

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Anthropomorphic Metaphors in Iban Proverbs: A Semantic-Inquisitive Analysis

Sylvia Jembau¹, Mary Fatimah Subet^{1,2}, and Muhammad Zaid Daud^{3*}

¹Faculty of Education, Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Jalan Datuk Mohammad Musa, 94300, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

²Institute of Creative Arts and Technology (iCreaTe), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Jalan Datuk Mohammad Musa, 94300, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

³Malay Language Linguistics Section, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

ABSTRACT – The current study assesses anthropomorphic metaphors in Iban proverbs (*Jaku Sempama*) to determine how physiological symbolism encodes indigenous cognition, moral reasoning, and sociocultural insight. A qualitative methodology, namely the document-based approach, was employed to scrutinise 54 proverbs extracted from *Sempama Jaku Iban* (Umping, 2010) using the semantic-inquisitive framework with three analytical tiers: script semantics, resonant semantics, and inquisitive semantics. Five metaphorical categories were examined, namely the head, face, eyes, fingers, and body, to uncover how these anatomical parts could serve as conceptual mediums for communicating distorted perception, moral burden, impulsive demeanour, emotional fragility, and superficial social cohesion. Each metaphor demonstrated how the Iban community embedded cultural critique and ethical philosophy in corporeal imagery, transforming the human body into a semantic medium for encoding culturally shaped intelligence, or *akal budi*. The results corroborated the view that *Jaku Sempama* functioned as a cognitive rather than solely a stylistic medium, underscoring the pragmatic inference, evaluative stance, and epistemological logic inherent in indigenous oral traditions by applying conceptual metaphor theory and relevance theory. The findings also significantly contributed to the international typology of metaphors by incorporating Iban figurative language into the wider theoretical and cultural context. This study also recommended greater documentation and the integration of indigenous metaphor systems into linguistic preservation endeavours and intercultural communication models, as metaphors operate not only as linguistic heritage but also as cognitive artefacts for comprehending communal identity, emotion, and social order.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Human physiology has been understood through its anatomical components, including the head, eyes, mouth, ears, hands, legs, and bones, which function in both biological and symbolic roles in human cognition and communication. Human anatomical components have been used continuously as metaphors to convey abstract concepts, including intention, notion, morality, and emotion. Ritos and Daud (2020) stated that the human body is divinely created with specific functions; Daud et al. (2021) described the human body as a complex network of anatomical systems with interdependent functions.

Nevertheless, corporeal references are not only restricted to physical perceptions. Wibowo (2008) explicated that corporeal parts are frequently utilised to garner cognitive attention and encode evaluative meaning. Omar (1986) underscored that human naturally gravitate towards symbolic languages to express personal experiences, whereas Hassan (2001) denoted symbolism as the utilisation of concrete words, terms, or phrases to embody abstract notions in culturally embedded linguistic forms. The symbolic utilisation of human physiology has consistently been a primary topic of investigation in cognitive linguistics, semantics, and anthropological pragmatics. Researchers, including Lakoff and Johnson (1980), argued that corporeal experiences involve numerous metaphors, rendering anthropomorphism a primary characteristic of quotidian communication. The proposition suggests that human physiological components serve as biological referents and metaphorical scaffolds for articulating social identity, emotion, morality, and knowledge.

The continuous metaphorical use of human body parts can be observed across indigenous societies in multiple oral traditions, particularly in proverbs. Proverbs encompass shared social understanding and cultural logic, with corporeal symbols providing universal yet localised access to cognitive and moral reasoning. While greater research interest has been noted in metaphor theory and symbolic embodiment, relevant studies on corporeal metaphors in Austronesian languages, particularly in the Iban cultural context, remain scarce and fragmented. Iban proverbs or *Jaku Sempama* in the Malaysian context comprise a significant cultural and linguistic oeuvre. The Iban language has gained greater academic traction in recent years following its institutional inclusion in national education (Larson, 2011).

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR | Muhammad Zaid Daud | ✉ zaid.daud@usm.my

Specifically, *Jaku Sempama* plays a role beyond mere decorative linguistic expressions, serving as mnemonic vehicles for inculcating local community ethics, customs, and social codes. Daud and Subet (2022) emphasised that proverbs serve as essential communicative instruments that speakers can leverage to express personal perspectives, sentiments, and intentions effectively. *Jaku Sempama* also represents traditional epistemology and a symbolic worldview among Iban communities, which are firmly rooted in nature, human demeanour, and human physiology. Utilising corporeal components in *Jaku Sempama*, such as the heart, eyes, or hands, has yielded a rich tapestry of semantic inquiries into how physical attributes are employed to convey more profound social, moral, or philosophical connotations.

Limited academic investigations have been conducted to systematically assess the anthropomorphic metaphors embedded in *Jaku Sempama*, despite its cultural richness. This study contributes to the development of the theory of meaning by proving that *Jaku Sempama* functioned as a cognitive rather than solely stylistic medium. The findings underscored the pragmatic inference, evaluative stance, and epistemological logic inherent in indigenous oral traditions through the applications of the conceptual metaphor theory and relevance theory. The findings also significantly contributed to the international typology of metaphors by situating Iban figurative language into the wider theoretical and cultural context.

Nonetheless, the role of corporeal symbolism in expressing abstract human qualities remains understudied. It creates a gap in the literature, motivating the current study to bridge it by adopting a semantic-inquisitive approach to pinpoint and interpret the symbolic roles of corporeal metaphors in *Jaku Sempama*. Particularly, this investigation focused on how the Iban community cognitively constructed and linguistically articulated personal virtues, social values, and communal identities, thereby enriching the literature and deepening understanding of indigenous linguistic creativity and its interactions with collective moral reasoning.

This study scrutinises the semantic richness of *Jaku Sempama* by analysing the symbolic embodiment of human traits through anthropomorphic metaphors. The corporeal components in *Jaku Sempama* symbolise the intricate interaction of the Iban community with notions, languages, and cultural values. Evaluating relevant expressions via a semantic-inquisitive framework facilitated the present study to expound the intellectual traditions conveyed through indigenous linguistic forms. The specific objectives are to

1. determine *Jaku Sempama* that symbolically utilises corporeal components,
2. assess the anthropomorphic metaphors embedded within the employed corporeal parts, and
3. synthesise the implicit knowledge and philosophical insights communicated by the Iban community.

The results also led to the development of three research questions:

1. Is there a symbolism of body part images in Iban proverbs (*Jaku Sempama*)?
2. What are the anthropomorphic metaphors used as symbolism in Iban proverbs (*Jaku Sempama*)?
3. Is there a common sense and philosophy of the Iban community behind the creation of Iban proverbs (*Jaku Sempama*)?

1.1 Anthropomorphic Metaphors in Scholarship

Metaphorical expressions attributing human characteristics to non-human entities, including anthropomorphic metaphors, emblemise one of the most persistent and cognition-specific patterns in figurative language, which operates as an intimate linkage between corporeal experience and conceptual abstraction. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explained that human embodiment provides the foundation for a plethora of abstract concepts. Corporeal components, including the head, heart, hands, and eyes, function as metaphorical bases for reasoning, emotion, authority, and perception, respectively, in linguistic expressions (Kövecses, 2002). The universal mapping between human physiological parts and abstract concepts has been consistently observed across cultures and languages, affirming its significant role as a cognitive constant. Southeast Asian academicians, including Daud et al. (2021), Hassan (2001) and Omar (1986), also emphasised the intricate interactions between corporeal metaphors and culturally shaped intellectual and moral reasoning or *akal budi*, in Malay and Austronesian traditions.

Recent scholarly work has placed greater emphasis on the cultural specificity of anthropomorphic metaphors within indigenous linguistic systems amid the proliferation of international metaphor research. Idegbekwe (2020) described how corporeal metaphors could illustrate social dynamics and moral evaluations via personification in Nigerian Pidgin. Nugraha (2023) contrasted Indonesian and English proverbs and demonstrated how corporeal metaphors have continuously been utilised to structure emotional categories, including sadness, across diverse cultural contexts. Furthermore, Krikmann (2007) highlighted how proverbs employed hierarchical personification, in which human traits were reflected downward onto plants, animals, and objects via the concept of the “Great Chain of Being”. Other scholars, including Baranyiné Kóczy (2024), Pourhossein (2016), Pumma (2013), and Yesypenko et al. (2022), also supported the notion that metaphorical anthropomorphism is deeply grounded in cultural cognition and determines how societies conceptualise human experience through non-human aspects.

The semantic-inquisitive model proposed by Jalaluddin (2014) has emerged as a robust instrument for assessing metaphorical language in Malaysia. The model combines formal semantics with inferential pragmatics and cultural logic to discover how meaning is socially developed and cognitively processed. Specifically, the model views proverbs not as fixed idioms but as interpretive devices that amalgamate morality, ideology, and tradition through figurative language. Jonteng et al. (2021) employed the semantic-inquisitive model to analyse Malay proverbs, such as *berat tulang* or *panjang tangan*. They uncovered implicit moral evaluations of indolence and burglary that are often overlooked in literal readings. Murthy et al. (2019) also utilised a relevant technique in Tamil to demonstrate how metaphors embody social hierarchy and cultural expectations. The findings postulated that the semantic-inquisitive model could

enable a more thorough understanding of the hidden cultural reasoning and implicit evaluative logics contained in metaphors, which serve as a pivotal technique for analysing proverb traditions, such as *Jaku Sempama*, rich in cultural nuances.

Jaku Sempama functions as a sophisticated linguistic system within the Iban tradition, wherein behavioural norms, collective values, and moral philosophies are articulated. Recent empirical research, including Douglas et al. (2024), has scrutinised the symbolic embodiment of mammals in Iban proverbs, such as *kapal pechah ikan yu kenyang*, which are interpreted as expressions of opportunistic behaviour. Mengga (2023) also revealed the symbolic role of flora, including *baka bungai manah dikena, udah layu lalu dibuai*, reflecting gendered social dynamics. Moreover, Douglas et al. (2023) investigated the usage of reptilian metaphors to communicate human characteristics, including cunning or deceit. Most existing studies remain highly focused on external symbols, including plants and animals, with research on anthropomorphic metaphors grounded in human physiology remaining scarce. The scarcity has limited the analytical depth of Iban metaphor research and has neglected the cognitive, emotional, and ethical expressions of the Iban community through corporeal symbols (Daud et al., 2017; 2018).

Research on indigenous traditions in other nations or cultural settings has actively posited the functions of corporeal metaphors in determining social cognition. Mihás (2012) examined how corporeal metaphors structured Ashéninka Perené myths in Peru, while Agyekum (2023) and Adisa (2023) evaluated the sociocultural significance of animal metaphors in Akan and Yoruba cultures. Occhi (2014) demonstrated a convoluted landscape of linguistic embodiment and personhood in the Japanese context, whereas Baranyiné Kóczy (2024) demonstrated the anthropomorphisation of trees in Hungarian folklore to represent human life phases. Collectively, the aforementioned studies corroborated the idea that anthropomorphic metaphors grounded in human physiology play a pivotal role in indigenous cultural knowledge systems. Meanwhile, relevant studies on the Iban metaphorical system are scarce in the international discourse on the current topic. However, the Iban metaphorical system can potentially contribute deeper insights into Bornean indigenous cognitive systems and values.

1.2 Bodily Metaphors in Iban Proverbs

Iban proverbs, or *Jaku Sempama*, encapsulate a linguistically rich and culturally profound system of the Austronesian heritage. Nonetheless, existing academic examinations have disproportionately focused on symbolism in flora and fauna rather than on corporeal or anthropomorphic metaphors. While Douglas et al. (2023; 2024) and Mengga (2023) have contributed significant thematic insights into external symbolisms, the roles of corporeal metaphors, including the head for leadership, the hand for agency, or the eyes for perception, within the Iban worldview remain scarcely evaluated despite the universal cognitive tendency to associate corporeal experiences with abstract concepts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2002). As such, more research is imperative to delineate the critical aspect of Iban *akal budi*, which constitutes the cognitive, emotional, and ethical fabric of the cultural logic (Omar, 1986).

Methodologically, the scarcity of research on *Jaku Sempama* has also been aggravated by the limited utilisation of the semantic-inquisitive framework. While the semantic-inquisitive framework has demonstrated potential for elucidating implicit moral reasoning in both Malay (Daud & Subet, 2022) and Tamil (Murthy et al., 2019) contexts, it has not been applied to the Iban community. As a result, an insufficient understanding of the inferential structures, evaluative dimensions, and cultural motivations within *Jaku Sempama* has been observed. Hence, more studies should employ the framework to understand metaphors beyond the superficial level. For example, the metaphor *rapas mata meda* (beyond the reach of sight) symbolises vigilance at the literal level and communal surveillance and interdependence in Iban society at the cultural connotation level.

The current literature gap is significant amid heightened international research interest in corporeal metaphorisation within indigenous discourses. Research in South America (Mihás, 2012), Africa (Idegbekwe, 2020; Agyekum, 2023), and East Asia (Occhi, 2014) has analysed the function of anthropomorphism in conceptualising identity, emotion, and authority, whereas the Iban metaphor system has been continuously neglected despite its expressive and epistemological richness. Neglect can reinforce the linguistic and epistemic marginalisation of Bornean traditions within international discourse (Pourhossein, 2016; Baranyiné Kóczy, 2024). Accordingly, the present study sought to resolve the disparity by conducting a semantic-inquisitive analysis of corporeal anthropomorphic metaphors in *Jaku Sempama*, which could assist in determining the metaphorical correspondences of abstract concepts and in reconstructing the cultural reasoning and indigenous cognition embedded in anthropomorphic expressions. As a result, *Jaku Sempama* could be incorporated into the broader discourse on corporeal embodiment, cultural semiotics, and metaphor theory.

1.3 Synthesis

The current literature on anthropomorphic metaphors and proverbs has been extensively reviewed by existing researchers, including Adisa (2023), Agyekum (2023), Baranyiné Kóczy (2024), Douglas et al. (2023, 2024), Idegbekwe (2020), Jonteng et al. (2021), Krikmann (2007), Mengga (2023), Mihás (2012), Murthy et al. (2019), Nugraha (2023) and Occhi (2014). Nonetheless, most of the existing studies have primarily used qualitative methods and document analysis. Relevant research has also focused on different areas. For example, most studies have investigated natural elements, such as flora and fauna. While one study examined body parts, it focused on Malay idioms rather than Iban.

Furthermore, while international studies mainly focused on metaphor-related issues, the inquisitive semantic approach, which could analyse the actual meaning of proverbs holistically, was not employed. Therefore, existing international studies could not reveal the exact meaning conveyed by proverbs when the inquisitive semantic approach was not applied. Conversely, in Malaysia, the inquisitive semantic approach has proven instrumental in disclosing the implicit meanings contained in proverbs. Nonetheless, relevant Malaysian studies have primarily focused on natural elements rather than body parts, thereby indicating a research gap: the symbolic use of body parts in Iban proverbs (*Jaku Sempama*) remains underexplored. In terms of theoretical relationships with past and current studies, there is an increasing trend toward employing relevance theory, the cross-reference framework, and the inquisitive semantic

approach. The use of relevance theory and the cross-reference framework has frequently been perceived as more capable of analysing the meaning of Iban proverbs. Conversely, past studies mainly utilised the ethnographic communication framework developed by Hymes (1960) to analyse proverbs, and this framework was deemed unable to uncover the intended meaning of Iban proverbs. Therefore, the current study sought to apply relevance theory, the cross-reference framework, and the inquisitive semantic approach to examine the meanings of body-part metaphors in Iban proverbs (Jaku Sempama). The objective was to bridge the above research gap and to contribute to a deeper understanding of the intellect and philosophy of Iban society during the creation of proverbs. As a result, the use of the inquisitive semantic approach in investigating bodily metaphors could offer an in-depth understanding of the Iban community's wisdom and philosophy.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The current study employed a qualitative methodology, namely an interpretive inquiry, to assess the inclusion of human physiology in anthropomorphic metaphors to emblemise the cognitive and cultural logic of the Iban community. The interpretive inquiry is suitable for scrutinising the ambiguous connotations of figurative language, especially culturally saturated terms and phrases (e.g., proverbs). The current study was conducted in the linguistic and ethnocultural landscape of Sarawak, Malaysia, focusing on Iban proverbs, or Jaku Sempama, as a living tradition that communicates indigenous morality, wisdom, and social norms.

The primary data source was the book, *Sempama Jaku Iban*, by Umping (2010). It is a systematic oeuvre of 460 Iban proverbs written in contemporary Iban orthography. *Sempama Jaku Iban* was selected over prior collections, including Ensiring et al. (2011), owing to its higher lexical consistency and the availability of contextualised example sentences, which could enhance semantic clarity and interpretive accuracy. *Sempama Jaku Iban* functioned as the research site, subject, and boundary, as no human respondents were involved. The current researcher determined 54 proverbs with symbolic references to human physiology, including the head (*kepala*), eyes (*mata*), face (*muka*), body (*tubuh*), and hands (*tangan*). Table 1 presents the distribution of the collected proverbs and coding processes involved in the study.

Table 1

Selected proverbs, meanings, and thematic analysis

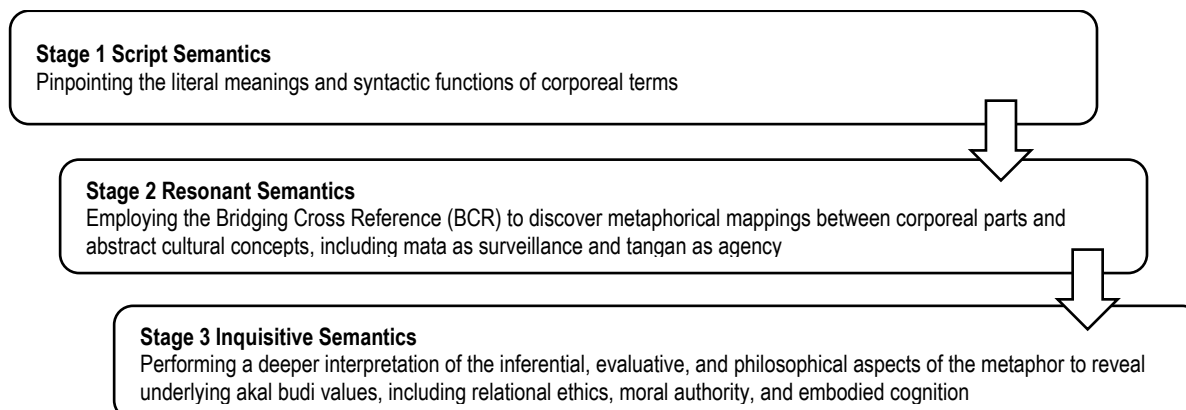
Proverb	Meaning	Code	Page
<i>Baka pitak dibuai mata</i>	Like a syrphidae lured by what it sees	Reliability or inefficacies of an individual's worldview	2
<i>Ngambi kayu mangkung pala diri empu</i>	Taking a stick to hit one's own head	Foresight, authority, and the moral consequences of an individual's decisions	20
<i>Gatal jari</i>	Itchy fingers	Rebuke individuals who behave without self-control, interfere with matters without suitable conduct, or violate communal norms	121
<i>Asaika sejeput agi mua</i>	Just a pinch, and he flares up	Pride, embarrassment, or emotional turbulence	10
<i>Seput sama ba tubuh</i>	Breath shared within the same body	A cultural cognisance of social façade	109

This study concentrated on the top five most frequently employed corporeal metaphors, namely *mata*, *kepala*, *jari*, *muka*, and *tubuh*, to guarantee a sufficient depth of analysis. It was the most optimal practice in the qualitative methodology with smaller sample sizes to fulfil the analytical and theoretical criteria (Liamputtong, 2010). Aidid (1998) contended that larger samples would not necessarily yield more accurate results, as these depend on the representativeness and conceptual richness of the selected cases. Purposive sampling was employed in the present study, selecting proverbs based on their semantic and metaphorical relevance. Proverbs were identified, collected, classified, and coded according to the physiological components involved.

The semantic-inquisitive model formulated by Jalaluddin (2014) was applied to synthesise formal semantics, inferential pragmatics, and cultural cognition. The analytical process consisted of three stages (Figure 1):

Figure 1

The three stages of the semantic-inquisitive model



The present study drew on relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986; 1995) to examine the influence of contextual cues and inferential mechanisms on the pragmatic roles of metaphors. Collectively, the current methodologically layered method enabled this investigation to extend beyond superficial metaphor classification into the semantic, cognitive, and cultural depths of *Jaku Sempama*, which functions not only as a literary oeuvre but also as an essential repository of indigenous reasoning.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a semantic-inquisitive analysis of selected Iban proverbs that employ corporeal symbolism to articulate culturally embedded anthropomorphic metaphors. Five of the 54 identified proverbs involving human physiology were selected based on frequency and conceptual richness: head (*kepala*), eyes (*mata*), fingers (*jar*), face (*muka*), and *tubuh* (body). The proverbs were appraised linguistically for inferential structures, evaluative stances, and sociocultural reasoning through the three interpretive stages, namely literal (script semantics), metaphorical (resonant semantics), and philosophical (inquisitive semantics), which enabled a more profound cultural insight beyond descriptive categorisation.

The role of metaphorical references to human physiology as cognitive devices for ethical values, emotional norms, social relationships, and indigenous epistemologies in the Iban community was elucidated. The proverbs were not studied separately but were interpreted as cultural texts connected to the Iban worldview and communicative techniques. The interplay between the metaphors and broader cross-cultural frameworks was also analysed to deepen the comprehension of anthropomorphism in the international discourse on metaphor and cultural linguistics.

3.1 Eyes as Anthropomorphic Metaphors for Distorted Perception and Cognitive Uncertainty

Eyes have continuously been a primary metaphorical vehicle for insight, perception, and truth across various cultural traditions. Ocular references in *Jaku Sempama* were found not only as simple anatomical references but also as cognitive metaphors, underscoring the importance of ensuring high clarity of cognisance, judgment, and epistemic responsibility within the Iban community. The eye symbolised the reliability or inefficacies of an individual's worldview. While other proverbs have constantly employed eyes to suggest impulsive cognition, distorted perception, or misjudgment observed through surface observation, *Jaku Sempama* has metaphorically employed the corporeal part to symbolise epistemic fragility and judgmental failure, as revealed through the three semantic analysis stages to ascertain the actual cognitive and social implications:

Proverb: *Baka pitak dibuai mata*

Literal Translation: *Like a syrphidae lured by what it sees*

3.1.1 Stage 1 Script Semantics

The current stage revealed that the Iban proverb, namely *baka pitak dibuai mata*, comprised three lexical parts: *baka* (like or as if), *pitak* (a type of insect, namely *syrphidae*), and *dibuai mata* (swayed or deceived by the eyes). The literal description is of a type of insect, namely *Syrphidae*, being influenced or attracted by visual stimuli, which is an oxymoron that elicits semantic dissonance. *Kamus Iban-Melayu Dewan* (2020) defined *mata* as the eye, meaning a biological organ and a cognitive tool for perceiving, discerning, and recognising stimuli. The idea of a type of insect, namely *syrphidae*, that feeds on human or animal blood, being inveigled by sight in the proverb, conveys satirical, metaphorically implicating connotations. The lexical organisation of the phrase aligns with a universal semantic script identified in cognitive linguistics, in which seeing is equivalent to comprehending (Kövecses, 2002).

Meanwhile, the Iban proverb has instilled a sense of cognitive dissonance to emphasise dysfunctional visual perception, suggesting that the organ responsible for visual perception cannot provide an accurate representation and can lead to incorrect actions. The proverb requires deeper interpretation beyond the superficial level, which serves as the foundation for broader cultural and philosophical resonances. Therefore, it is necessary to proceed to the second stage of analysis, the resonance semantic analysis.

3.1.2 Stage 2 Resonant Semantics

In this second stage, the researcher examined the data, theory, and cognitive ability to understand the actual meaning expressed in the Iban proverb *baka pitak dibuai mata*. The interpretive depth of the proverb was evaluated using the *BCR* (Jalaluddin, 2014) and relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). The proverb was scrutinised as a cultural remark on the potential risks of behaving from an incomplete perception or cognitive bias. A type of insect, namely *syrphidae* (*pitak*), with its eyes removed, denotes individuals who make decisions or develop judgments without adequate insight, and *dibuai mata* connotes a higher susceptibility to superficial stimuli, such as rumours, misleading appearances, or emotional incitements.

Sharp perception, or *mata ati* (eye of the heart), is regarded as a revered trait in the Iban worldview, particularly in communal decision-making processes involving customary law, *adat* deliberations, or inheritance settlements (Douglas et al., 2024). An individual who belongs to the community and behaves without the aforementioned cultural insight will be socially reprimanded and is frequently associated with moral failure. Hence, the proverb functions as both a caution and a reproach, rebuking community members who act like an insect, namely *Syrphidae*, with its eyes removed, impulsively based on illusions or shadows, while highlighting the fragility of perception in formulating truth. An example of naturalistically utilising the proverb is illustrated in conversational contexts:

“*Nya meh akih anang bangat nebang kepapa enti deka enggau orang besenis, peratika dulu pendiau orang nya ngambika kitai enda disemaka orang baka baka pitak dibuai mata nyau ligau-ligau enda temu tungga tuju agi.*” (Umping, 2010, p. 2), (Translation: That is why you cannot be careless when you want to do business with people, look at their lives so that we are not compared to people like a *Syzphidae* being thrown out of the eye, who are wandering around without knowing their purpose.)

The relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986) posits that the proverb urges listeners to develop contextual inferences, in which rash judgment without epistemic validation would result in socially rejected behaviours and even jeopardy. The *BCR* enables the mapping of the symbolic associations in the proverb:

- *Pitak* (*syzphidae*) → metaphorically describing cognitive incompetence
- *Mata* (eyes) → related to perception, judgment, and social discernment
- *Dibuai* (swayed) → susceptible to deception or emotional distortion

The proverb is embedded with a cultural logic that positions the clarity of perception with moral intelligence, while connecting blurred vision with rashness and social risk.

3.1.3 Stage 3 Inquisitive Semantics

The inquisitive semantic phase scrutinises the deeper epistemological rationale within the metaphor, namely the reason for utilising eyes (*mata*) as the anthropomorphic device and the meaning of *baka pitak* regarding Iban moral cognition. The proverb expands beyond lexical analysis to serve as an aperture for investigating indigenous cognitive frameworks and ethical codes. Eyes are not only a visual organ but also emblematised rational thinking, truth-seeking, and respectful social engagement in Iban cultural epistemology. The Encyclopedia of Iban Studies (2001) elucidated that visual acuity, both literal and metaphorical, is central to community ethics and dispute resolution. An individual who can visually perceive objects in detail is regarded as equipped not only with sharp physical sight but also with intuitive awareness and depth of judgment (*pengerai*). The image of a *Syzphidae* being thrown out of the eye, as delineated in the proverb, is an intentional narrative inversion employed to expose moral blindness and epistemic failure.

The metaphor also conveys an implicit rebuke of cognitive illusions and confirmation bias, particularly in the contemporary era teeming with misinformation, visual media, and superficial impressions that significantly influence public opinion (Gigerenzer et al., 2007; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). As such, the proverb espouses a virtually universal quality by underscoring the susceptibility of human cognition to unexamined stimuli. The anthropomorphised eye emerges as a figurative path to both knowledge and deception, which is contingent upon an individual's level of clarity and wisdom.

The proverb preserves and upholds Iban *akal budi*, a culturally rooted moral philosophy grounded in critical thinking, humility, and communal admonishment. Analogising human decision-making processes with the actions of a sensory-deficient animal, as an admonishing metaphor, by the Iban community has created an educational medium to strengthen social norms, in which individual or community decisions should be constantly guided by both factual clarity and ethical intention. The organ in the proverb, namely the eyes, functions as a metaphorical focus of moral reasoning, denoting the transformation of a corporeal reference into cognitive and moral admonishment through the anthropomorphic metaphor.

Accordingly, a reprimand is developed to prevent superficiality, recklessness, and arrogance in uncertain situations, while rebuking the human inclination to behave according to illusion, appearance, or emotional insinuation rather than rational clarity. Integrating the relevance theory and the semantic inquisitive model allowed the current study to validate the claim that traditional metaphors are not only decorative but also cognitively and culturally generative. The structure and resonance of the proverb have revealed how indigenous metaphor systems formulate, protect, and disseminate epistemological norms by employing corporeal experience to pursue and uphold communal truth and ethical clarity.

3.2 Head as the Anthropomorphic Metaphor of Cognitive Burden and Self-Inflicted Struggle

The head is culturally and cognitively perceived as the device for leadership, thought, and decision-making. References to the head in Iban proverbs frequently symbolise foresight, authority, and the moral consequences of an individual's decisions. The head also serves

as a potent anthropomorphic metaphor when an individual is burdened or implicated in wrongdoing, symbolically depicting self-imposed struggles and cognitive miscalculations. Hence, the head was examined to determine the role as a metaphorical device to emblemise personal accountability and the psychological weight of individual actions. The proverb below demonstrates the metaphorisation of the head as the location of personal decision-making and responsibility. Semantic-inquisitive analysis revealed the conceptual burden related to self-inflicted challenges and moral consequences:

Proverb: *Ngambi kayu mangkung pala diri empu*

Literal Translation: *Taking a stick to hit one's own head*

3.2.1 Stage 1 Script Semantics

The proverb *Ngambi kayu mangkung pala diri empu* comprises the lexical components of *ngambi* (taking), *kayu mangkung* (a stick to hit), *pala* (head), and *diri empu* (one's own self). Semantically, the proverb portrays an individual voluntarily situating a burdensome or awkward object on the head. The *Kamus Iban-Melayu Dewan* (2020) denoted *pala* as the head anatomically and a metonym for thought, leadership, and judgment. The definition provides a vivid, anthropomorphic depiction. The human body is used to illustrate the potential consequences of decision-making. The head also metaphorically serves as the vehicle of control, reason, and responsibility across different languages and traditions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The addition of the verb *mangkung* (hit or burdensome) suggests that the object being carried is heavy and misaligned. The notion delineates physical difficulty and internal moral imbalance. Therefore, the proverb is construed as an individual who consciously bears the weight of personal negative decisions or unfavourable circumstances, thereby laying the foundation for richer cultural and cognitive interpretations. Nevertheless, the analysis at this stage cannot fully capture the speaker's intended meaning, as it addresses only the surface-level interpretation. Hence, it is necessary to proceed to the second stage of analysis.

3.2.2 Stage 2 Resonant Semantics

In the second stage of semantic resonance, the researcher investigated the data, theory and cognitive ability to understand the actual meaning expressed in the Iban proverb *ngambi kayu mangkung pala diri empu*. The BCR (Jalaluddin, 2014) and relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) reveal the layered meanings of the proverb. The illustration of taking a stick to hit one's own head metaphorically describes personal accountability, internalised guilt, and the cognitive burden of inaccurate judgment (Nasir & Subet, 2019; 2023). The head (*pala*) is frequently employed to connote deliberation, leadership, and status among Iban communities, in which decisions performed both at the individual and communal levels, particularly by longhouse leaders or *tuai rumah*, are anticipated to be gingerly considered. The depiction of taking a *kayu mangkung* on the head symbolises a circumstance that the individual is both the agent and the victim of personal misjudgement, with the burden as self-imposed:

"Nya aku enggai dibai iya ngenchuri suba, enda alah ngambi kayu mangkung pala diri empu. Diatu iya kena jail nama penyadi bini anak nadai urang nupi laban deka ngiga utai muntang nyau tekenaka pemedis." (Umping, 2010, p. 20), (Translation: That is why I do not want to follow him in stealing, I do not want to be likened to someone who uses a stick to hit their own head. Now that he is in prison, what will happen to his wife and children? No one will take care of them because he finds an easy path and finds himself in his own trouble.)

Relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) postulates that the proverb urges community members to understand that the individual has acted on personal madness and should bear the consequences of those behaviours. The contextual implication is that accountability ensues personal agency, with personal actions based on misjudgement creating burdens that the individual should bear. The BCR enabled the mapping of conceptual associations:

- *Kepala* (head) → locus of judgement, reasoning, and accountability
- *Kayu mangkung* (a stick to hit) → connotation of personal guilt, burden, or flawed decisions
- *Ngambi diri empu* (self-imposition) → personal agency with self-directed consequences

The proverb serves as a cognitive prompt to activate the cultural knowledge of moral introspection and admonish against blame displacement in interpersonal and communal relationships.

3.2.3 Stage 3 Inquisitive Semantics

The proverb offered insights into the Iban community's ethical worldview and *akal budi*, with human cognition metaphorically manifested. The head functions as the predominant metaphorical location in Iban cosmology and social reasoning. The head is regarded as principal to rational thinking and moral agency. The *Encyclopedia of Iban Studies* (2001) stated that leaders are frequently assessed by their ability to "carry decisions on their heads," or to bear the burden of their personal actions with integrity. The phrase *kayu mangkung*, which means a twisted or awkward piece of wood, reinforces the proverb's moral reprimand. A straight and well-shaped log would signify duty or honour, whereas a crooked log posits an inaccuracy, conflict, and internal contradiction. The proverb warns against decisions made with malicious intent or flawed reasoning, and depicts decisions based on misjudgement as heavy and awkward burdens to be borne by the individual.

The proverb also highlights the broader moral philosophy encompassing collective obligations and self-regulation, cautioning against embracing responsibilities or actions that are inappropriate or morally contradictory. Gigerenzer et al. (2007) theory of cognitive ecology posits that individuals frequently make decisions using fast-and-frugal heuristics. Heuristics, driven by distorted logic or self-deception, would lead to burdens like a *kayu mangkung* borne on the head. Hence, the anthropomorphic metaphor distributes moral and cognitive weight to the human head and reveals how Iban culture localises abstract notions of consequence, guilt, and reflection

through human organs. Compared to Western idioms, including carrying the weight of the world on one's shoulders, the Iban proverb concentrates on individual misjudgement and self-inflicted struggle. It underscores that wisdom is situated in and performed via the head. The human corpus should withhold the consequence when the mind errs.

The proverb serves as a salient anthropomorphic metaphor for cognitive burden, which includes the Iban belief that flawed decisions are not only demonstrated in social outcomes but also in the corporeal experience of moral weight. The head, which is constantly perceived as the location of wisdom and authority, has served in the proverb as a symbolic medium for self-inflicted burden and ethical accountability. The semantic inquisitive model found that Iban proverbs, including *ngambi kayu mangkung pala diri empu*, communicated folk wisdom and indigenous moral logic, connecting cognition to embodiment and personal agency to communal consequences. The metaphors symbolise and articulate the actual reality, admonishing the individual to bear the burdens arising from personal actions.

3.3 Fingers as an Anthropomorphic Metaphor of Agitation, Intrusion, and Moral Instability

Fingers are metaphorically powerful emblems of disruption, personal agency, and boundary transgression despite being minor anatomical components. References to fingers in Iban proverbs rebuke individuals who behave without self-control, interfere with matters without suitable conduct, or violate communal norms. Relevant metaphors suggest that outwardly trivial actions, such as a finger's touch, can signal deeper moral ineffectiveness and social instability. The figurative phrase, namely, itchy fingers, denotes insufficient discipline and portends the erosion of communal trust. The metaphor below portrays that physically minor fingers can metaphorically signify social interventions and ethical imbalance:

Proverb: *Gatal jari*

Literal translation: *Itchy fingers*

3.3.1 Stage 1 Script Semantics

The metaphor consists of two primary lexical items, namely *gatal* (itchy) and *jari* (fingers). The *Kamus Iban-Melayu Dewan* (2020) defines *jari* as the digits of the hand, often associated with gesture, touch, and manual action. *Gatal* is a sensation that urges an individual to scratch, frequently accompanied by discomfort, irritation, or a sense of low control. Collectively, the metaphor evokes an image of impulsive, restless, or unrestrained fingers, or a physiological state requiring relief. The cognitive friction in the proverbs also highlights that the itch is not physical but metaphorical, offering a figurative expression grounded in corporeal experience. The cognitive metaphor theory propounds that corporeal demeanour are constantly associated with emotional or behavioural depictions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). As this stage cannot fully explain the speaker's intended meaning due to its surface-level interpretation, it is necessary to proceed to the second stage of analysis.

3.3.2 Stage 2 Resonant Semantics

In the second stage of semantic resonance, the researcher assessed the data, the theory, and the cognitive ability to understand the true meaning of the Iban proverb *gatal jari*. The BCR and relevance theory postulate that the metaphor encapsulates behavioural tendencies, including intrusion, impulsivity, mischief, and theft. The metaphor is not perceived as dermatological discomfort, but as socially reprimanded behaviours encouraged by inadequate self-discipline or self-control in Iban culture. The metaphor is generally employed to describe individuals who intrude into others' affairs or engage in illegal or mischievous conduct. The metaphor constantly serves as a subtle admonishment:

*"Anang enda bejaga enti mai iya ngagai kebun laban iya ke **gatal jari** tak sebarang utai dichabut baka paung buah kitai."*
(Umping, 2010, p. 121), (Translation: Do not be careless when taking him to the garden because his hands will itch and grab anything just like pulling out a fruit tree.)

The metaphor suggests that the individual engages in undesired behaviours that may engender discomfort or conflict. The relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) postulates that the metaphor attains optimal relevance not through literal meaning but by eliciting a shared cultural inference, in which minor, uncontrolled actions can produce disproportionate social impacts. The BCR maps key concepts in the metaphor:

- *Jari* (fingers) → personal agency, manipulation, and subtle interference
- *Gatal* (itchiness) → uncontrollable urge, moral irritability, and social unrest
- *Gatal jari* → subtle but disruptive demeanours creating communal havoc

The anthropomorphisation is performed by attributing personal will and moral intention to fingers and regarding deviant demeanours as embodied agitation, which corresponds to Kövecses (2002), who discerned that minor and purportedly inconsequential profound corporeal component could be embedded with substantial metaphorical weight to describe blame, instability, or minor transgressions.

3.3.3 Stage 3: Inquisitive Semantics

The metaphor was uncovered to incorporate moral norms related to social conduct in a highly connected communal system, including the Iban longhouse society. Contrasting with proverbs that focus on the head (reason) or heart (emotion), the metaphor employs fingers, which are distal and relatively minor anatomical components, to emblematised the potentially significant social implications of subtle actions. The metaphor also strengthens the Iban ethical worldview, in which communal stability is sustained via respect for

roles, boundaries, and consent. Specifically, itchy fingers are described as demeanours that violate social boundaries, including pilfering, inappropriate touch, or interloping in other individuals' arguments.

The Encyclopedia of Iban Studies (2001) elucidated that Iban social interaction is guided by highly contextualised norms of social etiquette and hierarchy, with minimal breaches of societal norms perceived as culturally pronounced. Furthermore, the metaphor implicitly conveys moral restlessness, a psychological disposition to seek stimulation through interventions. The concept is associated with broader ethnographic observations on *kaki sibuk*, or the 'busybody' character in Southeast Asian cultures, in which indirect actions are consistently considered more socially troublesome than explicit aggression (Geertz, 2017). Thus, the metaphor communicates not only physical touch but also emotional impulsivity, moral overextension, and the deterioration of communal boundaries. Anthropomorphically, the fingers serve not only as anatomical parts but also as devices for moral weakness, which can disrupt collective societal harmony through subtle, undisciplined demeanours. Jalaluddin (2014) also contended that indigenous metaphors are not decorative but epistemological, serving to portray corporeal references in social philosophy.

The metaphor can be effectively translated across diverse cultures. The Western metaphor of itchy fingers denotes burglary or interference. In contrast, its connotation extends beyond individual mischief to encompass reprimanding social disharmony and cultural impropriety in Iban society. The usage indicates a communally oriented epistemology, with the slightest divergence from culturally accepted demeanours perceived as a moral transgression and a significant social risk. The Iban metaphor also symbolises how anthropomorphic metaphors referencing distal corporeal components encapsulate intricate notions of social ethics, personal conduct, and communal accountability. The metaphorical meaning is pivotal despite the fingers being biologically peripheral, underscoring the Iban belief that divergent demeanours often manifest as minor, unregulated gestures. Both the relevance theory and the semantic inquisitive model also demonstrate that the metaphor not only depicts human restlessness but also reveals deeper moral character that contributes to the tendency. Summarily, the metaphor culturally and specifically exemplifies embodied ethics through human fingers, which serve as the locus of internal disorder and social instability. The Iban linguistic tradition offers a nuanced comprehension of the interweaving between physical action, moral impulse, and cultural order.

3.4 Face as an Anthropomorphic Metaphor of Emotional Sensitivity and Social Facework

The face in Iban cultural expression extends beyond a physical façade by emblematising public honour, emotional identity, and interpersonal sensitivity. Proverbs utilise continuous repetition of themes such as pride, embarrassment, or emotional turbulence, which emphasise the role of social status, the pursuit of personal dignity, and responses to criticism or perceived threats. The metaphor also underscores the importance of face-saving actions and the moral anticipations of emotional restraint in the Iban community. The proverb below employs the face as a metaphorical location of emotional susceptibility and interpersonal sensitivity to emphasise the embodiment of facework and honour in Iban figurative discourse:

Proverb: *Asaika sejeput agi mua*

Literal translation: *Just a pinch, and he flares up*

3.4.1 Stage 1 Script Semantics

The proverb contains *asaika* (already), *sejeput* (a slight touch), *agi* (again, still), and *mua* (flare up, become enraged), which describe an individual who responds strongly to a minor physical stimulus. The term *sejeput* denotes minimal pressure, while *mua* conveys a highly emotional, exaggerated response. The *Kamus Iban-Melayu Dewan* (2020) describes individuals who are easily instigated and emotionally volatile or hypersensitive. The proverb also reflects emotional and social dynamics, especially the fragility of self-worth or personal pride, in which corporeal sensation, such as a pinch, can be associated with psychological actions, including humiliation, insult, or ego injury. While the face is not mentioned in the proverb, it is comprehended as the metaphorical location of personal reactions and social perceptions. The finding calls for the second stage of analysis.

3.4.2 Stage 2 Resonant Semantics

The researcher appraised the data, theory, and cognitive capacity to understand the true meaning of the Iban proverb, "*asaika sejeput agi mua*." The BCR (Jalaluddin, 2014) and relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) postulate that the proverb serves as a mirror of emotional reactivity, particularly the predisposition to overreact to perceived slight disruptions or social discomforts. The metaphorical underpinning, namely the face, burns or flares at the slightest provocation, which elicits a culturally resonant construal of the face as a symbol of personal identity, pride, and social status. The face, or *muka*, in Iban culture is closely associated with an individual's emotional stability, honour, and interactional decorum. Losing face or *jatuh muka*, which connotes being effortlessly agitated, is regarded as emotional immaturity and social imbalance.

Moreover, facework in other Asian societies encompasses managing public persona via tact, restraint, and emotional regulation (Goffman, 2017; Ting-Toomey, 2005). The proverb is constantly employed to denote individuals who exhibit exaggerated defensiveness or construe benign behaviours as aggressive:

"Lebuh aku ngujika saiz seluar dia enda mukai-mukai uchu ke enggau aku lalu narit seluar sereta aku nyau ganjang-ganjang mina agi seluar dalam aja. Dia sepi aku nyau, asaika sejeput agi mua dipeda pelayuh orang ke bisi dia." (Umping, 2010, p. 10), (Translation: When I tried on the size of the pants, suddenly my grandson, who was with me, pulled the pants off, and I was left with only underwear. At those moments, I felt like a little more face because there were so many people there.)

Relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) holds that individuals are hypersensitive and incapable of regulating interpersonal criticism or casual comments. The term *pinch* in the proverb metaphorically indicates minimal interaction, with humour, feedback, or dissent misinterpreted as a threat to personal honour or ego. The RSS revealed the anthropomorphic mappings:

- *Face* → the locus of emotions, including pride, shame, and sensitivity
- *Pinch* → minor disruption or perceived insult
- *Flare up* → unregulated emotional vengeance

The mapping was consistent with Kövecses (2002), who elucidated the cultural connotations of facial expressions that are frequently used to metaphorically develop emotional categories. The Iban proverb of emotional irritability demonstrates the public and physical depiction of the self via facial metaphors and proverbs.

3.4.3 Stage 3 Inquisitive Semantics

The proverb could be interpreted as a social diagnostic instrument to appraise individuals' emotional resilience and interactional maturity within the Iban communal ethos. Specifically, *muka* is not only the locus of physical visibility but also a repository of social values, including standing (*maruah*), control (*pengemali diri*), and the ability for relational equilibrium. The anthropomorphisation of the face also extended beyond physiological references to symbolise a moralised psychology, with the face as the medium for adhering to or disrupting social harmony. Individuals who would be immediately irritated or *sejeput* (slight provocations) would be considered significant threats to community stability and coherence, given the inadequate emotional regulatory skills in a highly connected community. The Encyclopedia of Iban Studies (2001) also delineated that Iban social life is highly contingent upon consensus, negotiation, and collective restraint. An individual who cannot effectively control personal sentiments can lead to social inequity and cause the self to be distrusted or ostracised. The proverb not only portrays a behavioural flaw but also serves as a norm to emphasise the significance of emotional regulation as a communal virtue.

The proverb, in the broader anthropological context, corresponds to Erving Goffman's (2017) face-threatening acts, which are defined as social demeanours that pose a threat to perceived self-worth. Relevant behaviours would not be simply foregone in Iban communities owing to the high sensitivity to the signals of actions violating social and cultural norms. The proverb *asaika sejeput agi mua* is a culturally significant metaphor that underscores the psychological vulnerability of public self-construction. The proverb has enriched the Iban repository of corporeal moral philosophy by exemplifying the face as turbulent and reactive, with the head, eyes, and fingers conveying distinctive dimensions of ethical and emotional conduct.

In addition, the proverb aligns with recent research on emotional dysregulation and its pertinent social consequences (Gross, 2002), which highlights those traditional cultural metaphors continually herald modern behavioural science. The proverb serves as a comprehensive anthropomorphic metaphor for emotional susceptibility, with the *face* signifying personal honour, pride, and social exposure. The proverb also chastises exaggerated emotional responses to trivial provocations and warns against individuals with heightened emotional turbulence, potentially with negative implications for community cohesion and mutual respect. The multiple layers of meaning across lexical, cognitive, and cultural dimensions have enabled the proverb to offer a nuanced understanding of shame culture, facework, and moral embodiment. The Iban linguistic worldview corroborated that the face served not only as an anatomical component but also as a reflection of the exposed, vulnerable, and obligated self.

3.5 Body as an Anthropomorphic Metaphor of Superficial Unity and Latent Disunity

The body serves as a comprehensive representation of the Iban community cohesion, with relevant proverbs that use corporeal references to constantly emphasise external conformity while obscuring understanding of internal conflicts. Corporeal references synchronised extrinsically underscore the contrast between performative solidarity and genuine consensus, including a cultural cognisance of social façade, and highlight the significance of intrinsic calibration and moral integrity amid collective superficiality. The following proverb demonstrates how the human body is utilised metaphorically to portray performative social cohesion. The semantic-inquisitive interpretation in the proverb underscores the conflict between extrinsic conformity and internal divergence in a community.

Proverb: *Seput sama ba tubuh*

Literal Translation: *Breath shared within the same body*

3.5.1 Stage 1 Script Semantics

The proverb comprises *seput* (breath), *sama* (same), and *ba tubuh* (on the body). The *Kamus Iban-Melayu Dewan* (2020) denotes *seput* as a traditional textile or cloth worn around the torso for decorative and symbolic purposes in Iban culture. The proverb describes that all individuals are dressed in the same external apparel, which suggests apparent societal uniformity, cohesion, or shared identity. The literal perusal of the proverb also emblematises its metaphorical meaning through the portrayal of the body or *tubuh*, which serves as a physical location for the societal structure or identity (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The superficial construe has led to a conflict between external similitude and internal disparity, which requires a deeper cultural and cognitive interpretation at the second stage of analysis.

3.5.2 Stage 2 Resonant Semantics

The researcher evaluated the data, the theory, and cognitive ability to understand the true meaning of the Iban proverb *seput sama ba tubuh*. The BCR (Jalaluddin, 2014) and relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) underscore the implicit meaning of performative solidarity contained within the proverb. While all human corpora are similarly dressed (external uniformity), the proverb challenges the

notion that similitude can apply to internal structures, such as societal values, purposes, morals, and visions. The body is anthropomorphically utilised to represent the group, community, or collective identity, with the identical wrap or *seput* positing a shared culture or ritual (ceremonial attire). Nonetheless, the depiction of external resemblance may conceal potential fragmentation internally, which implies cultural pragmatics and admonishes against applying extrinsic characteristics to intrinsic qualities:

*“Amat bendar seduai nya deka berekak tak enda nemu ngampun asuh pangan diri lebu bekelanjur jaku. Tak munyi ke berani mati, pia ku seduai nya laban **seput sama ba tubuh**.”* (Umping, 2010, p. 109), (Translation: They will indeed fight and not know how to forgive each other when they say the wrong things. It is as if they seem to dare to die fighting, even though they have the same breath in their body.)

The proverb provides a contextual foundation for relevance theory by suggesting that apparent uniformity does not always reflect actual community consensus or harmony. The proverb enhances societal awareness of dissonance beneath superficial solidarity. The BCR mapped the terms with related concepts:

- *Tubuh* (body) → the collective or the community
- *Seput* (breath) → symbolic uniformity or performative identity
- *Same* (sama) → mimicked unity
- Implied contrast → superficial alignment is inequivalent to the actual consensus

3.5.3 Stage 3 Inquisitive Semantics

The proverb was discovered to provide a more nuanced interpretation of communal identity, moral cohesion, and performative culture within the Iban worldview. The *tubuh* served not only as a reference for the individual but also as an allegory for the social organism, namely the Iban longhouse, family, or ceremonial collective. Particularly, to be wrapped the same is to partake in shared vision and societal norms, such as obligations, rituals, and cultural attire. However, the proverb concurrently implies that the same wrap does not constantly ensure emotional or ideological uniformity. Apparel functions as a cultural symbol to represent social status, unity, or passage rites across numerous Austronesian communities, including the Iban (The Encyclopedia of Iban Studies, 2001). The *seput*, which is frequently employed in weddings, rituals, or funerals, suggests a public performance of belonging, although the phrase *seput sama ba tubuh* questions whether intrinsic community structures correspond to extrinsic solidarity. The divergence dissonance is religious, political, or familial in nature, in which conformity is continuously imperative despite the lack of actual belief.

Therefore, the proverb offers a culturally rooted admonition against assuming community cohesion, both intrinsically and extrinsically. Anthropomorphically, the body serves as the moral domain for corroborating or rejecting conformity. The wrap in efforts to foster community through via external signs while implicitly revealing hidden dissent, tension, and disunity. The connotation corresponds to the anthropological interpretation of superficial harmony in collectivist societies (Geertz, 2017), in which societal harmony is frequently sustained through the suppression of personal variation. The Iban metaphor has emphasised a reflexive awareness of the tendency to maintain superficial solidarity.

The proverb is consistent with contemporary sociolinguistic discourse on identity performance (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) and discursive concealment, in which individuals or groups sustain the façade of uniformity while diverging on core community values beneath it. The proverb functions not only as a cultural idiom but also as a discursive medium for conveying irony, reprimand, and political consciousness within the community. The proverb also serves as a significant analogy for the use of anthropomorphic metaphors to reveal the conflict between external uniformity and internal reality. The illustration of identically wrapped human corpora emphasises performative cohesion, superficial uniformity, and the illusion of community consensus, which strengthens a culturally ingenious cognisance that actual cohesion cannot be worn and must be experienced. The semantic inquisitive model also demonstrated that Iban metaphors functioned not only as instruments for retaining cultural memories but also for cultural introspection, facilitating a critical ethical framework that prioritises authenticity over superficiality.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The present study scrutinised the anthropomorphic metaphorical role of corporeal symbolism in *Sempama Jaku Iban* by applying the semantic inquisitive model to reveal the implicit social reasoning, cultural cognisance, and epistemological depth embedded in selected Iban proverbs referencing the head, eyes, face, fingers, and body. Appraising relevant corporeal expressions in terms of the literal, cognitive, and philosophical aspects demonstrated how traditional Iban metaphors exemplified communal ethos, moral knowledge, and indigenous depictions of individuals. The results postulated that human physiological components in Iban proverbs functioned not only as anatomical references but also as concepts to express moral burden (*kepala*), social sensitivity (*muka*), emotional regulation (*mata*), behavioural impulse (*jari*), and performative unity (*tubuh*). The metaphorical components demonstrated that the Iban community possessed a highly nuanced ethical system, deeply rooted in corporeal cognition and conveyed through oral traditions.

Simultaneously, the semantic inquisitive model was found to be effective in uncovering stance, inferential logic, and cultural values, with meta-embedded features employed by the user community. As such, this investigation profoundly contributed to existing research on metaphors by applying the anthropomorphic metaphor framework to an underrepresented Austronesian linguistic setting. Specifically, the theoretical status was strengthened, with the language, including proverbs, serving as a device for disseminating cultural epistemologies. Metaphors could also serve as a repository of a local community's worldview and moral instruction, further enriching the existing literature on cognitive linguistics, ethnopragsmatics, and semantic typology.

The current study comprises several limitations due to the primary examination of a single source, namely *Sempama Jaku Iban*, with five metaphorical groups. While the examination methodologically aligned with qualitative study principles, a more comprehensive and cross-linguistic comparison could deepen current understanding of the topic. Future scholars can assess how relevant metaphors are employed in daily interactions or ritual speech among Iban community members. This study also recommends integrating indigenous metaphors employing corporeal experiences into linguistic preservation curricula and intercultural communication frameworks. Existing metaphorical systems preserve traditional wisdom and contribute nuanced insights into the methods minority communities conceptualise social cohesion, morality, and conflict. Future academicians can also scrutinise how digital technologies, such as social media, perpetuate or diminish metaphorical traditions amid rapid globalisation. In summary, *Sempama Jaku Iban* functions as both a linguistic medium and a philosophical mechanism that encompasses the communication method of Iban society for perceiving, understanding, determining, and experiencing the surroundings and reality.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Sylvia Jembau (Conceptualisation; Investigation; Data curation; Writing – original draft)

Mary Fatimah Subet (Methodology; Formal analysis; Validation; Writing – review & editing; Supervision)

Muhammad Zaid Daud (Conceptualisation; Formal analysis; Visualisation; Writing – review & editing; Project administration; Supervision)

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