



**Fakulti Seni Gunaan Dan Kreatif**

**IBAN CULTURE : SEMANTIC APPROACH AND THE CROCODILE  
LEGEND IN PRODUCING CONTEMPORARY ARTWORK.**

**IVOR KANA AK EDWARD MAING**

**Ijazah Sarjana Muda Seni Gunaan dengan Kepujian  
(Seni Halus)  
2018**

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Projek ini merupakan salah satu keperluan untuk  
Ijazah Sarjana Muda Seni Gunaan dengan Kepujian  
(Seni Halus)

Fakulti Seni Gunaan dan Kreatif  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK

2018

UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK

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Final Year Project Report

Masters

PhD

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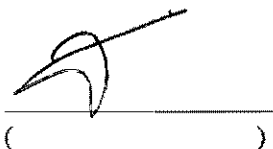
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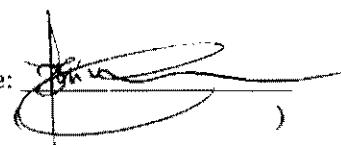
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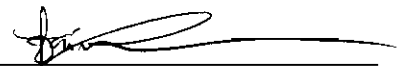
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Projek bertajuk **Iban Culture: Semantic Approach and Crocodile Legend in Producing Contemporary Artwork** telah disediakan oleh **Ivor Kana ak Edward Maing** dan telah diserahkan kepada Fakulti Seni Gunaan dan Kreatif sebagai memenuhi syarat untuk Ijazah Sarjana Muda Seni Gunaan dengan Kepujian Ijazah Sarjana Muda Dengan Kepujian (**Seni Halus**).

Diterima untuk diperiksa oleh:



---

( Encik Mohamad Faizuan bin Mat )

Tarikh:

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## **ABSTRAK**

*Kajian ini berkaitan dengan hubungan antara lagenda dan elemen semantik dalam penghasilan seni kontemporari. Objektif penyelidikan ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti pendekatan semantik untuk mewakili lagenda buaya dalam budaya masyarakat Iban. Seterusnya, ialah untuk menganalisis kaedah pendekatan semantik untuk mewakili lagenda buaya dalam masyarakat Iban. Di penghakiran langkah, sebuah karya seni akan dihasilkan menggunakan pendekatan semantik untuk mewakili bukan sahaja lagenda, tetapi juga cerita rakyat masyarakat Iban yang lain. Pendekatan untuk kajian ini adalah menggunakan kualitatif. Seterusnya, data akan dikumpulkan dari buku, internet, surat khabar dalam talian, video, audio dan temubual. Sebagai contoh, data untuk teori dan konsep semantik boleh dilakukan melalui membaca buku dan laman web dalam talian. Melalui cara ini, penyelidik akan lebih memahami dan lebih mudah untuk memahami maksud semantik dalam konteks seni halus. Dalam masa yang sama, temuduga dapat dilakukan antara pengkaji dengan beberapa orang masyarakat Iban di Sarawak. Sama seperti contoh teori dan konsep, proses temubual dapat membantu penyelidik memperolehi sumber maklumat yang sahih, tepat dan boleh dipercayai. Menggunakan semua data yang terkumpul, penyelidik akan menggunakan dan mencipta satu perspektif baru dan bersifat intelektual untuk keseluruhan penyelidikan. Pada akhir langkah kajian, sebuah karya seni yang bersifat kontemporari akan dihasilkan menggunakan semantik sebagai pendekatan dan lagenda sebagai kajian kes dalam penyelidikan ini.*

## **KATA KUNCI**

*Semantik, Mitos, Buaya, Kontemporari*

## **ABSTRACT**

This research is about the connection or relationship between legend and semantic in producing contemporary art form. The objectives of this research is to identify semantic approach to represent crocodile legend in Iban culture. Next, to analyse the method of semantic approach to represent crocodile legend in Iban society. Finally, to come out an artwork with preposition of semantic method approach to represent not only legend but others Iban cultural folklores as well. The approach for this research is using qualitative. Subsequently, the data will be collected from books, internets, online newspapers, videos, audios and interviews. For instance, the data for theories and concepts of semantic can be done through reading of books and online websites. The researcher indeed will be more understand and easy to perceive the intended meaning of semantic in the fine art context. Meanwhile, for legends, interviews can be conducted between the researcher and a few numbers of Iban's people in Sarawak. Similarly to the previous examples of theories and concepts, the interview process will helps the researcher to get an accurate and reliable source of informations from the respondense. Using all the accumulated data, the researcher will utilise and create a new interpretation and intellectual perspective towards the whole research. At the end of it, a contemporary art form will be produced using semantic with legend as the case study of this research.

## **KEYWORDS**

Semantic, Myth, Crocodiles, Contemporary

# CHAPTER 1

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This research will be conducted to transform literatures into a visual context using legend and semantic as an approaches for fundamental studies to produce an artwork. Based on Trask (2007) semantics is the field of meaning in linguistic studies. Michel Breal, a French linguist had invented the phrase of semantic and brought this concept successfully in European writings.

According to Fromkin et al., (2007) it's been ages theoreticians thinking about the meaning behind meaning but suprisingly the person who deliver speech or words can perceive the intended meaning given and form these words that are having meaning to another speaker. Indeed, it is true when Roman Jakobson quoted that, "*Language without meaning is meaningless.*" Meanwhile, according to Cobuild (2006) the meaning of legend is a very famous and aged story that took place which may be true.

Famous for its notorious rivers that filled with mystical legends and superstitious belief, Sarawak is well-known for the legend of Bujang Senang. According to Jong (1993), stated that the white crocodile was the incarnation of a brave and fearsome Iban's Batang Saribas warrior after he was killed brutally at the Batang Lupar river. Above all, the crocodile was regarded a sacred animal and it was supported by Tropaws (2016) when he stated that the God of Rivers can transform himself not only into crocodile but also can show himself into *orang utan* or snake.

Before the entering the final step, with all the accumulated datas the researcher will have a deeper understandings of the concept and theory of semantic including to identify the Iban's mythical legends about crocodile. Thus, this research will transform literature into visual context and using legend as a case studies.

## **1.1 Problem Statement**

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, the definition for legend is a story from ancient times about certain events or people that may be true or may not be true meanwhile according to Carston (2002) the area study of semantics is all about meaning in linguistic that portray clearly on particular content or what is said. Based on Lau (2016) Tsang Kin-Wah had created *The Fourth Seal*, a digital video work which had been exhibited in Venice Biennale in the year of 2015. This work was inspired from various of sources such as religious and metaphysical sources. In Sea Dayak society, the crocodiles were regarded not only as a fearsome animal but also appear in legends and plays important role since the days of the ancestors. Until today, no one knows how true is this legend. Using semantic as the medium, the key to the research problem is how to transform the Iban legend into a contemporary art form. Thus, this research will be carried out to produce a contemporary artwork and uplifting the values of Borneo culture to the new level.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

1. What is the semantic approach to identify legend in Iban's folklores?
2. What is the method of semantic approach to analyse and to represent crocodile legend in Iban society?
3. How to come out with proposition of semantic method approach to represent not only legend but others Iban's cultural folklores?

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

1. To identify semantic approach for legend in Iban's folklores.
2. To analyse the method of semantic approach to represent crocodile legend in Iban society.
3. To come out with preposition of semantic method approach to represent legend in Iban's cultural folklores.

#### **1.4 Research Scope**

This research is about the study of semantics, its approaches and method that will be used to represent legend for Iban's cultural folklores. The Iban's cultural folklores will be the subject for the outcome of this research. The data for this research were gained from two different places under the same Saratok region. Interviews from the local Iban's people were done from Rumah Tingkat, Roban and Emplaie Ulu, Saratok and also last but not least from Rumah Pelawa, Spaoh, Betong.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Research**

- Recognizing semantic approaches that can be used to represent legend for Iban's cultural folklores.
- Studying and examining the process of semantic approach to represent crocodile legend in Iban society.
- To transform the preposition of semantic method approach to represent legend in Iban's cultural folklores.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

Therefore, this chapter is discussing about the transformation of visual context from folklores stories in Sarawak which required us to produce an artwork towards the end of it. During this process of development, the theory from the field of linguistic which is semantics will be used as an approaches for delivering the message behind the subject matter. Using legend as a case of studies, all the accumulated datas will be gathered by the researcher.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

The fundamental of semantic area is language. According to Linda Thomas et al., (2005) language is a system where the objective of communication accomplished through the combination of smaller units to a wide scope of units. The objective for the production of language or also known as phonemes is to create lexical item or also known as words. The intention of why we need language is to convey or refer a particular thing.

In the past, according to Fromkin et al., (2007) the meaning of meaning have been in the mind among academicians although the production for numbers of words can be perceived without fail by other speakers.

According to William O'Grady et al., (2010) stated that the field of study for meaning is under human language. It is generally allude to the meaning behind utterance's content. This was supported by Jurafsky (2009) when he stated that the meaning representations languages refers to semantic branch meanwhile semantic refers to a process where representations are invented for linguistic inputs.

#### 2.1 What is Semantics?

According to Finegan (2008) among the field of phonology, morphology or syntax, semantic is more well known compared to these. Words and sentences are two elements which can be found in how languages structure meaning. To describe exactly what is semantic in the linguistic world, we should beseech the definition for *meaning*. The words *meaning* and *to mean* is actually commonly use in our daily conversation including for dissimilar reasons. Took for example, 'skin irritation' and 'impetuos' is two different meanings yet both of these share one word, *Rash*.

Based on a statement stated by Ruthrof (2000) language relies onto nonlinguistic signs and only verbal substitutions is existed which means the dictionary does not have any meaning. Leonard Bloomfield, a semantics behaviorist explained that meaning is a tangible links whereby its occurs between speech and action. For instance, when Jill looks an apple and requesting Jack to have it for her. This is what we called double stimulus-response scheme. Jack here was functioning as a verbal respond and when he heard a request it is what we called stimulus.

In relation to the above statements, according to Saeed (2016) he stated that semantic is a disciplines about meaning and every meaning has its own definition and notion. Semantic is also about how does meaning collobrate in language regardless of the native language especially the words and phrases. It is also about how we comprehend and perceive each other languages. Apart from that, semantic is also about how does it functioning especially when the words are combine forming a new meaning and definition.

However, the study of semantic is not only under the field of linguistic but in other disciples as well. This statement was supported when Mouton (2011) stated that meaning concept was also learned in philosophy, physchology, semiotic and many mores. Variousity about this area from other disciplines leads to the arisen many theories and perspectives.

## 2.2 Meaning Theory

According to Akmajian (2001) it took a comprehensive understanding in answering questions regarding with semantic theory. Each meaning has varieties of definition. One single word for *mean* can be used in different situations.

Examples:

- a) That was no *mean* (insignificant) accomplishment
- b) Keep off the grass! This *means* (refers to) you.
- c) Those clouds *mean* (are a sign of) rain.

From the sentences previously, we know that the word *mean* can be used in different expressions as shown previously. The word *mean* here does not suitable for one specific definition. Apart from that, another situation potray a different notion.

Examples:

- a) Procrastinate means “to put things off.”
- b) In saying “It’s getting late,”she meant that we should leave.

From these statements above the word *mean* here illustrate two essential kinds of meaning which is linguistic meaning and followed by speaker meaning. This situation is was supported by Milikan (2006) when he stated that speaker meanings coexist with conventional meanings especially when the speakers trying to conforming with the conventions of a language. Usually, language was used by speakers for diverge purposes from conventional meaning. The exception is only for social distance case. For instance, a bid between two persons. One should do the same thing rather than different things.

### **2.3 Utterance and Sentence Meaning**

According to Sharpe (2009) a German philosopher named Gottlob Frege had embarked the modern history of meaning as reference. As a mathematician, he is the earliest pioneer proving that mathematics subject is not an important subject. Frege’s principle was in the mind of the linguistics when he reckoning the combination of sentences meaning. This statement leads to sentence-meaning which was formed from word-secondary meaning. The phrases potrayed that the meaning can be true or false.

Meanwhile, *meaning as use* was stated by Odell (2006) when he explained that countless kind of sentences in languages such as assertion, question or commands. He called this as ‘language-game’ due to various of usage. These can be illustrated when giving and obeying

orders, how people describing things, telling and making up stories, reporting things that took place, examining hypotheses or having a conversation with the Supreme-being and etc. The uses of language from these situation is dominated by idiosyncratic laws.

Correspondingly, McGregor (2009) stated that a high standard of understanding from entire sentence was formed by signs, morphemes, words, phrases and grammatical relations. Each of these have its own meaning and concepts with their forms. An expression from utterance can bring abstract picture to the others and with many ways and also different circumstances these sentences can be verbalised. To illustrate, examples are shown below:

*a. Carol: What's been happening while I've been away?*

*Barry: The car broke down yesterday.*

*b. Carol: Do you feel like going out tonight?*

*Barry: The card broke down yesterday.*

From these situation, it can create two meanings. One, Barry might giving an ordinary statement as both of them have not seen each other for some time. Two, sounds like Barry is giving a refusal or unwillingness to go out.

## **2.4 Utterance Semantics**

It is believed by Abusalim (2017) utterance is any act of uttering that speakers perform. Uttering basically means that you're saying something. To demonstrate, 'I like apples' is a sentence. There's a different between utterance sentence and actual sentence. Example, '*I like apples*' uttered by 3 different peoples at 3 different situations yet it has nothing been changed which is only one sentence, '*I like apples*' is still there. However, *utterance* are considered as utterance as long as the word has meaning regardless of the native speaker or language. This is because utterance is a part of language itself.

One of major characteristics for utterance semantics is that there's no grammatical needs when a sentence utter. Next, utterance also only will be uttered by one person at a specific time, location or anythings that took place. This include any types of languages regardless of the speaker native's background.

In a way agree with McGregor (2009) stated that the act of speech is called illocutionary force which speakers will do such as informing, promising, requesting, questioning, commanding, warning, preaching, congratulating, laying bets, swearing and last but not least exclaiming. For instance, *I pronounce you man and wife* is an example how performative sentence is utter by one speaker.

## **2.5 Semantics Reference**

As specified by Abusalim (2017) in Semantics itself, there's a branch called *Levels of Semantics Analysis*. In this levels of semantics analysis, there is three elements namely sense, denotation and reference. There is also three types of reference beneath reference which is constant reference, no physical reference and expression. One of characteristic for *no physical reference*, it has function words, abstract notions and myth/people or creature. Unicorn, for instance. No one had ever seen the creature unicorn because it is part of myth or legend.

## **2.6 Case Study: The Crocodile Legends in the Iban's Spiritual World In Producing Contemporary Artworks.**

### **2.6.1 Bujang Senang**

One of the famous legend is backed-white crocodile called Bujang Senang. According to Ritchie & Jong (1993) it was started when a frightening appearance and wield immense power Iban Saribas warrior going to Batang Lupar for the *kayau* or known as head hunting. The residence of Batang Lupar started to asked his wife for help after he had put down numbers of foes. His magical powers would lose if he touched the waters from Batang Lupar river.

As soon as they knew his weakness, the residence killed his wife first and then they attacked and dragged him to the river bank with his head chopped off and was buried in a vice versa position. Pity to his condition, he was turned by the dieties into a massive white crocodile and he took vow to do revenge to his murderers and their descendants.

Starting from this, people called him Bujang Senang as it he attacks people every year. This statement was supported by Post (2011) stated that instead of hurting each other, an agreement between mans and crocodiles was made in the past. As time flies, both sides failed to obey the rules. According to Sidi (2013) mentioned that consequently, the crocodile who had committed "sin" especially who took the life of a man will be killed after "he" ate the bait that was prepared by the shaman.

### **2.6.2 A Marriage Proposal By The Crocodile**

According to Ngindang (2017), who is a local residence at Rumah Tingkat, Roban which happened to his own late grandmother. Located at Sg. Buloh, Roban this story took its place when an old woman named Lisa at her late 60's on her way to buy thread to the nearby small town. During that time land road access was very limited in the rural areas and they have to use boat as their river transportation.

As her brother sails the boat, he was shocked to see that Lisa was no more sitting at the back seat of the boat. Everything happened as quick as a flash when the crocodile attacked Lisa. Instead of taking her body as its food, strangely, the crocodile only killed her with several bites on her body. The wake ceremony was held as soon after Lisa's dead body was found at the head of the Sg Buloh river.

Throughout 3 days of wake, the striking sound of splash from the river can be heard from the long house and it was believed that the sounds was made by the crocodile itself. Shortly after that, one of Lisa's relatives had a dreamed that the crocodile itself had proposed her to be his wife. As a prove, the crocodile hung a small golden hair bun stick on the top of fish trap which is still kept by the Lisa's descendant until today as a magical charm.

### **2.6.3 Bukit Baya, The Crocodiles Mount**

According to a story told by Tandang (2017), the first crocodile effigy was made from soil by Lipa and "his" partner was made by Sat ak Seman after he dreamt that the first crocodile was looking for partner. *Bukit Baya* is located approximately 18 km from the small town Saratok. After the two effigies built by Lipa and Sat ak Seman, a small hut was erected to protect the effigies from the hot sun and cold from the rain. Villagers from Emplaie Ulu, Emplaie Ili and the whole are of Bajau believed that the two effigies

would bring luck and protect their paddies from harms since there is not such thing as pesticides in the old days. Every year, a *Miring* ceremony will be held before Gawai Dayak took place to “feed” the crocodiles. Until now, people still seek helps from the crocodiles. Some people came to this place with a hope to win a lottery. Some seeking for physical healing.

#### **2.6.4 Indet, the Crocodile Shaman**

As claimed by Senabong (2018) he learned this *ngalir* knowledge starting from the age of 16 years old. The knowledge of *Ngalir* is one of Iban’s mystical knowledge whereby the shaman use certain type of mantras or prayers to catch crocodile without being attacked or getting hurt. He learned this shamanic knowledge from both of his father and grandfather.

According to him, he will hunt the crocodiles depending on his customers request in the past. During that time, people as far as from Kuching, Sibul, Bintulu and Miri will ask him to hunt crocodile down for its skin. All of the crocodiles were came from different kinds of sizes. In the year of 1988, he was caught be the government for his actions hunting the crocodiles down. He said that for every 2 or 3 months, there will be request for crocodile skins. By the year of 1978, he already started his hunts for the crocodiles, yet it is not for the sake of money or pride but he do it for those who want crocodiles to be their pets. He says that it has been his passion to hunt the crocodiles.

When it comes to hunting-ritual process, *miring* ceremony will be conducted before he starting his crocodile hunting. Leaves from *Isang* and *Segak* also will be used for this *ngalir* ritual. At the same time, he will shakes these leaves by his hands and try to get the crocodiles attention. If the crocodile had eaten human, the shaman will give certain duration of days. It will started usually from the first day until the third day,