Nancy Pedri, Vernon Press, 2020, pp. 165-179.
- Reisner, Marc. *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water*. Penguin Books, 1993.
- Rowan, Jamin Creed. "The Hard-Boiled Anthropocene and the Infrastructure of Extractivism." *American Literature*, vol. 93, no. 3, 2021, pp. 391-416.
- Worster, Donald. *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*. Pantheon Books, 1985.
- Yazell, Bryan. "A Sociology of Failure: Migration and Narrative Method in US Climate Fiction." *Configurations*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2020, pp. 155-180.

## **ECHOES OF IDENTITY: THE ROLE OF NYOKUM IN PRESERVING NYISHI CULTURE OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

**Minu Sono**

*Binni Yanga Government Women's College, Lekhi, Arunachal Pradesh 791110, India.*

E-mail: drminusono82@gmail.com

### **ABSTRACT**

Nyokum is a significant agricultural festival of the Nyishi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, celebrated annually in February to invoke blessings for prosperity and communal harmony. The festival is characterised by traditional rituals, folk dance, and community feasts, functioning both as a cultural expression and a reaffirmation of the tribe's identity, values, and ancestral connection to land. The term "Nyokum" is derived from two words: "Nyok" meaning the entire landmass, and "Kum" signifying collectiveness. This study investigates the role of the Nyokum festival in preserving the traditional practices and cultural heritage of the Nyishi community. The study relies on primary sources including unstructured interviews and secondary data sources such as books, journals, newspapers, and online materials, the research examines how the celebration serves as a cultural cornerstone amidst the challenges posed by globalisation and rapid modernisation. Findings suggest that Nyokum is more than a seasonal festival; it is a vital socio-cultural institution that ensures continuity and resilience of indigenous identity. The paper concludes that through its vibrant observance, Nyokum sustains the cultural ethos of the Nyishi tribe and reinforces communal solidarity, offering a model for indigenous cultural preservation in a transforming world.

### **KEYWORDS**

Nyishi tribe; identity; Nyokum; culture; preservation; tradition

### **ARTICLE INFO**

*Article history:*

Received: 5 July 2025

Accepted: 5 August 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

The Nyishi tribe is the largest ethnic group in Arunachal Pradesh, both in terms of population and territorial occupation. They have a population of around 3,00,000 (**Statistical Abstract of Arunachal Pradesh**), and are dominant in eight districts of Arunachal Pradesh: East Kameng, Papum Pare, Lower Subansiri, Kurung Kumey, Kra Dadi, Pakke Kessang, Kamle and Upper Subansiri. They are also settled in some districts of Assam, such as Lakhimpur and Sonitpur district of the Assam. Nyishis are known for their rich culture, traditional agriculture practice and unique social structure. Like any other community of the country, Nyishi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh celebrated Nyokum festivals to preserve their own rich culture and heritage. There are three major festivals celebrated across the Nyishis areas of Arunachal Pradesh viz Nyokum Yullo, Boori Boot Yullo and Longte. Among them, the Nyokum is the most important and major festivals of the Nyishis which is celebrated annually month of February (**Hissang,2025**). The word 'Nyokum' is a combination of 'Nyok,' meaning land or earth, and 'Kum,' meaning collectiveness or togetherness. Therefore, the Nyokum festival may be interpreted as inviting all existing spirits on earth at a particular place called Nyokum Lapang where rituals are to be performed. These spirits are worshipped for better productivity, prosperity and happiness of human beings. The tribe's relationship with the land is sacred, and Nyokum reinforces this bond by honouring the deities that protect their livelihoods. Historically, the first recorded collective observance of Nyokum took place in Joram in August 1967. This was followed by another collective observance in Yazali in August 1968. However, the first time Nyokum was celebrated in the month of February was in Doimukh in 1969. Since then, the festival has been observed annually in February. February, known as Limi Pollo in Nyishi, is considered the first month of the year by the Nyishi tribe. This study investigates the role of the Nyokum festival in preserving the traditional practices and cultural heritage of the Nyishi community and examines how the celebration serves as a cultural cornerstone amidst the challenges posed by globalisation and rapid modernisation.

## RELATED LITERATURE

Focusing on the Nyokum festival celebrated by the Nyishi tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, **Sunku, T. (2024)** emphasizes that the festival not only preserves the tribe's rich heritage but also adapts to modern influences, thereby attracting tourism and promoting cultural performances. **Behera, G.K., Pujahari, M., & Murmu, S.C. (2024)** mentioned that festivals provide opportunities for the tribe to come together, reconnect with their heritage, strengthen social bonds, and pass down cultural knowledge to younger generation. **Tarh, R (2019)** revealed in his paper "promoting cultural tourism through traditional festivals among Nyishi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh" that Nyishi traditional festivals embrace diverse cultural activities which together portray the glamour of the people's indigenous way of life. Collectively, these perspectives underscore the multifaceted nature of festivals like Nyokum, which function as cultural touchstones that both honour ancestral traditions and embrace modernity. They serve as vital instruments for cultural preservation, community identity reinforcement, and economic development through tourism.

## METHODS

The author employed a qualitative method, specifically the content analysis technique, to write the paper. The data were gathered from both primary sources including unstructured interviews

with members of the Nyishi tribe and secondary sources includes content analysis of the existing materials such as festival records, media coverage, and relevant academic literature to contextualize and supplement primary findings. The analysis aimed to understand the role of Nyokum in preserving cultural heritage of the Nyishi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, India.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The Nyokum festival, celebrated by the Nyishi of Arunachal Pradesh, is a multi-day event with rituals, offerings, and celebrations. It involves invoking deities, especially Nyokum goddess, and seeking blessings for a bountiful harvest and good health. The festival includes priest, prayer structures, sacrificial animals, traditional attire, and community feasting. However, The Nyokum festival, celebrated by the Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh, is undergoing significant changes due to modernization, acculturation, and the influence of various media sources. These factors are greatly impacting and altering the long-standing traditions of the festival. The influx of modern influences has begun to overshadow the moral and ethnic practices that have been central to the festival for generations. The fundamental values of Nyokum seem to have faded in modern times, because in the past, the festival was celebrated with sincerity, through communal gatherings, sacrificial offerings, and adherence to traditional norms. Some of the notable changes include the upgrading of celebrations from family and village levels to community-wide events, Concept of silver and Golden jubilee are emerged, Traditional songs and dances are being replaced by Bollywood and K-pop numbers, Shift towards merrymaking, Integration of modern trends, Impact of media, Adaptation and preservation, and religious influence.

However, the Nyokum Festival plays a pivotal role in preserving the cultural heritage of the Nyishi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. The Nyokum festival serves as a profound expression of the Nyishi tribe's cultural ethos and ancestral legacy. More than a celebration, it is a dynamic institution that safeguards the community's intangible heritage—its rituals, oral traditions, architecture, social values, and spiritual beliefs. By engaging all generations in shared acts of worship, storytelling, and cultural performance, Nyokum ensures the continuity of Nyishi identity in the face of modern influences. It reinforces communal harmony, respect for elders, reverence for nature, and a deep sense of belonging. In preserving and transmitting the cultural heritage of the Nyishi people, Nyokum stands not only as a symbol of tradition but as a vital force in sustaining the cultural fabric of the community for generations to come.

## **CONCLUSION**

The objective of the study was to examine and analyze the role of Nyokum in preserving cultural heritage of Nyishi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, India. The cultural influences of music, dance, religion, lifestyle, and food culture have gradually brought about significant changes in the way the Nyokum festival is celebrated. However, over the years, the traditional heritage, ideas, meanings, and methods of celebration have undergone drastic change. In this connection, with the increase in the number of academicians, intellectuals, and CBOs, religious leaders of various faith groups of the community, such as the Nyishis Festival Committee, the Central Nyokum Committee, the Nyishis Indigenous Identity Society, the Nyishis Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society, the Nyishis Art & Culture Society, the Nyishis Baptist Church Council, etc, are striving to go back to the original form of Nyokum to keep the olden identity alive, and to preserve and interpret the meaning of Nyokum in a more refined way.

## REFERENCES

- Begi, J. "Nyokum Yullo: The Festival of Nyishings." Nyokum Yullo Celebration Committee, 1997, pp. 1–8.
- Patel, R., and B. Davidsson. *Forskningsmetodikens Grunder*. Studentlitteratur, 2003.
- Pegu, N. *Mising Socio-Religious Life: Continuity and Change*. Dept. of History, Arunachal University, 2005.
- Sunku, T. "Media Influence on Nyokum: Cultural Shifts in the Nyishi Community." *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Arts, Science and Technology (IJMRAST)*, vol. 2, no. 6, June 2024, pp. 42–48. ISSN 2584-0231.
- Behera, Gagan Kumar, et al. "Sacred Celebrations: Exploring Festivals and Ritual Sacrifices among the Kutia Kandhas of Odisha." *Anthropo - Indialogs*, vol. 4, no. 1, June 2024, pp. 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.47509/AI.2024.v04i01.01>.
- Likha, T. "Nyokum Celebration." *The Arunachal Pradesh Times*, 25 Feb. 2025, [arunachaltimes.in/index/2025/02/25/nyokum-celebration-2/](http://arunachaltimes.in/index/2025/02/25/nyokum-celebration-2/).

## ANGAMI NAGA ECOTOPIA IN EASTERINE KIRE'S FICTION

**Nigamananda Das**

*Nagaland University, Nagaland 797004, India.*

E-mail: [nndas@nagalanduniversity.ac.in](mailto:nndas@nagalanduniversity.ac.in)

### ABSTRACT

The paper seeks to analyze three select novels of Easterine Kire, an Angami Naga ethnoecohistorian whose fictional narratives have emphasized on the ecoethical and ecotopian traditions of Angami Naga tribe of India. Reacting to contemporary ecological disasters, Easterine Kire has explored the glorious ecoethical traditions of her tribe in the Naga Hills. The paper will also analyze the idea of Ecotopia depicted in selected novels of Easterine Kire. Like Thomas More's idea of sufficient Utopia, Easterine Kire reveals the Angami Naga Ecotopia in her novels like *Sky is My Father*, *When the River Sleeps* and *Spirit Nights*. The paper will also explore the theory and idea of Ecotopia presented by Ernest Callenbach. Ecotopia is the evergreen natural world of peace and prosperity, which provides stable and happy life for all, where there is no internal dissension to harm anyone. Along with the evergreen environment, the human virtues are honoured in the ecotopia, where the younger generation honours their elders, and the society observes several taboos for the well-being of humanity. The green natural environment is protected, and Nature is not colonized and devastated for the sake of rapid urbanization, causing ecological inequilibrium. Through analysis of themes of the selected novels, the paper will present how contemporary environmental disasters can be managed and ecological stability be maintained. The paper will also define the borders between the natural world and the spirit world, and underline the need of respecting the social taboos, while exploring the unique Angami Ecotopia.

### KEYWORDS

Angami Naga Ecotopia; ecoethics; cultural etiquettes; spirit world

### ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*

Received: 6 July 2025

Accepted: 25 July 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

Ecological Utopia is a panacea for the present era of technotopia, which has been witnessing the ravages of the environment and natural degeneration resulting in myriad devastating effects and health hazards, making the earth unlivable for humanity. We have been continuously going against the designs of the Almighty and harming humanity and other living beings on this earth. We need to follow the ways of Utopia of Sufficiency and reduce our inclination towards the Utopia of Abundance (de Geus 1999:21). The idea of ecotopia as a contrast to technotopia has been desired in the present era of environmental crises due to our ever-overambitious exploitation of nature by degreening it constantly. Regreening extensively is desired to reduce natural calamities and the effects of environmental pollution. Abundant production and consumption must be avoided. Thomas More's *Utopia* is regarded as a foundation stone of the ecological way of thinking. We need to solve the problem of scarcity of means and attain a good life, by satisfying our wants by producing sufficient or desiring little. As per Marshall Sahlins' views on adopting the Zen strategy of enjoying an unparalleled plenty with a low standard of living, we can make ourselves happy and safe (de Geus 1999:21). Our affluent and extravagant way of living is bringing environmental maladies. The aforesaid principles are key features of maintaining an Ecotopia.

## RELATED LITERATURE

Environmental studies in literature have a long tradition and the concepts of Utopia were preconceived during ancient and medieval periods. Marius de Geus in his *Ecological Utopias* (1999) has presented seven different aspects in fifteen chapters to discuss in detail the theory of Ecological Utopia (Ecotopia) taking examples from different Western cultures of the precautionary measures adopted during the post-Industrial revolution era. Marius de Geus also refers to Buddhist traditions where the ecological principles were followed which were healthy. Hence in the present paper three fact-fictional texts of Easterine Kire like *Sky is My Father* (2018), *When the River Sleeps* (2014) and *Spirit Nights* (2022) have been analyzed on the basis of two aspects of Classical Utopias of Sufficiency and Modern Ecological Utopias as Kire's novels blend both the traditions of ecological utopias.

## METHODS

The paper follows a qualitative method of analysis of three novels by Easterine Kire based on the theory of Utopia and Ecotopia propounded by Thomas More and Ernest Callenbach. It also refers to the ecoethical principles of Buddhism, which have frequently been deliberated upon by Marius de Geus while highlighting the culture of Ecotopia. The same has been applied for analysis of the three novels of Easterine Kire on Angami Naga Ecotopia and similar concepts in the Naga ecocultural tradition.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Though *Sky Is My Father* (2018) is a historical fact-fiction narrating the Naga resistance to British colonial exploits on Khonoma village of Nagaland during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it presents the pre-Christian Angami Naga natural life and the testimony of their Utopian cultural excellence. The Angami Ecotopia is a protected green village/ valley with

boundary and village gate called *Kharu*. There are also stone made forts within the territory for self-defense during the enemy attack. The inhabitants live within the territory and go to their fields which are beyond the territory. Rituals are essential features of their Ecotopian life. Appeasing myriad spirits and gods is the most important aspect of Ecotopian life. *Ukepenuopfū* is their Creator deity. Though there are so many spirits in their animist tradition, only the names of *Vo-o*, the spirit propitiated at the seed-sowing ritual, *Chūkhieo*, the spirit guardian of wildlife and the spirit- tiger (weretiger) are mentioned in this novel. *Terhase* is the ritual of making peace with the spirits. The *genna* (no-work) days are to be observed, failing which living peacefully is quite impossible. They celebrate other festivals like *Kelipie*, *Kerütsu*, *Liede*, *Rhoutho* (Ritual of Seed Sowing), *Sekrenyi*, *Terhüny*, *Thekranyi*, and *Tiemvükie* in different times of the year for appeasement of the spirits and gods. At the time of any danger, an Angami seeks protection from his creator deity, *Ukepenuopfū* with the words, “Sky is my father, earth is my mother, I believe in *Kepenuopfū*” (Kire 2018:71).

The Angami Ecotopia in *When the River Sleeps* is his forest abode, and the wilderness presided over by the spirits and wild animals where he lives his life of hunting and gathering along with working in field and rearing animals without doing any disastrous harm to Mother Nature. Vilie was protecting the forest from the hunters and other trespassers. He considered forest as his wife (Kire 2014:9) as the forest gave him shelter and food. In Angami tradition, if they take firewood or herbs from the forest, they acknowledge and give thanks to the Creator deity, *Ukepenuopfū* with the words, “*Terhuomia peziem*” (Kire 2014:80). The Angami Ecotopia is dissimilar with Callenbach’s Ecotopia. It is wild and natural though human aggression upon it is being felt in recent years. The lone Angami hunter, Vilie, sets out to find the Sleeping River and search for the mythical Heart Stone and gets it with much struggle with the Sleeping River.

The warlikeness of the Naga communities was, of course, for punishing the evil. But it is natural also as the territory is inflicted with the spirits and to get rid of them, both in Angami and Chang Ecotopia, the inhabitants have to resort to war. Tola in *Spirit Nights* (2022) explained to Namu how the twenty-two-day darkness was spiritual (Kire 2022: 126). Tola considers their village as their Ecotopia and says, “Your birth mother is the one you call *Anyu*, but we call the village *Kuneibü nyu*, for she is mother of us all. ...*Kuneibü nyu* held us together, giving us her wisdom, and that is how we defeated *Nakyu*.” (Kire 2022: 139). In Naga tradition, it has been an innate attribute to challenge their enemies to safeguard their territory and property. Easterine has compared the Angami ecotopia with Chang Ecotopia, giving a twist in Angami Ecotopia and introducing the idea of near-Apocalypse (twenty-two days of Spirit Nights).

## CONCLUSION

The Angami Ecotopia and ecoethics have ample similarity with the Buddhist attitude to Nature. A simple life with few easily satisfied wants is considered to be an exemplary life. Humans are solely dependent on Nature for fulfilling their needs. Hence human greed and aggressive attitude are detrimental to the future of humanity (de Silva 1998: 285). Through human virtues and our non-violent attitude to all the elements of Nature, we can maintain our Ecotopia for the welfare of all concerned. Along with the evergreen environment, the human virtues are honoured in the Angami ecotopia, where the younger generation honours their elders, and the society observes several taboos for the well-being of humanity. The paper presents how contemporary environmental disasters can be managed and ecological stability be maintained

and defines the borders between the natural world and the spirit world underlining the need of respecting the social taboos, while exploring the unique Angami Ecotopia.

## REFERENCES

Callenbach, Ernest. "The 'stable state' Utopia." *Ecological Utopias*, edited by Marius de Geus International Books, 1999, pp. 169-184.

de Geus, Marius. *Ecological Utopias*. International Books. 1999.

de Silva, Lily. "The Buddhist Attitude toward Nature." *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*, edited by Richard G. Botzler and Susan J. Armstrong. Mc Graw Hill. 1998, pp. 284-289.

Kire, Easterine. *When the River Sleeps*. Zubban, 2014.

---. *Sky is My Father*. Speaking Tiger, 2018.

---. *Spirit Nights*. Simon & Schuster, 2022.

More, Thomas. "The Sufficient Utopia." *Ecological Utopias*, edited by Marius de Geus. International Books, 1999. pp. 59-71.

## **SACRED SPACES IN ZARQA NAWAZ'S *LAUGHING ALL THE WAY TO THE MOSQUE***

**Siti Hawa Muhamad**

*Universiti Islam Selangor, 43000 Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia.*

E-mail: siti.hawa.m@uis.edu.my

### **ABSTRACT**

Sacred spaces play an important role in a Muslim's life. It is also the titular work of Canadian Muslim writer Zarqa Nawaz's memoir, *Laughing All The Way to the Mosque* (2014). The memoir records the author's challenging journey of growing up and living as a Muslim woman in the West where contestations regarding Muslim identities exist both within mainstream society and the Muslim community. This paper then seeks to explore sacred spaces such as the mosque and the holy city of Mecca mentioned deliberately within some chapters of Nawaz's memoir and discuss what they probably mean to the author as a Muslim woman. The discussion is conducted using the lens of Muslim spaces of hope, the concept itself is elaborated by a number of writers in a collection of articles edited by Richard Phillips, *Muslim Spaces of Hope: Geographies of Possibility in Britain and the West* (2009). The findings indicate that although Nawaz at times has an uncomfortable connection with sacred spaces, they hold some spatial meaning and emotional significance to her. To conclude, this study recognizes the construction of Muslim women experience and contributes to the scholarship of minority Muslim women literature.

### **KEYWORDS**

sacred spaces; minority Muslim women; Muslim spaces of hope; Zarqa Nawaz

### **ARTICLE INFO**

*Article history:*

Received: 4 July 2025

Accepted: 21 July 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

For some Muslim minorities, sacred spaces play an important role in their lives. Living in a mainstream Western society brings about significant challenges to some members of this community. They experience issues adapting to the norms of the Western society which are often in stark contrast to the practices of Islam and their heritage culture. Therefore, connecting to sacred spaces such as the mosque anchors their sense of belonging. It becomes a sign of their identity. However at times, they also struggle with maintaining their cultural and Muslim identity even while being within the enclave of their own community. Due to this delicate balancing of identity and belonging, this paper aims to discuss the meaning of sacred spaces to Nawaz as found within her memoir, *Laughing All The Way to the Mosque*, to know what significance do these places hold to her.

## RELATED LITERATURE

*Laughing All The Way to the Mosque* is a collection of Nawaz's personal anecdotes and reflections on her life as a Muslim woman in Canada. It blends humour and serious reflections within the thematic recounting of the author's unique perspectives on identity, culture, and family. Nawaz herself has produced a sitcom, *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, aired in 2007 and dubbed the West's first Muslim sitcom (Friesen 245). With the exception of a few scholarly articles on the sitcom itself, analysis on Nawaz's memoir however is few and far between.

Nevertheless, there are a number of studies on the mosque as sacred spaces, albeit within the fields of human geography. Connection of Muslim communities to the mosque extends beyond it being a place of worship. Rather, it has always been "a sign of belonging and identity" (Radwan 70) where it is a necessary place to either start or settle the Muslim communities in any part of the world. The mosque serves not only spiritual but also functional values as a place that becomes the centre of Muslims' communal activities such as marriages, funerals and even political events (Radwan 70).

For Muslim women, the mosques provide them with a strong sense of belonging which "facilitate women's sharing of experiences" (Jensen & Kofoed 796). They are viewed as "spaces of tranquillity and safe spaces from expectations related to everyday life" (Jensen & Kofoed 797). Therefore, to look at the significance of the mosques in Nawaz's memoir is to open up the possibility of discussing sacred spaces within the literary field.

## METHODS

This study employs textual analysis and adapts the concept of Muslim spaces of hope as elaborated by a few scholars in a collection of articles edited by Richard Phillips, *Muslim Spaces of Hope: Geographies of Possibility in Britain and the West* (2009). The approach is drawn from the field of human geography. According to Phillips (2009), a series of geographies shape and express the experiences of Muslims in Western countries. They face challenges of being negatively labelled as troublesome minorities. The notion of spaces of hope contests this negative label and sets out to find hopeful spaces for the Muslims in many areas of their everyday lives (Phillips 1). One of these hopeful spaces is the mosque.

Ziauddin Sardar, one of the scholars who contributed to Phillips' *Muslim Spaces*, states that the mosques are seen as "a logical progression of belonging," of being at home in the West, and as "the basic necessity for confessional communal survival" where Muslim communities

congregate (Sardar 16). Second and third generations of Muslim minorities are active in the mosque where they transform this space “to articulate their ethnoreligious identities” and “asserting their distinct claims, experiences, and expectations” which are different from their parents and grandparents’ (Ocal & Gokariksel 154). This study recognizes that Nawaz, like other later generations, asserts her experiences as a Muslim minority within the backdrop of the mosques.

Therefore, this study identifies sacred spaces such as the mosques within Nawaz’s memoir as a space of hope before exploring the episodes that happen within these spaces, recognising any hint of emotion that suggests their significance. Though spaces of hope concept carries positive connotation, this study also acknowledges the possibilities that not all spaces promise positive emotional significance. Rather, it takes into consideration that some might have negative connotations as well.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the memoir, Nawaz believes that the mosque is where she can find peace and tranquillity: “The mosque had once been a place of repose” (Nawaz 146). Her love for this space is immortalised in her feature-length documentary, *Me and the Mosque* (2005). She visits mosques throughout Canada to interview people about equal access for women (National Film Board of Canada 2005). As she was always curious about the significance of mosques to women, Nawaz created the sitcom *Little Mosque on the Prairie* (2007) with the thought of “fitting Islam into the modern world” (Nawaz 140). She wonders “how the dynamics of a mosque would change if the imam was from Canada and supportive of women” (141). The sitcom receives good ratings, but her community is not happy with it: “They believe the show makes fun of Islam” (139). Some men even surround her husband in their local mosque after Friday prayer and demand that he divorces her (139). Throughout the episode, Nawaz is “holed up in a mosque waiting for a mob to leave”, wondering if she “had been naïve” when she created the show (139). It would be a while before she “could go to the mosque again” since it is now “a place with a lot of bad memories” (146). This experience shows the uncomfortable connection that Nawaz has with the place where she once found peace.

Similarly, when Nawaz goes to Mecca for hajj, she at first feels overwhelmed and uncomfortable with “the crushing crowds” (Nawaz 88). However, towards the end of the hajj rituals, as she comes across a child watching her at Muzdalifah, she is reminded of her own daughter whom she had to leave behind (86). Nawaz is then further reminded of the Prophet Abraham being ordered to sacrifice his son (86). Before she performed hajj, she decided not to have any more children and wanted to focus on her career (87). However, being within the space of the holy city of Mecca has changed her view and makes her want to try for another baby (87). This exemplifies how a sacred space stirs, changes and therefore creates some emotional significance within Nawaz’s self as a young mother.

## CONCLUSION

From the discussion, the significance of employing the concept of the mosques as spaces of hope to foreground the discussion is that it explores the articulation of minority Muslim women’s experiences within sacred spaces. These experiences are both positive and negative. Although there are times Nawaz has an uncomfortable connection with sacred spaces, they are

not merely places of worship for her. Rather, they hold some spatial meaning and through Nawaz's experiences within them, form a profound emotional significance.

## REFERENCES

- Friesen, Jay. "Comedy as Social Commentary in Little Mosque on the Prairie: Decoding Humour in the First 'Muslim Sitcom'." *Muslims and Humour*. Editors Bernard Schweizer, Lina Molokotos-Liederman, and Yasmin Amin. Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022. pp. 245-270.
- Jensen, Pernille Friis & Kofoed, Kamilla Amalie Bech. "Gendered Muslim Stigma and Mosques as Spaces of Collective Coping." *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* vol. 25, no. 8 (2022): pp. 789-801.
- Nawaz, Zarqa. *Laughing All the Way to the Mosque*. London: Virago Press, 2014.
- Nawaz, Zarqa. "Me and the Mosque." *National Film Board of Canada*. National Film Board of Canada, 2005.
- Ocal, Devran Koray & Gokarikel, Banu. "Grounding religious geopolitics: The everyday counter-geopolitical practices of Turkish mosque communities in Germany." *Geoforum* vol. 129 (2022): pp. 151–160.
- Phillips, Richard, editor. *Muslim Spaces of Hope: Geographies of Possibility in Britain and the West*. London: Zed Books, 2009.
- Radwan, Ahmed Hosney. "The Mosque as a Public Space in the Islamic City – An Analytical Study of Architectural & Urban Design of Contemporary Examples." *Journal of Architecture, Arts and Humanistic Science* vol. 6, no. 30 (2021): pp. 70-90.
- Sardar, Ziauddin. "Spaces of Hope: Interventions." *Muslim Spaces of Hope: Geographies of Possibility in Britain and the West*. Editor Richard Phillips. London: Zed Books, 2009. pp. 13-26.

## SUSTAINING CULTURE, SUSTAINING NATURE: AN ECO-CRITICAL LENS ON NAGA FOOD TRADITIONS IN LITERATURE

**Subhashis Banerjee\*, Talisenla Imsong, and Tiajungla Longchar**

*Department of English, Nagaland University (A Central University), Kohima Campus,  
Nagaland, 797004, India.*

E-mail: subhashis@nagalanduniversity.ac.in

\*Corresponding author

### ABSTRACT

Naga cuisine, deeply ingrained in indigenous traditions, serves as a powerful literary and cultural motif reflecting ecological sustainability, identity, and resistance. This paper employs an eco-critical framework to examine the representation of food in Naga literature, focusing on Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps*, *A Naga Village Remembered*, and *Bitter Wormwood*, alongside oral narratives and ethnographic records. In *When the River Sleeps*, the protagonist's foraging practices and reliance on wild edibles underscore an intrinsic ecological ethic, challenging modern capitalist consumption patterns. Similarly, *A Naga Village Remembered* portrays food as an essential part of communal life, where traditional fermentation, hunting, and seasonal foraging reinforce the symbiotic relationship between people and nature. *Bitter Wormwood*, though primarily a political narrative, subtly weaves in the disruption of indigenous foodways due to political unrest, reflecting how external forces alter the ecological balance of traditional societies. These texts collectively emphasise how indigenous food practices embody a sustainable ethos that modernity threatens to erode. The study critiques the increasing marginalisation of traditional knowledge systems due to globalisation, where processed foods and monoculture farming overshadow ecologically sound subsistence methods. Furthermore, oral literature, folktales, and myths often embed food as a sacred link to the land, reinforcing an ecological consciousness that resists the extractive economies of modernity. By analysing these representations, this paper argues that Naga literature serves as a crucial site for ecological activism, preserving indigenous knowledge while critiquing environmental degradation and cultural homogenization. Food in Naga literary discourse is not merely a means of sustenance but a narrative tool that asserts ecological autonomy and cultural survival.

### KEYWORDS

cuisine; eco-criticism; identity; sustainability; literature

### ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*

Received: 26 June 2025

Accepted: 19 July 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

The Nagas are a group of indigenous communities predominantly inhabiting the northeastern region of India, particularly the state of Nagaland, with significant populations in neighbouring states and across the Indo-Myanmar border. Characterised by distinct languages, customs, and oral traditions, Naga identity is deeply rooted in tribal affiliations and ancestral heritage. Naga literature, emerging in both English and vernacular forms, primarily seeks to articulate the lived realities, struggles, and philosophies of these communities. It is increasingly gaining visibility through the works of authors like Easterine Kire, who is recognised as a pioneering and canonical voice in modern Naga literature.

The intricate relationship between nature and culture has long been central to indigenous worldviews. Among the Nagas, food is not merely sustenance; it is a symbol of community, identity, memory, and ecological practice. Naga food traditions—rooted in foraging, fermentation, seasonal cultivation, and shared consumption—form a dynamic site for understanding ecological ethics. This paper adopts an eco-critical approach to examine how Naga literary texts explore food as a conduit of cultural knowledge and environmental sustainability. By analysing Easterine Kire's novels and Naga oral literature, the paper underscores how traditional foodways encode ecological wisdom and resist capitalist commodification. This study is significant in the context of rising global concerns about biodiversity loss, climate change, and the erosion of indigenous knowledge systems.

## RELATED LITERATURE

Within Naga literature, Easterine Kire—a Sahitya Akademi award-winning author and widely considered the first novelist from Nagaland—stands out for her nuanced portrayal of nature, memory, and food. Her works have been instrumental in shaping contemporary indigenous writing from Northeast India and in bringing Naga voices to the national and international literary stages. Scholars such as Dolly Kikon (2020) have examined the politics of food and land in Northeast India, arguing that food becomes a site of resistance and cultural affirmation.

## METHODS

This paper adopts a qualitative, interpretative methodology grounded in literary analysis and cultural studies. It involves close reading of three major literary texts by Easterine Kire—*When the River Sleeps* (2014), *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), and *Bitter Wormwood* (2011). The analysis is supplemented with ethnographic studies, oral narratives, and scholarly discourse on Naga culture and ecology. Eco-critical theory, particularly indigenous eco-criticism, frames the study. Textual analysis focuses on metaphors, motifs, and narrative structures that reflect food-related practices and their ecological implications. Attention is also paid to the representation of land, memory, and the transformation of traditional foodways under socio-political pressure. Oral literature sources were gathered from secondary documentation, focusing on tales, myths, and ritual songs that embed food in symbolic and sacred contexts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps* presents food foraging and hunting not just as acts of survival but as spiritually significant engagements with the land. The protagonist Vilie's

reliance on wild edibles such as bamboo shoots and forest herbs symbolises a deep ecological awareness. In *A Naga Village Remembered*, communal feasts and food preservation techniques reflect social cohesion and seasonal consciousness, highlighting sustainable practices such as fermentation and firewood-drying. *Bitter Wormwood*, though more politically driven, subtly documents the disruption of these food traditions through militarisation and modern trade. The replacement of millet beer and smoked meat with store-bought alternatives marks the erosion of communal rituals and sustainable food chains.

Oral narratives further enrich the discussion. Many folktales link the origin of food crops to divine or ancestral intervention, reinforcing respect for the environment. Food is also central in ritual songs that invoke agricultural cycles and natural phenomena. These cultural texts reflect an indigenous eco-epistemology where food binds the human and non-human worlds. However, the increasing dominance of market-driven food systems and monoculture plantations poses a threat to these ecological lifeways. The literature analysed serves both as a document of loss and a space for reimagining cultural resistance. It invites a renewed attention to the role of literature in advocating ecological justice.

## CONCLUSION

Naga literature offers a fertile terrain for exploring the intersections of ecology, culture, and food. Through an eco-critical reading of Easterine Kire's novels and oral traditions, this paper has shown how food practices reflect a holistic environmental ethos. These narratives do more than document—they resist the erasure of indigenous knowledge and critique the homogenising forces of modernity. As global ecological crises deepen, indigenous food traditions must be acknowledged not merely as cultural remnants but as vital models for sustainable living. Literature, thus, emerges as both archive and advocate in the struggle to preserve cultural and ecological plurality.

## REFERENCES

- Ao, Temsula. *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*. New Delhi Zubaan, 2006.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press, 1996.
- Guha, Ramachandra. *Environmentalism: A Global History*. Longman, 1999.
- Kikon, Dolly. *Living with Oil and Coal: Resource Politics and Militarization in Northeast India*. University of Washington Press, 2020.
- Kire, Easterine. *A Naga Village Remembered*. Ura Academy, 2003.
- . *Bitter Wormwood*. Zubaan, 2011.
- . *When the River Sleeps*. Zubaan, 2014.
- Shiva, Vandana. *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*. South End Press, 2005.

## **THE PSYCHOSOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF TATTOOED APATANI WOMEN IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH, INDIA**

**Tage, Monju**

*Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, India.*

E-mail: nungku.2@gmail.com

\*Corresponding author

### **ABSTRACT**

This study recorded the lived experiences of the last generation of Apatani women in Arunachal Pradesh, India, who practiced the now banned tradition of facial tattooing. Using a qualitative research approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with 11 elderly tattooed women selected through purposive and snowball sampling. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect their narratives, to understand the cultural meanings, motivations, and emotional impacts of this practice. The study found that tattooing was deeply linked to identity, beauty, and cultural pride. While some women recalled being forced into the practice during childhood, many viewed it as an adornment that enhanced their beauty and marked their belonging to the community. The popular narrative that tattooing was intended to make women less attractive to prevent kidnapping was rejected by most participants, who instead said it was done for beautification and cultural distinction. The process, though painful, was regarded as an important rite of passage, with specific aesthetic standards such as darker ink, straighter lines, and large nose plugs. The 1971 ban, imposed by the Apatani Youth Association with was met with mixed reactions, some welcomed it for promoting modernization and reducing discrimination, while others mourned the loss of a valued tradition.

### **KEYWORDS**

Apatani women; Arunachal Pradesh; psychosocial experiences; facial tatto

### **ARTICLE INFO**

*Article history:*

Received: 25 July 2025

Accepted: 8 August 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

The Apatani tribe is one of the most unique and recognizable indigenous communities of Arunachal Pradesh, India. They primarily live in the picturesque Ziro Valley, which is known for its scenic beauty, fertile fields, and sustainable rice-fish farming. Among the 26 major tribes and many sub-tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Apatanis stand out for their distinct language, customs, and identity. The Apatanis have developed their own cultural traditions, including a unique and now rare practice: facial tattooing.

For Apatani women, facial tattoos once held deep cultural meaning, symbolizing identity, beauty, and a strong sense of belonging within the community. The process typically began before puberty, when a vertical line was inked from the forehead down to the nose, followed by five distinct lines on the chin. Large nose plugs, known locally as *yaping hurlo*, were also inserted as part of this rite. The tattoos were marked using thorns from local plants, while the ink was traditionally made by mixing soot and cooked rice water with pork fat. Although Apatani men also wore facial tattoos, the designs on women were far more detailed and hence became more popular.

Some stories suggest it began as a way to make women appear less attractive to prevent abduction the neighbouring tribes or even British colonialists. Others believe it was part of beautification, spiritual protection, or a means to set the Apatanis apart from neighboring groups. Although many popular stories on the internet claim that Apatani women were tattooed to make them look ugly and prevent kidnapping, the modern and educated Apatani youth do not agree with this. They believe that tattooing was actually done as a form of adornment and beauty. In the past, a tattooed woman was considered very beautiful, and this was the Apatani standard of beauty. So, the youth today reject the idea that the tattoos were meant to make women unattractive. Instead, they say the tattoos were proudly worn by Apatani women to enhance their beauty. They also strongly disagree with the kidnapping story that's widely shared online, saying it is not true and does not match their cultural understanding. In 1971, the Apatani Youth Association (AYA), with government support, banned this tradition. Fines in the form of money were imposed on those who continued the practice, and gradually the tradition faded. Today, very small population of elderly Apatani women remain with facial tattoos. As they grow older, there's a risk of losing not just the visual symbols but the personal stories and cultural meanings tied to them.

## RELATED LITERATURE

A good number of researchers made their studies on the fading tattooing tradition of the Apatani tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, emphasizing its cultural significance, emotional impact, and gradual disappearance. Bharadwaj and Boruah (2020) studied how tattooed Apatani women experienced emotional and cultural pain after their traditional practice was banned in the 1970s. Fiska (2023), in his *Tribal Tattoo Encyclopaedia*, documented global tattoo practices, including those of the Apatani, highlighting their cultural patterns and also about the role of the Apatani Youth Association in ending the practice. Ghosh (2020) examined the changing meanings of tribal tattoos in India, arguing that Apatani tattoos were originally intended to make women appear less attractive to prevent abduction. Sen, Mallick, and Kipgen (2023), through taking interviews and fieldwork, observed that the loss of facial tattoos and nose plugs has made it more difficult to visually distinguish Apatanis from other tribes, another study, Sen (n.d.) found that the 1971 tattoo ban was part of a broader push for modernisation. similarly, Thakur and

Verma (2016) argued that the tattoos were not a matter of personal choice, but a cultural obligation aimed at reinforcing social norms and protection and also a report by *The New Indian Express* (2017) reported that the tattoos, once symbols of beauty and identity, were banned to promote modernity and reduce discrimination.

Although as evident many previous researchers have written about the meaning, history, and social reasons behind Apatani facial tattoos, very few have actually lived with those women and heard their stories. Their personal thoughts, emotions, and the impact the tattoos had on their lives have rarely been explored in detail. This study aims to bring their stories to the world and share their experiences in their own words. This study aims to bring their stories to the world and share their experiences in their own words. This study attempts to fill the gap by listening and sharing the real-life stories of Apatani women who were tattooed. It provides a record of how the tattooed Apatani women understand their identity, the changes in their culture, and what this banned tradition means to them now.

## **METHODS**

This study follows a qualitative research approach, using in-depth interviews to collect personal stories and experiences of Apatani women who were traditionally tattooed. Around 11 women were interviewed using purposive and snowballing sampling technique. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect their narratives, to understand the cultural meanings, motivations, and emotional impacts of this practice.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Motivation and Meanings Behind Tattooing**

Apatani women gave varied reasons for facial tattoos. Some saw them as part of their identity and beauty, while others, were forced into the practice as children. A few believed tattoos deterred kidnappings, but most rejected this, with some saying the elders created the story to create fear and enforce the tradition. For many, larger tattoos and nose plugs symbolized greater beauty. These differences reveal that the tradition held diverse meanings, and online accounts may not reflect women's real experiences.

### **2. Pain, Technique, and Aesthetics**

Tattooing was remembered as a painful experience, often done in early childhood. Tools included wild thorns and pigment made from soot, rice water, and pig oil. Beauty standards were clearly defined: darker ink, straighter lines, and prominent nose/ear plugs were valued traits.

### **3. The Tattoo Ban and Its Emotional Toll**

The Apatani Youth Association banned facial tattooing in the 1970s. Some supported the ban, saying it was good for health, helped stop discrimination, and fit with the changing society. But few others felt sad. They believed the ban took away a meaningful part of their culture. One woman said the ban on tattoos was unfair. She questioned why only her generation had to go through the pain of going through the tattooing, reiterating, "If others take Apatani girls away, how will they be recognised without their tattoos?"

#### 4. Identity, Memory, and Cultural Legacy

For many women, tattoos remain a symbol of cultural pride and beauty, and they choose to keep them despite social pressure. Some feel sadness that the younger generation may never experience this tradition, though younger Apatani girls still admire the designs during festivals and gatherings.

### CONCLUSION

The study found that the practice of tattooing among the Apatani women was closely tied to their identity, beauty and culture. The study also found that the commonly told stories that the Apatani women started wearing tattoos to make them look less attractive to deter kidnapping by the neighbouring tribes was not supported by the majority of the women interviewed.

### REFERENCES

- Bharadwaj, Shrestha, and Uttam Boruah. "Inking the Identity: A Study of the Apatani Tradition of Tattooing through Bakhtinian Chronotope." *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, vol. 12, no. 5, 2020, pp. 1–11.  
DOI: 10.21659/rupkatha.v12n5.rioc1s29n1.
- Chanda, Aishik. "Arunachal's Apatani Tribe Won't Get Inked: Dropping Traditions in Fear of Discrimination." *The New Indian Express*, 1 Oct. 2017.
- Fiska. *Tribal Tattoo Encyclopaedia*. Global Cultural Press, 2023.
- Ghosh, Payel. "Tattoo: A Cultural Heritage." *Antrocom Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2020, pp. 295–304. *Antrocom Online Journal of Anthropology*.
- Sen, Nibedita, Puspita Mallick, and Jangkhomang Kipgen. *Prohibition on Tradition, Tattooing and the Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh*. ResearchGate, n.d.
- Thakur, Binod Kumar, and Shikha Verma. "Tattoo Practices in North East India: A Cross Sectional Study." *Journal of Cutaneous and Aesthetic Surgery*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2016, pp. 172–76.

**IN PURSUIT OF “MODERNITY”:  
HONGKONGESE REJECTION OF A CHINESE LITERARY CANON**

**Wyatt, S**

*The University of New Mexico, New Mexico 87106, United States.*

E-mail: sethers000wsf@unm.edu

**ABSTRACT**

The *bazi* school of Chinese astrology is rooted in a literary tradition that reaches back thousands of years. An important mainstay of this canon is *tiao hou*, the method by which a fate-calculator considers the climate and seasons in determining which of the five elements is most favorable in rectifying a client’s imbalances. *Tiao hou* has been a part of *bazi* practices since at least the Warring States period, though it was heavily refined in the Qing dynasty compendium *Qiongtong baojian*. More recently it has come under fire by some career astrologers in Hong Kong, both on practical and seemingly ideological grounds. This paper situates a contemporary Hong Kong practitioner’s claim within the context of *bazi* traditions to argue that the new minority of *bazi* practitioners who reject the *tiao hou* method represent a growing, unmanaged clash between foundational literary tenets and the perceived needs of a modern, scientifically conscious Chinese clientele.

**KEYWORDS**

Chinese literature; modernization; astrology; Hongkong

**ARTICLE INFO**

*Article history:*

Received: 4 July 2025

Accepted: 18 July 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

*Bazi* or “eight character” fate-calculation is one of the most prevalent forms of numerology or astrology used in greater China today. In *bazi* one’s year, month, date and hour of birth are represented by four columns of one *tiangan* “heavenly stem” and one *dizhi* “earthly branch” each according to the sexagenary calendar’s use of them as timekeeping ordinals. The eight characters therein each carry an elemental value and an association with either yin or yang, and soothsayers interpret their interactions across the columns and among themselves. One of the most quintessential methods for *bazi* practitioners is finding their client’s *yongshen*.

A *yongshen* or “useful god” is whichever of the five elements is most beneficial to a person’s *bazi*. There are essentially four *yongshen* types, defined by how they cause elemental harmony. The *fuyi yongshen* strengthens a particularly weak phase or suppresses an overly strong one. The *tongguan yongshen* introduces a “peacekeeping” element to mediate disruptive clashes between two prevalent phases. The remaining two types are the *bingyao* and *tiaohou yongshen*. The former is only vaguely defined from chapter one of the Ming-era *Shenfeng Tongkao* on and in practice is a catch-all solution to miscellaneous issues like the complete absence of an element (Lo 217). Chapter one of *Qiongtong Baojian* describes the *tiaohou yongshen* as managing “temperature,” rather than the elements. One reduces the elements to a heat spectrum and based on the season of birth as represented by the month *dizhi* and the day *tiangan* a ranked selection (Liang 62-63) of up to three *yongshen* signs exists to prevent *pianku*, a harmful partiality to either end of this spectrum.

While there is room for minor variation between *bazi* practitioners in how exactly they are used and to what ends, the *yongshen* are an absolutely indispensable part of the *bazi* mechanism (Liang 131). Practitioners tend to err across the board towards traditionally established methods and interpretations, so if a high-profile master of the craft were to reject wholesale two mainstay subtypes of the *yongshen* method, it would have significant ramifications and necessitate discussion. One well-known Hongkongese metaphysician and prolific author Lo Leung does exactly this - rejecting the *tiaohou* and *bingyao yongshen* - in his 2003 entry *bazi* textbook *Dim Jap Baat Zi Mun*.

## RELATED LITERATURE

This project relies on both premodern Chinese literary works and more recent publications from Hong Kong specifically. The *bazi* literary canon stretches back to no later than the Warring States period, but grew particularly robust during the Song, Tang and Ming dynasties. Concepts discussed and considered in this work originated in core texts like *Yuanhai Ziping* and *Shenfeng Tongkao* and were expounded on in later Qing-era commentaries like *Qiongtong Baojian*. While many literary works and other materials from contemporary Hong Kong were consulted in the preparatory work for this project, the most immediately relevant is Master Lo Leung’s textbook series *Dim Jap Baat Zi Mun* for its particularly bold claims and continued popularity.

## METHODS

A cursory survey of modern astrological literature from Hong Kong and Taiwan, the spearheads of modern Chinese metaphysics, formed the initial phase of this project’s methodology. Through this survey I identified key points of contention between various *bazi* practitioners and schools, which through comparison with the tenets introduced in foundational works of

premodern literature on Chinese astrology allowed for a general understanding of how conservatism and innovation dapple this community of metaphysics practitioners. Finally, I synthesized these notes into an overall picture and analyze its implications for the *bazi* practitioner community as a whole from a psychosocial perspective.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned above, a brief look through public-oriented literature by *bazi* practitioners from Hong Kong reveals that not all careerists are in agreement on the usefulness of some of the *yongshen* described previously. Juxian Guan's master Lo Leung, for example, rejects both the *bingyao* and *tiaohou yongshen* approaches (Lo 214-218). While he rejects the former on the grounds of its historically vague definition and inconsistent forms of use, in the case of the latter he does so on the basis of the elemental balances allegedly caused by the *tiaohou* method demonstrably not improving his clients' quality of life in contrast to the other *yongshen* methods - a conclusion he reaches by attempting to apply the scientific method to his astrological practice.

This points towards a crisis of identity which has troubled astrologers for centuries, but most acutely since the rise of global industrialization and the rise of modern science (Song et al 1387-1388). As science advanced in depth and prestige over the past several centuries, astrology was superseded and came to be defined in reference to it - as "pseudoscience." *Bazi* practitioners lost much of the respect and authority they once commanded, being increasingly seen as superstitious (Chan) and uneducated (Johnson 31). The community of *bazi* practitioners has struggled ever since to regain control of the narrative and define itself again.

Masters like Lo Leung need to be seen by their clients as modern, trustworthy, and reliable, but they also need to rebuild self-identities that they feel are worthy of that respect they desire (Giddens 12). The looming specter of "feudal superstition" threatens metaphysicians' face in this regard (Chan), and indeed that of their clientele as well. In an attempt to wrestle back some positive optics in the modern scientific landscape, Master Leung uses the very mechanisms of his antagonist - i.e. he employs the scientific method, albeit selectively - to attempt to demonstrate that his practice can be reconciled with modernity and science rather than only being sent as feudal refuse to the dustbin of history. In this way, his rejection of the *tiaohou yongshen* is a kind of sacrificial lamb; by applying the scientific method in a way that would disqualify many other aspects of *bazi* methodology if fairly applied across the craft, Master Leung makes the "modern and scientific concession" of a *yongshen* in order to keep the rest of the *bazi* traditions intact.

## CONCLUSION

The discussion above briefly touches on a case in which a *bazi* astrologist selectively applied the scientific method to make a symbolic concession from the ancient literary traditions of his craft. He seemingly does so to keep the remaining traditions intact, but the move itself reflects a largely unspoken massive insecurity in the community of traditional numerologists and their clients. Whether *bazi* and similar arts will adapt to the contemporary world or live on in spite of it is impossible to predict now, but actions like these taken by Master Lo Leung are indicative of consciousness among practitioners that deliberate actions are called for one way or another.

## REFERENCES

- Chan Faat Chai. “命理算命是封建迷信嗎？如何利用算命更好地規劃人生？” [“Is fate management fortune telling feudal superstition? How to use fortune telling for better life planning?”]. *YouTube*, uploaded by 香港六壬神功陳法齊師傅 [Hong Kong Liuren Shengong master Chan Faat Chai], 25 July 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwQH0jfzH-M>.
- Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Polity Press, 1991.
- Johnson, R. *Is knowledge of science associated with higher skepticism of pseudoscientific claims?* 2003. University of Tennessee, B.A. Thesis: pp. 31.
- Liang Xiangrun. 子平教材講義 [*Ziping teaching materials*]. Xingmao Publishing, 2021.
- Lo Leung. 點入八字門 [*How to enter the Bazi gate*]. Juxian Guan Ltd, 2003.
- Song Jingwoong, Chun Jieun, and Na Jiyeon. “Why people trust something other than Science: Cases of Acupuncture and Four Pillars of Destiny in Korea.” *Science and Education* 30 (2021): pp. 1387-1388.
- Xu Ziping. 淵海子平 [*The deep sea of Ziping*]. Song dynasty.
- Yu Chuntai. “五行總論” [“Comprehensive treatise on the five elements”]. In 窮通寶鑑 [*The precious mirror of poverty and passage*]. Qing dynasty. Pp. 2.
- Zhang Nan. “五行謬說類” [“Fallacious theories on the five elements”]. In 神峰通考 [*Comprehensive study of the divine peak*]. Ming dynasty. Pp. 12-14.

## TELEVISION AS CULTURAL CATALYST: AN EXAMINATION OF *THE GOLDEN GIRLS*' SOCIOCULTURAL IMPACT

**Zoe Sim Ning**

*Swinburne University of Technology Sarawak, 93350 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia.*

E-mail: zoesn0928@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

*The Golden Girls* was an American sitcom that premiered in 1985 and may have at least a partial answer. At a period when mainstream television often avoided controversial and sensitive themes, the show cleverly used both heartfelt, humour and candid dialogue to broach controversial themes. From aging and gender roles to sexuality, same-sex relationships and female independence, the show also probed into hard-hitting societal topics like human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), immigration, racism, and even euthanasia. The way that the four older women in the show were portrayed, as main characters instead of supporting characters or comic relief, was the uniqueness of the show. A look at the show's dialogues and or clips can offer insights of societal expectations, love and also grief to the audiences. The show's willingness to push boundaries was clear in episodes featuring Blanche's gay brother, Rose's battle with ageism in the workplace and Sophia's discovery that an old friend of hers is euthanizing herself. This abstract examines how *The Golden Girls* became a significant cultural touchstone, utilizing the sitcom format to raise awareness, encourage dialogue and bring recognition to marginalized voices. The show's significance still influences television storytelling today, demonstrating that even within conventional storytelling frameworks, progressive themes can be conveyed.

### KEYWORDS

social issues; cultural impact; television storytelling; controversial themes

### ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*

Received: 1 July 2025

Accepted: 14 July 2025

Published: 26 August 2025

## INTRODUCTION

*The Golden Girls* was an American sitcom that aired from the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 1958 to the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1992 on NBC. It was directed by Susan Harris and was produced by Witt/Thomas/Harris Productions in union with Touchstone Television. The sitcom received numerous awards such as Emmys and Golden Globes. With a total of 7 seasons, 180 episodes, the show centers around 4 elder women, Blanche Devereaux played by Rue McLanahan, Rose Nylund played by Betty White, Dorothy Zbornak played by Bea Arthur and Sophia Petrillo played by Estelle Getty. These 4 elder women share a friendship and a home in Miami, Florida. The aim of this paper is to explore the sociocultural impact of this show and how did it broach themes that were considered controversial when mainstream television frequently avoided them.

## RELATED LITERATURE

Even though television sitcoms are frequently written off as light entertainment, they are still effective platforms for cultural commentary. Kellner (1995) noted that media culture provides materials for people to construct their identities and television is crucial in influencing public ideologies and attitudes. *The Golden Girls* is widely acknowledged for challenging stereotypes surrounding gender, age and sexuality (Van Bauwel 2017; Powell, 2019). The sitcom showed a progressive representation of older women who were sexually confident, assertive and socially engaged, which were roles that were uncommon for women in mainstream media at that time.

Studies by Harwood and Roy (2005) mentioned that age-based stereotypes are common in media, frequently portraying elder adults as invisible or dependent. Van Leeuwen's (2008) framework of social actor representation offers a critical lens through which such representation can be understood. The framework emphasizes on how discourse can include, exclude, activate or passivate social actors (Van Leeuwen, 2008). The characters in *The Golden Girls* are given voice and agency through consistently activation within the plotlines.

Furthermore, the series was noteworthy for its early inclusion of LGBTQ+ themes and characters. Avila-Saavedra (2009) highlights how it aided mainstream television legitimize queer identities, especially during a time when AIDS and homosexuality were socially stigmatized.

Additionally, recent studies also explored this influence, especially in LGBTQ+ and aging representation (Henry et al., 2023). Henry et al. (2023) explored the ongoing significance of sitcoms in promoting sexual diversity, noting how earlier shows like *The Golden Girls* paved the way for modern LGBTQ+ visibility. These recent studies confirm the sitcom's ongoing cultural relevance.

## METHODS

A qualitative study of media representation based on Van Leeuwen's (2008) framework of social actor representation was utilized, with the aim to investigate how disadvantaged social groups such as elder women, LGBTQ+ people and people who are facing social issues are represented in the sitcom, *The Golden Girls*. A total of 12 selected episodes were sampled across all seven seasons of the show, with an emphasis on the episodes that specifically addressed societal issues such as gender roles, ageism, illness, sexuality and also discrimination.

These episodes were analyzed to explore the strategies and representational choices utilized in constructing the voices and identities of the social actors within the portrayals. In Van Leeuwen's framework, the categories of inclusion and exclusion, categorization and allocation were applied to evaluate how specific groups were made visible, framed or given autonomy in either stereotypical or empowering ways. The analysis' aim is to understand how the show's elements, such as storyline structure, character dialogues and humor were used to carefully engage audience in social critique.

Additionally, secondary sources such as academic publications, media reviews and audience reception studies were consulted to further triangulate the findings and situate the analysis in larger socio-cultural and historical contexts.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing twelve selected episodes from *The Golden Girls*, it was revealed that there was an intentional and constant portrayal of marginalized social actors, especially elder women and LGBTQ+ individuals. Through Van Leeuwen's (2008) framework of social actor representation, the study discovered that these groups were often activated in the discourse, represented as agents who expressed opinions, made decisions and were directly engaged with social issues (Van Leeuwen, 2008). This representation challenges the dominant media storylines in which such individuals are often excluded or passivated (Harwood & Roy, 2005).

For example, in "*Isn't It Romantic?*", Blanche confronts her own discomfort about a friend's lesbian identity highlights internalized homophobia while prompting audiences to reconsider their own prejudices. Besides, in "*72 Hours*" where Rose waits for HIV test results, dispels the stereotype that HIV only affects certain communities. Rose's bravery and anxiety made the issue relatable to a larger audience, thus humanizing a stigmatized subject. These plotlines align with Avila-Saavedra's (2009) argument that sitcoms have a key role in incorporating queer representation during the AIDS crisis.

Episodes like "*Older and Wiser*" and "*Job Hunting*" demonstrated how the characters navigated through workplace discrimination and social invisibility. The show challenged ageist presumptions in media through emphasizing experience, autonomy and humor instead of depicting aging as decline (Van Bauwel, 2017; Meyer et al. 2021).

The show also made topics more approachable through using humor rather than trivializing them. Through incorporating social critique in everyday conversations and domestic contexts, the show encouraged reflection without alienating its audience. This approach supports Kellner's (1995) assertion that television serves as a platform for ideological negotiation where culture and identity are constructed and contested.

Additionally, more recent studies indicate that *The Golden Girls* established the foundation for modern inclusive storytelling. Henry et al. (2023) noted that how the sitcom's normalized representation of LGBTQ+ themes remains relevant in today's culture.

Generally, the findings suggest that *The Golden Girls* was not only entertainment but also a platform for social commentary. Through activating and empowering marginalized voices, the show provided a counter-narrative to portrayals in the mainstream media and helped the sitcom genre become more inclusive and empathetic.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined how *The Golden Girls* functions as a cultural text that challenges prevailing depictions of marginalized groups, especially LGBTQ+ individuals and older women. The analysis, which was conducted using Van Leeuwen's (2008) framework of social actor representation, demonstrated that the sitcom constantly included and activated these social actors, providing them visibility and agency in ways that defied mainstream media norms.

## REFERENCES

- Avila-Saavedra, Guillermo. "Nothing Queer about Queer Television: Televised Construction of Gay Masculinities." *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 31, no. 1, Jan. 2009, pp. 5–21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443708098243>.
- Harwood, Jake, and Abhik Roy. "Social Identity Theory and Mass Communication Research." *Intergroup Communication: Multiple Perspectives.*, Peter Lang Publishing, 2005, pp. 189–211.
- Henry, Seán, et al. "'Laughing Ourselves out of the Closet': Comedy as a Queer Pedagogical Form." *Ethics and Education*, vol. 18, no. 1, Jan. 2023, pp. 151–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2023.2188744>.
- Kellner, Douglas. *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and the Postmodern*. Routledge, 1995.
- Meyer, Michele, et al. *Women over 50: The Right to Be Seen on Screen*. 2021, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.32453.26083>.
- Powell, Elliott H. "'Staying Golden': The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Jazz in *the Golden Girls*." *Jazz Research Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1, Apr. 2019, pp. 86–109, <https://doi.org/10.1558/jazz.35902>. Accessed 30 Nov. 2020.
- Van Bauwel, Sofie. "Invisible Golden Girls? Post-Feminist Discourses and Female Ageing Bodies in Contemporary Television Fiction." *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1, Dec. 2017, pp. 21–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1409969>. Accessed 8 Mar. 2020.
- van Leeuwen, Theo. *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

# AUTHOR'S BIODATA

**Aleeya Hana Mohd Fadhlán** is a graduating student at the International Islamic University Malaysia, majoring in English Language and Literature. Her research interests include discourse analysis, persuasion strategies, and cyber linguistics.

**Farhana Bakar** is a senior lecturer at the Language Academy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). She earned her doctoral degree in Higher Education from the University of Otago, New Zealand. Her current research focuses on L2 postgraduate language socialisation, higher education and language education. She is also the recipient of the Recognised Associate Supervisor Award from the United Kingdom Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE).

**Vijay Kumar** is the Dean of Centre for Postgraduate Studies at Quest International University, Malaysia, and an Honorary Professor of Doctoral Education at the University of Otago, New Zealand. He has played a pivotal role in enhancing doctoral supervision capacity in over 45 universities across 22 countries worldwide. He is the first scholar outside the UK to receive the prestigious Recognised Research Supervisor status from the UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE).

**Grecilda Augustine Tinggie** is presently lecturing in a public university in Malaysia. Her current research focuses on the sociolinguistics of the Remun speech community, exploring language use and cultural dynamics within this distinctive indigenous community.

**Lisbeth Sinan Lendik** works in a public university teaching English proficiency courses to undergraduates. Her areas of interest include discourse analysis, linguistic anthropology, and sociolinguistics focusing on the indigenous communities in Sarawak.

**Huang Mingcheng** is a PhD student at Universiti Putra Malaysia since 2023 and has been involved with research related to discourse analysis, corpus linguistics and media.

**Zalina Mohd Kasim**, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication at Universiti Putra Malaysia. Her research expertise spans cognitive stylistics, semiotics, applied linguistics, and discourse analysis, with a particular focus on the intersection of language, cognition, and media representation.

**Afida Mohamad Ali** is an Associate Professor in Discourse Studies and Applied Linguistics at Universiti Putra Malaysia. She specializes in discourse and genre analysis, LSP/ESP and corpus-based research. Her publications focus on various professional contexts, including business, finance, health, tourism, and emerging media, reflecting her dedication to innovative language research.

**Lim Hui Woan** has conducted research on language acquisition in local languages (e.g. English, Mandarin and Malay) by (pre)school children since joining Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. She is currently working on English child language tests that can be used by professionals (e.g. teachers, SLTs) to identify delayed/disordered language skills.

**Yap Ngee Thai** is a Professor in the English Department at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). She was the recipient of various international awards and grants. Her research involves second language speech perception and speech production, vocabulary acquisition, and language and cognitive processing among bilinguals and multilinguals.

**Liu, Chengjin** is a BA Honours student at the Australian National University. She completed her Bachelor's degree in Linguistics and Marine Science at the University of Sydney. Her research interests include multilingualism, migration linguistics, language maintenance and identity, phonetics and phonology, prosody, and second language acquisition.

**Michal Schwarz** focuses on East Asian countries, languages, and interactions of religions with the environment. At Masaryk University, he established a Vietnamese studies program and the Department of Mongolian, Korean, and Vietnamese Studies.

**Phiphawin Suphawut Srikrui** is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University, and a PhD holder in English Language Studies. Her research interests include Project-based Learning (PBL) and technology-enhanced language learning (TELL).

**Chirarat Khongsat** is an English major student at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University.

**Radika Subramaniam** is a Senior Lecturer in the General Studies Department at Politeknik Sultan Idris Shah, Selangor, Malaysia. She obtained her PhD in Corpus Linguistics from Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Her research interests include integrating corpus linguistics into ESP and EAP studies, particularly the academic written discourse.

**Yusmahariz Ashraf Yusmaherizam** is a Ph.D candidate at Universiti Teknologi MARA Kedah Branch. His research interest is in the area of language and English for specific purposes, applied linguistics and liberal arts. He is currently working on his research on the needs of English language in the Malaysian banking sector.

**Wan Irham Ishak** (Ph.D) is a Senior Lecturer at Universiti Teknologi MARA Kedah Branch. His research interests include language for specific purposes, discourse and communication studies, professional communication and applied linguistics.

**Ismie Roha Mohamed Jais** (Ph.D) is currently a Professor at the Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Malaysia. Her research interests include translation and interpretation, language and ICT, as well as communication and interpersonal skills.

**Chunxiang Zhou** specialized in English language, metaphor and linguistics before starting her PhD journey in FBMK, UPM. Her academic expertise lies in metaphor studies and ecological discourse analysis, supported by a strong foundation in language education and applied linguistics. The article Conceptual Metaphor Analysis of Climate Change in Chinese Media: A Comparative Study of State-Run and Market-Oriented News Outlets has been accepted by the World Journal of English Language.

**Zalina Mohd Kasim**, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication at Universiti Putra Malaysia. Her research expertise spans cognitive stylistics, semiotics, applied linguistics, and discourse analysis, with a particular focus on the intersection of language, cognition, and media representation.

**Halis Azhan Mohd Hanafiah**, Ph.D., is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Educational Studies at Universiti Putra Malaysia. His expertise lies in creative writing and children's and adolescent literature.

**Ankita Priyadarshini** has been involved in research related to ecocriticism, since joining Nagaland University as a Doctoral Research Scholar in 2024 in the Department of English. Now she is engaged in research on sustainability and enthnocology.

**Mohammed Akhtar Jamal Khan** is a Professor of English specialized in Commonwealth Literature.

**Chuo Hui San** is an MA TESOL postgraduate at Swinburne University of Technology Sarawak. She obtained her BA in English and Literary Studies from the University of Western Australia in July 2024. Her research interests include English literature, cinema, feminist studies, and ESL teaching and learning. (TNR 12 pt)

**Minu Sono** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Education at Binni Yanga Government Women's College, Lekhi, Arunachal Pradesh. She currently serves as the academic in-charge and chairperson of the Women's Cell of her college. With eight peer-reviewed and UGC-listed publications, she has presented extensively in national and international seminars. She also serves as the Assistant Secretary of the Research and Documentation Cell, Nyishi Elite Society (NES), the apex organisation of the Nyishi community.

**Nigamananda Das** is a Senior Professor in the Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima, India. He joined Nagaland University in 2007 and has been consistently working on Indian English Literature, Ecocriticism, Indian Tribal Literature, and Saint Literature. Currently he is working on a book project on Traditional Knowledge Education.

**Siti Hawa Muhamad** teaches at Universiti Islam Selangor and is a PhD candidate at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. She has published works including “Spaces of hope: Third space identity in selected Muslim chick lit” (2023, GEMA), and on topics related to the application of ICT in English literature classrooms and Muslim women’s identities.

**Subhashis Banerjee** is an Assistant Professor at Nagaland University (A Central University). His research interests include Travel Writings, American Literature, Indigenous Literature, Eco-Criticism, and Cultural Studies with a focus on Northeast India.

**Talisenla Imsong** is an Assistant Professor at Nagaland University (A Central University). Her research interests include Commonwealth Literature and cultural studies.

**Tiajungla Longchar** is a research scholar at the Department of English, Nagaland University (A Central University), India.

**Tage, Monju** is serving as an Assistant Professor at Rajiv Gandhi University, a Central University, with around eight years of experience.

A graduate of City University of Hong Kong, **Wyatt, S** teaches Navajo linguistics at the University of New Mexico and is involved in Navajo language revitalization. His research is chiefly on Cantonese and Navajo, but he is also writing several works on contemporary diversity in Sino-Japanese metaphysics between Hongkong and Japan.

**Zoe Sim Ning** is a postgraduate TESOL student at Swinburne University of Technology Sarawak in Kuching, Malaysia. She is passionate about language, media, and cultural representation. With a background rooted in language studies, she looks at television dialogue through sociocultural lens to see how it is shaped by societal issues.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The MICOLLAC 2025 Organising Committee would like to extend their appreciation to the following reviewers:

**PROF. DR. ANEALKA AZIZ HUSSIN**  
Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam

**ASSOC. PROF. DR. ARBAAYAH ALI TERMIZI**  
Universiti Putra Malaysia

**ASSOC. PROF. DR. JESLYN AMARASEKARA**  
Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology

**ASSOC. PROF. DR. MOHD MUZHAFAR IDRUS**  
Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia

**ASSOC. PROF. DR. MOHD ROSLAN ROSNON**  
Universiti Putra Malaysia

**ASSOC. PROF. DR. RADZUAN AB RASHID**  
Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin

**DR. AMINNUDIN SAIMON**  
International Islamic University Malaysia

**DR. FATIN NABILA ABD RAZAK**  
Universiti Putra Malaysia

**DR. MASTURA MAHAMED**  
Universiti Putra Malaysia

**DR. MANIMANGAI MANI**  
Universiti Putra Malaysia

The MICOLLAC 2025 Organising Committee would like to extend their appreciation to the following reviewers:

**DR. MOHD FADHLI SHAH KHAIDZIR**

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

**DR. NURDIYANA MOHAMAD YUSOF**

Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak

**DR. NURHAFEZA MOHD AKHIR**

Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam

**DR. NUR NAJAH RADHIAH ZAINAL ABIDIN**

Universiti Malaya

**DR. NURUL ATIQA AMRAN**

Universiti Putra Malaysia

**DR. PAVANI MALAA MEGANATHAN**

Universiti Putra Malaysia

**DR. RAMIZA DARMI**

Universiti Putra Malaysia

**DR. SEACH JIN BENG**

Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology

**DR. SHARIFAH SYAKILA SYED SHAHARUDDIN**

Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak

**DR. SHARON SHARMINI A/P VICTOR DANARAJAN**

Universiti Putra Malaysia

**DR. WAN IMAN WAN SALIM**

Universiti Kuala Lumpur

**DR. WELYNE JEFFREY JEHOM**

Universiti Malaya

**DR. ZAINOR IZAT ZAINAL**

Universiti Putra Malaysia

**Publisher:**

Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication  
Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor.

Email: micollacproceedings@gmail.com

Contact No.: 03-97698778

**The 13th Malaysia International Conference on Languages, Literatures  
and Cultures (MICOLLAC 2025) Proceedings**

This proceeding will be published every 2 years, following the trend of  
the said conference.

Copyright © Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and  
Communication

eISSN 3009-0423



9 773009 042005