

Realising the Supernatural in Baba Malay Folktales: A Transitivity Analysis

Kit Yee Tang ^a

Kityee.t27@gmail.com

Faculty of Languages and Linguistics
Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

Ayeshah Syed ^b

ayeshahsyed@um.edu.my

Faculty of Languages and Linguistics
Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The examination of Baba Malay folktales enables further exploration of this endangered minority language and provides insight into Peranakan Chinese culture. This paper examines how supernatural elements are realised through linguistic choices in six Baba Malay folktales in the contemporary book *Chrita-Chrita Baba* (by Kenneth Y.K. Chan). Applying Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) transitivity analysis from Systemic Functional Linguistics, the texts were analysed to answer two research questions: 1) How are supernatural themes realised in the Baba Malay folktales through the transitivity categories of process, participant and circumstance, and 2) What transitivity patterns are associated with supernatural characters in these folktales? The transitivity analysis reveals that clauses featuring supernatural entities in subject position predominantly instantiate material processes (e.g., *pi* 'go', *bikin* 'make', *kasi* 'give'), positioning these figures as dynamic agents within the narrative. Such representation reflects culturally embedded ideologies attributing agency and causal power to supernatural forces, reinforcing communal views in which the supernatural is perceived as an active and determinative presence in human affairs. The difference found between carrier and token participants in relational clauses suggests that the narrative describes, rather than defines, the supernatural characters. The rare association of temporal and spatial circumstances with supernatural beings also shows their otherworldly nature. This study demonstrates how transitivity choices linguistically construct cultural beliefs about agency and otherworldliness in Baba Malay storytelling. The findings extend current scholarship on Baba Malay and Peranakan Chinese culture by detailing the vocabulary and transitivity patterns through which supernatural elements are represented in the folktales.

Keywords: Baba Malay; folktale; transitivity analysis; endangered language; supernatural

^a Main author

^b Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

The Peranakan Chinese, or Baba Nyonya, community are descendants of Chinese merchants who travelled to Southeast Asia for better job opportunities and settled down after marrying local women (Hamzah et al., 2019; Lee, 2015). Thus, Peranakan Chinese culture shows the influence of both Chinese and local Malay culture in their customs, language and cultural items including folktales. As a unique community that has evolved from the complex geopolitical history of Southeast Asia, the Peranakan Chinese have long attracted scholarly attention, from early studies of their history and culture to more recent research on aspects including funeral customs (Sankar et al., 2016), fashion (Jamaludin et al., 2024), cuisines (Fisol & Abdullah, 2022), rituals for weddings and daily prayers (Chua, 2019; Ooi, 2017), and language (Lee, 2022; 2024; Wolf et al., 2019).

Beyond characterising Peranakan Chinese heritage, recent studies address future-focused concerns facing the community. For example, noting the visibility of Peranakan Chinese culture in Melaka, Wang et al. (2023) propose linguistic landscape as a tool for cultural revitalisation. Moreover, a review of research on Peranakan Chinese culture from 2018 to 2023 by Huang et al. (2024) identified a trend towards cultural sustainability. With several studies highlighting new promotional approaches, including digital marketing of Peranakan products (Ahmad et al., 2019) and media promotion of Nyonya cuisine (Zanzaizman et al., 2023), it appears that Peranakan Chinese culture can be sustainably promoted. Comparatively, the language of Peranakan Chinese, Baba Malay, garners less attention in academic and in real-world settings.

Baba Malay, often described as a creole, combines predominantly Malay lexicon with Hokkien grammatical structures (Wolf et al., 2019). Lee (2022) provides a comprehensive description of its phonetics, syntax, and regional variation. With fewer than 2,000 speakers in Malaysia and Singapore, Baba Malay texts are vital records of Peranakan Chinese heritage. The early community produced diverse written works, including historical narratives, romances, legends, and folklore (Ding, 2004; Yoong & Zainab, 2002), while contemporary texts serve documentation and revitalisation purposes. Linguistic analyses have examined Baba Malay novels, letters (Lee, 2024), newspapers (Thurgood, 2001), pantun (Ding, 2004), and Nyonya recipes (Manokaran et al., 2025; Nair & Ong, 2020), offering insights into its evolving linguistic features. However, studies of Baba Malay folktales remain limited, leaving a rich source of linguistic and cultural data on the Peranakan Chinese largely unexplored.

As enduring cultural artefacts, folktales play a vital role in preserving minority cultures by transmitting collective knowledge and values unique to their communities (Gerry et al., 2024; Sone, 2018). Folktales in heritage languages further enable the study and teaching of linguistic features while fostering cultural continuity. Once conveyed orally, their written forms now serve dual functions - promoting literacy and safeguarding linguistic and cultural knowledge (Amali, 2014; Nomlomo & Sosibo, 2016; Yektingtyas-Modouw & Karna, 2013). This is especially crucial for endangered languages such as Baba Malay. The cultural significance of folktales has inspired research into how linguistic choices encode cultural meaning. For instance, Gusnawaty et al. (2017) showed that action verbs depicted female characters in Sundanese folktales as possessing limited agency, while Kheong et al. (2019) demonstrated how trickster tropes in Sang Kancil narratives conveyed moral values. However, such linguistic analyses have yet to be applied to Baba Malay folktales. Exploring these texts through a linguistic lens could show how language encodes cultural meaning in Baba Malay storytelling, offering new insights into the language and worldview of the Peranakan Chinese—an integral component of Malaysia's multicultural heritage.

The current study therefore examines the linguistic features used to realise supernatural themes in six Baba Malay folktales contained in *Chrita-chrita Baba* by Kenneth Y. K. Chan (2019). The contemporary volume was selected for its accessibility to current audiences and relevance to Baba Malay revitalisation, while the supernatural theme was chosen because of its salience in the stories (Neo, 2020) and its universal ubiquity in folklore across cultures (Das, 2017; Dhera, 2024; Niemjyska, 2015; Zamani, 2022).

Taking direction from research on the encoding of cultural meanings via transitivity choices in minority languages (Gusnawaty et al., 2017; Linares & Zhi Ying, 2021), this study aims to examine how supernatural and human characters (mediums) are constructed in Baba Malay folktales through transitivity processes, participants, and circumstances. Incorporating transitivity analysis from Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), we analyse clauses which construe the supernatural elements, characters and events, addressing two research questions:

1. How are the supernatural themes in Baba Malay folktales realised through transitivity elements?
2. What transitivity patterns are associated with supernatural characters in these folktales?

The findings are expected to add to the literature on Baba Malay language and Peranakan Chinese culture. Specifically, the identification of transitivity patterns related to supernatural elements will contribute data on Baba Malay vocabulary and how the language functions in folk stories. However, while the folktales selected are common to the Peranakan Chinese community, the findings may not be generalisable to their other folktales. Despite that, this study can still serve as a stepping stone for future research on Baba Malay folktales.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Folktales are elements of intangible cultural heritage, which carry the values and identity of a cultural group (UNESCO, 1989; 2003), and have been studied in various fields, including sociology, history, psychology and linguistics. This section discusses relevant literature about folktales and Baba Malay.

LANGUAGE USE IN FOLKTALES

The language used in folktales reveals the cultural beliefs and teachings of a community. For example, a comparison of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ in Mandarin and English found that only the Mandarin retelling depicted greetings and polite exchanges, reflecting Chinese cultural values about respect and social status (Pan, 2021). Similarly, Ngan’s (2020) study found that medieval Vietnamese fantasy folktales of Chinese origin were altered to promote anti-Confucian values, to establish the Vietnamese identity. These findings support Song’s (2017) proposition that the structure and message of folktales depend on a community’s cultural experience. Moreover, cultural gender assumptions shape language in folktales, with strong male protagonists depicted as saving the damsel in distress (Movahedi & Moshtagh, 2019) and distinct qualities attributed to female versus male characters (Jorgensen, 2019). Yet, these portrayals shift with time and social change, as seen in the more empowered female characters found in modern Minangkabau folktales (Abdurahman et al., 2024). Through such portrayals of events, dialogue and characters, folktales

reflect a community's values and identity but most of these analyses were on stories in well documented languages.

However, several researchers have utilised transitivity analysis (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) to examine language patterns in folktales, as this enables the systematic analysis of clauses to reveal the author's or characters' intentions within a narrative. For example, the high frequency of material clauses and action verbs in Balinese folktales (Yuniari et al., 2023) and Butonese folktales (Gusnawaty et al., 2017), could indicate that action is valued in these communities. Besides, Mahmud and Imperiani (2019) found that material, relational, and verbal clauses were dominant across three Indonesian folktales, also noting key themes of karma, gods and supernatural beings, and politeness. These studies demonstrate that beyond identifying types of processes, transitivity analysis can reveal cultural elements in the narrative. Since there have been few, if any, studies of transitivity choices in Baba Malay folktales, an analysis of how cultural elements are encoded via process, participant and circumstance types could provide unique findings on Baba Malay language patterns and vocabulary, in addition to the cultural meanings conveyed in the narratives.

SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS IN FOLKTALES

Supernatural elements are an essential feature in folktales, influencing the overall narrative (Dhera, 2024; Manggala, 2023; Zamani, 2022). However, whether the roles of these supernatural elements or characters benefit or hinder the protagonist depends on the folktale's context. For instance, in Sulawesi folktales, humans are portrayed as inferior to and dependent on supernatural beings, turning to them for solutions (Manggala, 2023). However, Šešo (2020) and Zamani (2022) offer differing perspectives; the former argues that the role of the supernatural in folktales is to instil fear and to provide structure to the world, while the latter claims that supernatural elements are merely to entertain and introduce readers to their respective cultural context. Regardless of the supernatural's role, the literature shows they are a crucial aspect in folktales, serving to enhance the richness of the narrative and reflecting a community's values and beliefs.

Supernatural characters in folktales are also often depicted very specifically in terms of their traits, which reflect cultural beliefs and sometimes carry symbolic meanings. Yalim and Low (2019) found detailed accounts of supernatural characters in 13 Dusun folktales, including their backstories, and how they came to influence the Dusun ethnic group's culture. Studying the portrayal of the popular supernatural entity, the *Pontianak*, in Malay folktales, Jamal (2023) found that the stories heavily emphasised the entities' physical features, like having a beautiful appearance, long straight hair, and a slim figure. Contrastingly, a study on *Nenek Kebayan* – another popular supernatural entity in Malay folktales – found that descriptions of the character's traits, including being immortal and having the ability to shapeshift, in addition to physical descriptions (Osman, 2020). These detailed depictions not only help readers visualise the characters but also convey social and cultural messages in folktales.

The forest is an important location in most narratives revolving around the supernatural or mythical creatures. In some cultures, trees represent the bridge between the underworld and the sky, while the forest is a place where spirits and supernatural creatures dwell (Amirova, 2022; Naponiello, 2024). Similarly, in Javanese folktales, spirits reside in the forest, which is a heritage to be protected by humans (Irfan, 2022). More specifically, Rapala (2024) explained that in Slavic folktales, the forest is a liminal place where people get lost or even stranded. This is where the protagonists undergo their transformation or growth in the narrative, a sentiment also echoed by

Dhera (2024). As a result of the beliefs surrounding the powerful beings residing in the forest, Zhu et al. (2022) explained that the people in the Qingyuan county pay their respects to pacify the spirits in order to be blessed with plenty of crops. These findings highlight the importance of forests as a setting for supernatural characters or events, in folktales across various cultures.

While the supernatural has been extensively examined in world folklore, Baba Malay folktales remain largely overlooked, despite their hybrid cultural origins rooted in Peranakan Chinese heritage. Existing research has primarily emphasized the symbolic functions of supernatural figures, with limited attention to their linguistic construction. This study addresses this gap by applying transitivity analysis to Baba Malay folktales, uncovering how supernatural characters are linguistically realized and ideologically positioned within the narrative.

BABA MALAY LANGUAGE

Although many studies have explored Peranakan Chinese culture and traditions, their language and literature are much less studied. The few studies on the language include those by Chee-Beng (1980), Lim (1988), Pakir (1989), Thurgood (2001). More recently, Lee (2014; 2022; 2024) has presented a particularly comprehensive description of Baba Malay language, including its linguistic components and regional varieties (Lee, 2022). The cultural and linguistic influences found in Baba Malay have also been discussed, including by Nair and Ong (2020), who describe Malay and Chinese words forming compound words about Nyonya cuisine. Besides, based on fieldwork in 1970s Melaka, Chee-Beng (2022) noted that the Peranakan Chinese often included Hokkien words, and less frequently, some Mandarin, when communicating with each other in Baba Malay. Although Lee (2022) also mentions Portuguese, Dutch and English influence in Baba Malay, the literature has mainly examined its Malay and Chinese influences. These studies indicate that examining the linguistic components of a language such as Baba Malay can reveal cultural dynamics beyond the historical roots of the language.

Studies have also examined Baba Malay's language vitality and level of endangerment based on the number of speakers and language preservation efforts. While Coluzzi et al. (2018) warn that Baba Malay is in danger of disappearing as speakers shift to more dominant languages like English or Mandarin, Peranakan Chinese youth in Kelantan were found to be highly proficient in localised Malay and consider its incorporation into their Hokkien speech as an identity marker (Pue et al., 2019). However, Lee (2023) highlights that Baba Malay speakers who wish to distinguish themselves contribute to the loss of variability in Baba Malay, ultimately threatening the survival of a region's Baba Malay variant. Wang et al. (2023) posit that the continued use of Baba Malay in cultural and religious activities in Melaka could promote its revitalisation. As indicated by these studies, the active use and discussion of Baba Malay, in scholarly and daily settings, could contribute towards preserving this critically endangered language. This study continues the discussion by examining the linguistic features of Baba Malay, contributing to the literature on both the language and Peranakan Chinese culture.

METHODOLOGY

This paper draws on the findings of a discourse analytic study of transitivity and narrative structure in Peranakan Chinese folktales written in Baba Malay, as compiled in the book *Chrita-chrita Baba* (Chan, 2019). Permission to analyse the book was obtained in writing via email from both the publisher and the author.

DATASET: SIX FOLKTALES IN *CHRITA-CHRITA BABA*

Chrita-chrita Baba features six Peranakan Chinese folktales written in Baba Malay, with the corresponding English translations on the adjacent pages. Idioms or words that do not have an exact English equivalent are highlighted in footnotes, with a general interpretation of their meaning. When necessary, the book's glossary (pp. 238-240) and the English translations provided on the adjacent pages were referred to, to ensure accurate interpretation of Baba Malay terms. The book comprises 233 pages, of which 109 pages, containing a total of 27,818 words and 4,629 clauses in Baba Malay, were analysed. The pages containing the English translation were not analysed. The clauses were compiled into individual rows in an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. Each clause was labelled with brackets indicating the corresponding transitivity process, participant, and circumstance. Prior to coding, the two authors discussed the coding scheme to ensure consistency before they analysed the data independently. Discrepancies were resolved through discussions to ensure agreement was reached. Consider the following exemplar clause from one of the folktales:

Pawang (participant: behavior) *ketawa-gelakak* (process: behavioural) *sama seram* (circumstance: manner)

The clause above shows how the participants interact with other elements (process and circumstance) in the clause. Using the search function on spreadsheet, common themes associated with the supernatural, like the types of participants, frequency of different process types, and circumstances were identified. These themes will be discussed further in the findings section. Table 1 provides a description of each folktale and its word count.

TABLE 1. Folktale titles, description and word count

Title of Folktale	Brief description	Clauses (supernatural)	Words
<i>Si-Swee Merah</i>	A girl encounters a bad supernatural character in the forest, which attacks her and her family.	648 (188)	3,946
<i>Rumah Tangga Wee</i>	A man and a woman engage supernatural forces to deal with family issues, leading to terrible outcomes.	721	4,611
<i>Bachik</i>	A lazy man engages supernatural forces out of greed, with terrible results.	914 (74)	5,210
<i>Bawang Putih, Bawang Merah</i>	Two girls of different characters encounter a woman with special powers, leading to different outcomes.	652 (101)	4,014
<i>Dunia Di-bawah Rumah</i>	Ignoring instructions to come inside during twilight, two children enter a portal into a supernatural world.	699 (95)	4,283
<i>Di-dalam Bilek Loteng</i>	Ignoring customs, a couple encounter a supernatural character which endangers their son.	995 (14)	5,574
Total		4,629 (472)	27,818

As shown in Table 1, the dataset for this study comprised 27,818 words and 4,629 clauses in Baba Malay, 472 of which featured a supernatural character in the subject position. While there were supernatural occurrences in the second folktale – *Rumah Tangga Wee*, no supernatural characters were present in the subject position. Moreover, although written by the same author, the variety of Baba Malay language differs across the stories. According to the linguistic notes in the preface, all folktales use the *alus* ‘refined speech form’, except *Bachik*, which uses a *kasar/kasair* form ‘coarse form of speech’. The *kasair* form differs from the *alus* form in the way words are spelled, with the former resembling standard Malay (Wolf et al., 2019). Additionally, the *kasair* form is also more prevalent in the *Baba* (male) characters, while *Nyonya* (female) characters tend to use the *alus* form. This is in line with the history of the linguistic preferences of the Peranakan Chinese (Hock, 2006). For the current analysis, the difference in speech forms was deemed to have a minimal impact as transitivity analysis focuses on semantic meanings of words, rendering matters of spelling and pronunciation less significant.

Chrita-Chrita Baba was considered suitable for analysis as its author, Kenneth Y.K. Chan, is a well-regarded Baba Malay expert. Chan is also directly involved in efforts to revitalise the language through education, having published a Baba Malay textbook titled *Baba Malay for Everyone: A comprehensive guide to the Peranakan language* for beginner to upper-intermediate learners. The availability of the book in Malaysia and Singapore, in addition to the author’s involvement in revitalisation efforts and recognised expertise make it a suitable data choice for this study.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The present paper focuses on transitivity elements in clauses involving the supernatural, utilising Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2014) transitivity model from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). SFL is seen as a “functional-semantic approach to language” that examines the way people use and structure language in different contexts, taking the speakers’ intentions and perspectives into account. SFL defines three metafunctions of semantic systems within language: textual, interpersonal, and experiential. Transitivity analysis falls under the experiential metafunction, also known as the ideational metafunction, which relates to the role of language in how people represent and experience the world. Transitivity analysis involves identifying process types, participants, and circumstances in the clauses of a particular text. Table 2 shows the six main process types used in transitivity analysis and how they relate to one another in presenting a person’s worldview.

TABLE 2. Process Types in Transitivity Analysis (Source: adapted from “The grammar of experience: types of process in English,” by M. A. K. Halliday, & C. Matthiessen (p. 216, 2014)

Being: abstract relation	Sensing: consciousness	Doing: physical world
Existential (identity, attribute, symbolising)		
Relational	Verbal (saying)	
	Mental (seeing, feeling, thinking)	
	Behavioural (behaving)	
		Material (acting, creating, happening, changing)

As shown in Table 2, certain process types share similar meanings with their adjacent counterparts. As the participant labels depend on the process type of a clause, they are only identified once a process type is assigned to a clause. Circumstances are only identified as and when they appear in clauses. In the case of multiple verb phrases within a clause, which is common in Baba Malay, the verbs will be taken apart to be analysed as separate clauses. They will not be analysed as circumstances if a verb is present, as shown in some examples by Eggins (2004). This step allows a more thorough analysis of the unique linguistic structure of the language.

Although there are many ways to analyse textual narratives like folktales, Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) transitivity framework was chosen for the study because it enables analysis of how one's experience with the world is reflected in language. Unlike the two other metafunctions in SFL, which examine interpersonal relationships and cohesion in the data, the experiential metafunction allows a more detailed exploration of events and character representation, which in this case, involves the supernatural. Moreover, by breaking down clauses into participants (e.g., actor, goal, behavior), processes (e.g., material, verbal, behaviour) and circumstances (e.g., location, time, manner), transitivity analysis enables a detailed examination of Baba Malay vocabulary. By examining the participants, processes, and circumstances the supernatural characters are associated with in the folktales, this study applies the transitivity framework to reveal linguistic patterns that contain cultural information and beliefs surrounding the supernatural and the human characters' relationship with them. Furthermore, there are many past studies using this framework to examine narratives of varying styles and lengths (Jittho & Tongpoon-Patanasorn, 2022; Linares & Zhi-Ying, 2021; Shahzadi et al., 2022), providing a rich source of references to guide analysis.

ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

The contents of *Chrita-Chrita Baba* were transferred into an Excel sheet and segregated into clauses, with each folktale in a separate tab. Then, the process types, participants, and circumstances were identified in each clause of the Baba Malay text, while the English translations were referred to in instances where meaning was unclear. Analysis was supported by referring to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) and related literature, in terms of assigning process types and the related categories. The first author performed the first round of analysis and checked it twice before the analysis was validated by the second author. Ambiguous cases were resolved via discussion, in reference to the literature. Labels were then double-checked before the frequency of each transitivity element was counted and compiled into a table. The resulting dataset formed the starting point for the analysis, which focuses on the supernatural theme.

To provide an overview of how supernatural themes were realised throughout the six folktales, we closely re-read them and noted the supernatural elements in each story. This includes a general description of the story, and notes about characters, actions, events, objects and settings with supernatural relevance. These were organised according to transitivity categories, including the larger categories of "participants", "processes", and "circumstance" as well as sub-categories such as "attributes", "goals" and "phenomenon". Salient supernatural elements are highlighted in the findings section, addressing the first research question.

Next, we focused on the supernatural characters, as a significant participant type in realising the supernatural themes. To address the second research question, we performed further analysis of clauses where supernatural characters take a subject position as participant. This included clauses where the subject position featured nouns possessed by the supernatural character, for example, "the *Penanggalan's* head". The subject of a clause often marks agency, featuring

participants that are responsible for moving the narrative forward, which is important for understanding how these characters are constructed and presented in these folktales (Cordeiro, 2017). Additionally, a clause's subject encodes experiential meaning, which is the focus of transitivity analysis, thereby offering insights into the roles these characters play in the folktales (Mingsakoon & Srinon, 2020). The segmenting of the sentences into 4,629 clauses was based on process types, as each clause can only contain a single process in transitivity. The processes also determined the clauses' transitivity types, influencing how the participants (e.g., actor/goal, senser/phenomenon) were coded. All types of clauses were included, that is, independent, dependent and partial clauses, as well as projections of mental and verbal processes, as long as the supernatural character was the active participant/subject of the clause. Only defining relative clauses were excluded from the analysis in accordance with Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). Process types, participants, and circumstances were totalled up to summarise transitivity patterns in construing supernatural characters, as presented in the findings section.

LIMITATIONS

While this analysis identifies patterns of language use related to the supernatural theme in *Chrita-Chrita Baba* (Chan, 2019), the small dataset limits generalisation to other Baba Malay folktales. The transitivity patterns observed are specific to this text and may vary across Baba Malay varieties (Lee, 2023). As the source material is a contemporary publication, linguistic differences from traditional texts are expected. Future studies should examine larger, historically diverse collections and additional themes. Nevertheless, the present findings remain valuable for understanding Baba Malay literature and its reflection of Peranakan Chinese cultural perspectives.

FINDINGS

Out of 27,818 words and 4,629 clauses analysed, a total of 5,512 process types, 6,084 participants, and 1,323 circumstances were found in the six folktales. However, only 472 clauses were found to include the supernatural characters in the subject position. The following section discusses the supernatural themes found in each folktale, followed by the process types in clauses involving supernatural characters.

SUPERNATURAL THEMES IN BABA MALAY FOLKTALES

All six Baba Malay stories had supernatural elements throughout the narratives, although the extent to which they featured in the narrative varied. Supernatural characters and events played a significant role in the story plots, as the main movers of events that underscored the moral of the story, for example, the need to adhere to customs (*Di-dalam Bilek Loteng*), the dangers of being outdoors during twilight (*Dunia Di-bawah Rumah*) and how greed and laziness can lead to destruction (*Bachik*). This section provides an overview of how the supernatural theme is realised across the six stories, in terms of the transitivity categories of participant, process and circumstances.

In terms of participants which were characters in the folktales, all the stories except *Bachik* featured at least one supernatural character, including *Penanggalan*, *Toyol*, *Djin* and *Antu* (see Table 3). These characters were mostly 'bad' or posed some threat to the protagonist. However, in *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah*, an old woman with supernatural powers is a friendly character who

rewards the main character's kindness with magical treasures. The names of supernatural characters such as *Antu* and *Toyol* largely showed influence from the Malay language. Additionally, the phrase '*Barang* + adjective' was also used generically to refer to supernatural beings, for example, as *Barang Kotor* (unclean spirit).

Another important participant group was humans with supernatural abilities, in the form of the medium or shaman, referred to as *Tang Ki*, *Pawang* or *Bomoh*. These characters were salient in the narratives as a means for human characters to harness supernatural powers for good or bad outcomes, or as an intermediary for communication with supernatural beings. For example, in *Di-Dalam Bilik Loteng*, a couple reaches out to the *Bomoh* (medium) to cure their possessed son. Both non-human and human participants played a significant role in the folktale plots, as their actions formed key events in the narratives. The transitivity patterns related to supernatural characters are further discussed in the following section.

TABLE 3. Main supernatural participants in Baba Malay folktales

<i>Transitivity element/ Folktale</i>	<i>Participant-Supernatural Character</i>	<i>Participant-Human/Medium</i>
Si-Swee Merah	<i>Penanggalan</i> (vampiric demon)	
Rumah Tangga Wee	N/A	<i>Tangki, Pawang</i> (medium)
Bachik	<i>Toyol</i> (undead infant)	<i>Pawang</i> (medium)
Bawang Puteh Bawang Merah	<i>Wak-wak Sungei</i> (older woman at the river)	<i>Bomoh</i> (medium)
Dunia di-Bawah Rumah	<i>Jin</i> (Djin) <i>Antu Tetek</i> (breast ghost)	
Di-Dalam Bilek Loteng	<i>Barang Kotor</i> (unclean spirit) <i>Penghulu Rumah</i> (guardian spirit), <i>Antu</i> (demon)	<i>Bomoh</i> (medium)

Other participant types related to the supernatural theme were physical and intangible objects as well as abstract nouns related to the senses, mainly smells. These included supernatural elements, physical objects and sensory phenomena in participant categories such as goal, carrier and phenomenon (see Table 4). Supernatural elements included intangible items such as *ilmu* (knowledge), in the context of the dark arts, *susok* (charm), *tangkair* (charm) and *jampi* (spell), and objects used to perform magic spells such as *lemo* (lime) and *hio* (burning incense). Description of sensory phenomena, mainly smells, aided in bringing the scenes of supernatural events to life. For example, the *Penanggalan* (vampire) in *Si Swee Merah*, is described as having *bau macham chuka* (the smell of vinegar) while a terrifying scream (*satu bunyi menjeret yang seram*) adds tension to a scene when the villagers are chasing the vampire. Moreover, the smell of benzoin smoke (*asap kemenyan*) and joss-sticks (*hio*) are found in characters' encounters with the mediums or shaman.

TABLE 4. Other supernatural participants in the Baba Malay folktales

Supernatural elements	Objects	Sensory Phenomena
<i>susok</i> (charm)	<i>satu lemo</i> (a lime)	<i>bau macham chuka</i> (the smell of vinegar)
<i>tangkair</i> (charm)		
<i>nama busok</i> (a notorious reputation)	<i>duri-duri mengkuang</i> (mengkuang leaf thorns)	<i>bau sikit pesing</i> (a sharp scent)
<i>satu jampi</i> (a spell)	<i>manyak barang harta</i> , (treasures) <i>batu intan, belian,</i> <i>delima, mair, perak</i> , (names of precious stones and metals)	<i>asap kemenyan</i> : (benzoin smoke) <i>bau kemenyan</i> (benzoin odour)
<i>ilmu</i> (the arts)	<i>hio yang bakair</i> (burning incense)	<i>satu bunyi menjeret yang</i> <i>seram</i> (a terrifying scream)

While many different process types were used, we identified some verbs that were particularly associated with supernatural actions or the use of black magic (see Table 5). These include verbs and complements used to describe the act of putting a spell on someone, such as the material processes of *pukau-kan*, *kunang-kan*, and the phrase, '*bikin ilmu*', which combines the generic verb '*bikin*' (make) with '*ilmu*' (knowledge) to mean doing black magic. Moreover, the possession of a person by a demon was described using phrasal verbs combining the modal '*kena*' with a complement. For example, three different phrases, *kena bikin*, *kena sampok* and *ada kena chiong tiok* are used in *Di-dalam Bilek Loteng*, in the Shaman's dialogue when he explains to a main character that her young son has been possessed by an angry spirit. These phrases show the influence of both Malay and Hokkien, where *chiong tiok* is derived from Hokkien, meaning possessed (by a supernatural entity), while *sampok* and *bikin*, are derived from Malay. Finally, we observed processes, or verbs, describing the medium's actions in performing spells and rituals, such as *asap-kan* (to smoke with incense) and *bacha-bacha* (to chant). These verbs show the influence of multiple languages on Baba Malay, reflecting its multicultural roots in mainly Malay and Hokkien. Some Portuguese, Dutch, and English loanwords can also be found in Baba Malay (Lee, 2022); however, they were used infrequently in the dataset. Additionally, the repeated use of these unique verbs shows the kind of changes the supernatural characters bring about in the narrative, positioning the human characters as the more passive participants in the clauses. Moreover, the *kena* + verb constructions function almost like a passive structure, placing humans on the lower rung of the agency hierarchy. These grammatical choices highlight the extent of the supernatural characters' influence on the trajectory of the narrative.

TABLE 5. Examples of Processes related to supernatural actions

Excerpt (Baba Malay)	English Translation
<i>Tambah pulak, dia (senser) pun takot (pr: mental)/ pasair dia (senser) sua tau (pr: mental)/ dia (actor) tak lagi dapat kunangkan (pr: material) dia mia embok jantan (goal).</i>	On top of that, Second Wife was worried because she was not able to charm her husband anymore.
<i>"Tapi mak...bikin (pr: material) ilmu (goal)?"/Bini Kechik (sayer) jawab (pr: verbal) sama tak tentu (circ: manner).</i>	"But Mother...to use black magic?" Second Wife answered with uncertainty.

<i>Pasair tu (circ: cause) lu mia anak (carrier) sua kena (pr: intensive) sampok (attribute)."</i>	Because of that, your son has been made to suffer by the malevolent spirit."
<i>Dia (sayer) pun bacha-kan (pr: verbal) kata-kata (verbiage)/ yang pawang (actor) sua ajair-kan (pr: material) dia (beneficiary)</i>	She started reciting the chants that the shaman had taught her to say

Additionally, two types of circumstances were relevant to the supernatural theme (Table 6). First, the locative circumstance *utan* (forest, jungle) was presented as a mysterious and potentially dangerous place, the setting for supernatural events in the stories. For example, the forest is where the protagonist in *Si Swee Merah* first encounters the *Penanggalan* (vampire) and where the *Tangki* (shaman) in *Rumah Tangga Wee* lives. The temporal circumstance, *sinjakala* (dusk/twilight) is mentioned in two stories as a time when supernatural forces are present. In *Si Swee Merah* the *Penanggalan* must wait until dusk to transform into her demonic form, while the entire plot of '*Dunia Di-bawah Rumah*' centres on the dangers of being outdoors after dusk.

TABLE 6. Examples of Circumstances of location (*utan*) and time (*sinjakala*)

Excerpt (Baba Malay)	English Translation
"Nanti (circ: time) mesti jaga-jaga (pr: material)/bila jalan (pr: material) dalam <i>utan</i> (circ: location).	"You must be careful when you travel through the forest later.
" <i>Sinjakala</i> (carrier) mo (pr: intensive) sampay (attribute)..."/ <i>tu prompuan (senser) pikir (pr: mental) seniri (circ: manner).</i>	"Dusk isn't far away..." the woman thought to herself.

This section has presented participant, process and circumstance types that were significant in construing the supernatural theme across the six folktales, highlighting salient Baba Malay vocabulary related to the focal theme. The next section will examine transitivity patterns in clauses involving supernatural characters.

TRANSITIVITY PATTERNS ASSOCIATED WITH SUPERNATURAL CHARACTERS IN BABA MALAY FOLKTALES

All the folktales contained clauses involving a supernatural character in the subject position, except *Rumah Tangga Wee*, in which the supernatural occurrences are realised through the medium. Table 7 shows an overview of the transitivity processes found in each folktale.

TABLE 7. Transitivity processes involving supernatural characters in the subject position

Folktale/ Processes	<i>Si-Swee Merah</i>	<i>Bachik</i>	<i>Bawang Puteh Bawang Merah</i>	<i>Dunia di- Bawah Rumah</i>	<i>Di-Dalam Bilek Loteng</i>	Total
Material	77 (40.96%)	37 (50%)	45 (44.55%)	38 (40%)	8 (57.14%)	205 (43.43%)
Mental	20 (10.64%)	12 (16.22%)	16 (15.84%)	7 (7.37%)	2 (14.28%)	57 (12.08%)
Verbal	19 (10.11%)	0	26 (25.74%)	13 (13.68%)	1 (7.14%)	59 (12.5%)

Behavioural	20 (10.67%)	5 (6.76%)	8 (7.92%)	16 (16.84%)	0	49 (10.38%)
Existential	2 (1.06%)	0	1 (0.1%)	1 (1.05%)	1 (7.14%)	5 (1.06%)
Relational	50 (26.6%)	20 (27.03%)	5 (4.95%)	20 (21.05%)	2 (14.28%)	97 (20.55%)
Total	188 (39.83%)	74 (15.68%)	101 (21.4%)	95 (20.13%)	14 (2.97%)	472

The material process type was the most salient process type (43.43%) in clauses featuring supernatural characters, followed by relational (20.55%), verbal (12.5%), mental (12.08%), behavioural (10.38%), and lastly, existential processes (1.06%). This shows that when supernatural characters are present in the subject position, they are presented as active participants engaged in material processes to actively shape events, as opposed to exploring their mental states and existential qualities. Some common material process verbs include *pi* (go), *jalan* (walk), *bikin* (make), *kasi* (give), and *charek* (search). Table 8 shows an example of a material clause.

TABLE 8. Material process in *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah*

“ <i>Saya</i> actor I	<i>mo kasi</i> pr: material would like to give	<i>nya</i> beneficiary you	<i>satu labu</i> goal a pumpkin
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Table 8 shows the actor (*saya* – referring to *Wak-Wak Sungei*) utilising the material process (*mo kasi* - give) the beneficiary (*Nya* – Swee Neo) a pumpkin (*satu labu*), which is the goal in the clause. This is one of the few instances in the folktales where a single clause contains both a beneficiary and a goal, as most material clauses found in the data contain only a goal as the second participant. Apart from material processes, the remaining five processes were also found in clauses featuring supernatural characters in most folktales, except *Bachik* and *Di-Dalam Bilek Loteng*. In *Bachik*, verbal processes were not found, as the supernatural character, the *Toyol* (undead infant), does not speak. The same applies to the *Barang Kotor* (unclean spirit) in *Di-Dalam Bilek Loteng*, who only speaks once through the medium, resulting in the occurrence of one verbal process. This also explains why behavioural processes were not attributed to *Barang Kotor*, as they are not directly involved in the narrative. The infrequent use of existential processes, in contrast to material and relational processes, highlights the focus on action and description in clauses with supernatural characters, rather than setting the scene. Therefore, the supernatural characters were portrayed to take actions more often than indulging in their thoughts or interactions with others.

After material processes, relational clauses were also frequent in three folktales. As shown in Tables 9 and 10, relational clauses in the stories use verbs like *ada* (had/was) and *sua* (had).

TABLE 9. Relational process in *Dunia di-Bawah Rumah*

<i>Tu orang jantan tinggi</i> carrier This tall man	<i>jugak</i> also	<i>ada</i> pr: intensive was	<i>macam banyak puchat</i> attribute very pale
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TABLE 10. Relational process in *Bachik*

<i>Tapi</i>	<i>dia mia badan</i>	<i>sua</i>	<i>pokak itam.</i>
	carrier	pr: intensive	attribute
except (that)	its body	has	rotted black.

Relational clauses with these verbs typically describe a character's attribute; *ada* was also used occasionally to indicate possession (e.g., *dia mia chaching belang yang ada jiwa seniri*; 'its innards which had a life of their own'). However, there were many instances where relational clauses did not include a relational process verb due to the use of zero copula (i.e., no 'be' verb) in Baba Malay. These clauses were categorised as relational based on the type of information they conveyed in the narrative, such as attribution, identification, or possession. While a detailed syntactic consideration of these clauses was beyond the scope of the study, the description of zero copula clauses as relational clauses corresponds with that of Hidayat and Jatmika's (2019) treatment of similar clauses in Indonesian. Many relational clauses without verbs in the folktales tend to include only the carrier/token as the participant in the subject position and the attribute/value as the complement (e.g. *Nya kuai sair*; 'Nya [is] truly obedient').

Additionally, supernatural characters were portrayed in various participant types, as shown in Table 11. As the material process was most frequent, the actor was the most salient participant across all the folktales. The lack of sensors, sayers, and behavers compared to actors suggests that the supernatural characters were presented as more action-oriented, rather than exploring their thoughts, speech, or behaviours.

TABLE 11. Participant types (subject position) of supernatural characters

Folktale/ Participants	<i>Si-Swee Merah</i>	<i>Bachik</i>	<i>Bawang Puteh Bawang Merah</i>	<i>Dunia di- Bawah Rumah</i>	<i>Di-Dalam Bilek Loteng</i>	Total
Supernatural being(s)	<i>Penanggalan</i>	<i>Toyol</i>	<i>Wak-Wak Sungei</i>	<i>Jin, Antu Tetek</i>	<i>Barang kotor, penghulu rumah, antu</i>	
Actor	56 (37.09%)	30 (49.18%)	31 (38.75%)	23 (32.86%)	6 (54.55%)	146 (39.14%)
Senser	18 (11.92%)	10 (16.39%)	12 (15%)	7 (10%)	2 (18.18%)	49 (13.14%)
Sayer	17 (11.26%)	0	26 (32.5%)	10 (14.29%)	1 (9.09%)	54 (14.48%)
Behaver	18 (11.92%)	5 (8.2%)	6 (7.5%)	12 (17.14%)	0	41 (10.99%)
Carrier	35 (23.18%)	16 (26.23%)	4 (5%)	16 (22.86%)	2 (18.18%)	73 (19.57%)
Token	7 (4.64%)	0	1 (1.25%)	2 (2.86%)	0	10 (2.68%)
Total	151 (40.48%)	61 (16.35%)	80 (21.45%)	70 (18.77%)	11 (2.95%)	373 (100%)

Table 11 indicates that the actor has the highest participant frequency (39.14%), followed by carrier (19.57%), sayer (14.48%), senser (13.14%), behaver (10.99%), and token (2.68%). The *Penanggalan* contributes most to actor roles, suggesting frequent initiation of actions compared to

the *Barang Kotor* in the final folktale. Notably, the higher occurrence of carrier over token participants - both associated with relational processes - implies that supernatural characters are defined more by attributes than by fixed identities. This linguistic tendency enhances their enigmatic portrayal, positioning the supernatural as simultaneously powerful and unsettling within the narrative.

TABLE 12. Relational process clause with carrier as participant in *Bachik*

<i>dia mia mata</i> carrier its eyes	(were)	<i>besair</i> attribute large
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Table 12 presents a clause which introduces the reader to a feature of the *Toyol* (undead infant) in *Bachik*. Such descriptions were common across the folktales, not only related to features of supernatural beings but also those of supernatural occurrences. Instances where supernatural characters define themselves or their characteristics, like in *Si-Swee Merah*, *gua mia gigi tajam s'kali* (my teeth are very sharp), were rare. The descriptions of these characteristics provide information to readers, allowing them to imagine the supernatural characters' odd appearances.

Furthermore, the disparity between the number of processes and the participants associated within the same transitivity category highlights the frequent use of ellipsis and the recurrence of the same participant across multiple clauses. Among the five folktales, the difference between the number of processes and participants is the largest in *Si-Swee Merah*, followed by *Dunia di-Bawah Rumah*. Unlike the other three folktales, these two folktales contain only one antagonist each (the *Penanggalan* and *Jin*). The infrequent use of participants in these two folktales indicate that the narrative focused on the actions of supernatural characters, with minimal need to repeatedly identify the antagonist when there was only one involved in each folktale.

TABLE 13. Circumstances involving supernatural characters

Folktale/ Circumstances	<i>Si-Swee Merah</i>	<i>Bachik</i>	<i>Bawang Puteh Bawang Merah</i>	<i>Dunia di- Bawah Rumah</i>	<i>Di-Dalam Bilek Loteng</i>	Total (%)
Supernatural being(s)	<i>Penanggalan</i>	<i>Toyol</i>	<i>Wak-Wak Sungei</i>	<i>Jin, Antu Tetek</i>	<i>Barang kotor, penghulu rumah, antu</i>	
Time	14 (17.5%)	7 (33.33%)	3 (11.54%)	2 (8.7%)	3 (30%)	29 (18.13%)
Location	38 (47.5%)	7 (33.33%)	10 (38.46%)	8 (34.78%)	6 (60%)	69 (43.13%)
Direction	5 (6.25%)	1 (4.76%)	3 (11.54%)	3 (13.04%)	0	12 (7.5%)
Manner	23 (28.75%)	6 (28.57%)	10 (38.46%)	10 (43.48%)	1 (10%)	50 (31.25%)
Total	80 (50%)	21 (13.13%)	26 (16.25%)	23 (14.38%)	10 (6.25%)	160

Table 13 shows the four most frequently occurring circumstances found in the data. Location is the most prominent, followed by manner. Locations that were frequently mentioned include *rumah* (typically the protagonists' home) and *bilek* (room – often within the home). Most

of the important events in the narrative occur within these locations, emphasising the significance of the home and family space in the stories. Other locations were more specific to the happenings in the folktales, including *seberang pintu chaya* (beyond the bright door) in *Dunia di-Bawah Rumah* and *di-dalam botol* (inside the bottle) in *Bachik*. In line with the narrative's emphasis on description, circumstances of manner play an important role in describing the processes in more detail, adding depth to the characters' actions. Examples include *kuat-kuat* (forcefully), *lebeh t'rang* (clearly), *seram* (menacingly), and *lekair-lekair* (quickly).

The low overall occurrences of time and direction circumstances could indicate that the supernatural characters are less bound by human constraints such as temporal or spatial orientation. This emphasises the otherworldly nature of these beings, creating a boundary between the human and non-human characters in the folktales. However, whenever a specific time was mentioned in the folktales, it was almost always *sinjakala* (dusk/twilight) or less frequently, *malam* (night), as exemplified in Table 14.

TABLE 14. Circumstance of time – *malam* (night)

<i>Malam-malam</i>	<i>dia</i>	<i>pun</i>	<i>pulang</i>	<i>kat ranjang Mak</i>
circ: time	actor		pr: material	goal
Every night	it	would	return	to her bed

The tendency to associate the supernatural with the transitional period to and during nighttime shows how the temporal circumstances were used to reinforce the unpredictability and danger that comes with these otherworldly beings. Although there were mentions of daytime in the folktales, they were limited and more frequently associated with the human characters.

This section has examined transitivity patterns across five folktales, focusing on process types, participants, and circumstances. The findings reveal that Baba Malay folktales foreground supernatural events and action-oriented beings, portraying them as powerful agents who propel the narrative through material processes. The predominance of carrier over token participants in relational clauses suggests an emphasis on describing rather than identifying supernatural figures, foregrounding their mysterious, otherworldly nature. Their limited association with temporal and spatial circumstances further reinforces their detachment from human reality, while their perceived capacity to influence the real world reflects community beliefs. The recurrent settings of the home and forest highlight the centrality of family and domestic harmony, with the supernatural often depicted as an external force that threatens familial unity - thereby reinforcing moral and cultural values through linguistic choices aligned with the ideational metafunction.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This section discusses the findings of the current study, drawing on past studies, to address the two research questions posed at the beginning of the paper. The first question aimed to understand how supernatural themes in Baba Malay folktales were realised through transitivity elements while the second question focused on the transitivity patterns associated with supernatural characters in the folktales.

DISCUSSION

All six folktales featured supernatural elements in the storylines, with some folktales like *Rumah Tangga Wee* and *Di-Dalam Bilek Loteng* relying more on the medium's character to bring the supernatural elements into the narrative. This is congruent with previous studies on how supernatural elements help protagonists grow and advance in the narrative (Dhera, 2024; Irfan, 2022). Without the supernatural, the moral of the Baba Malay folktales would not be as effectively conveyed since the plot would not progress as dramatically.

Moreover, the linguistic details in the folktales convey unique elements of Baba Malay, including the influence from Malay language in the nomenclature of supernatural characters, *Toyol* and *Penanggalan*, and Chinese influences in vocabulary such as *hio* (incense), *chiong tiok* (possessed), and *Tangki* (medium). Abstract nouns concerning the sense of smell were brought up frequently in the folktales to enhance descriptions of supernatural characters themselves like *bau sikit pesing* (a sharp scent) from the *Penanggalan* (vampiric demon) or scenes of magic rituals, which often mentioned *hio* (burning incense). While studies in the past have not examined these rituals in detail, the use of incense or joss-sticks are common in Baba households for prayers (Chua, 2019; Ooi, 2017). Mentions of these items reflect a part of the community's religious practices and cultural heritage, which is crucial in any folktale. As for circumstances, the frequently occurring locative circumstance *utan* (forest) corresponds with past studies (Amirova, 2022; Irfan, 2022; Naponiello, 2024; Rapala, 2024), indicating the universality of certain folklore elements. The emphasis on the forest as the supernatural's dwelling place is a stark contrast with the human characters' homes, as it is wild and untamed; its mysterious and unpredictable nature reinforces the idea that the supernatural emerges as a threat from the unknown.

In the portrayal of supernatural characters, specifically, the salience of material processes such as *bikin* (make), *kasi* (give), and *pi* (go), followed by relational processes such as, *ada* (had/was) and *sua* (had) as well as the emphasis on action verbs, echoes the findings of studies of folktales of Indonesian communities (Gusnawaty et al., 2017; Mahmud & Imperiani, 2019; Yuniari et al., 2023), yet these findings are expected, given the importance of action and description in any narrative genre. Moreover, placing the supernatural being in the actor position forced human characters and other entities into passive roles within clauses. This shows the extent of the supernatural's dominance in shaping events, while human characters became the recipients instead of the initiators of these actions. However, our study found some distinct patterns related to the portrayal of supernatural characters, namely as associated with material actions compared to existential and verbal processes. Besides, the finding that supernatural characters in relational clauses were more often in the role of "carriers" rather than "tokens" shows that the supernatural characters were mostly introduced through descriptions and not fixed definitions. The descriptions were helpful in constructing an unconventional image of the supernatural in the reader's mind, which requires imagination as they are far removed from typical human features. This aligns with previous findings that folktales include detailed descriptions of supernatural beings (Jamal, 2023; Yalim & Low, 2019).

Additionally, a notable linguistic feature observed in the folktales is the use of the zero copula in Baba Malay. Clauses with this rule normally occur in relational clauses, providing descriptions or definitions without a 'be' verb. This feature is common to both Malay and Hokkien (Ansaldò, 2010), which have a major influence on Baba Malay structure. Clauses like *dia mia gigi kechik* (its teeth [were] small) and *berengkali dia orang hamba* (perhaps she [was] a slave) can be understood easily within context. This streamlined grammatical structure is a unique feature in Baba Malay that reflects its historical and sociocultural roots. Additionally, the study's focus on

the supernatural identifies a set of Baba Malay vocabulary, in clauses like *tapi dia mia badan sua pokak hitam* (except that its body has rotted black) and compound nouns like *Barang Kotor* (unclean spirit), which is distinct from those mentioned by other researchers such as Lee (2022), whose linguistic examination utilises common phrases and Manokaran et al.(2025), who examined compound nouns related to cuisine. Examining a language within a different context thus reveals novel words and expressions that might otherwise go unnoticed, giving additional depth into our understanding of Baba Malay.

CONCLUSION

This study explored patterns of language used to realise the supernatural theme in six Baba Malay folktales. Our analysis shows the salience of supernatural themes in the stories, providing details of Baba Malay vocabulary relevant to the topic and their use within the clause structure. We examined the supernatural themes through transitivity elements and their associated transitivity patterns, to address the research questions. The findings illustrated distinct linguistic choices that contribute to the depiction of supernatural characters in the folktales, from identifying related process, participant and circumstance types, including the lack of association to temporal and circumstances. The transitivity patterns also revealed how vivid imagery of the supernatural characters is constructed through attributive relative clauses, which were used to emphasise the otherworldly nature of the supernatural beings. The frequent use of material processes also signified that supernatural characters were cast in an active role, while humans became passive participants, suggesting agency dominance by the supernatural. The contrast between the supernatural and human worlds is made clear throughout the narrative through transitivity elements, reinforcing the supernatural characters' mysterious and ominous presence and instilling fear in the human characters. While the analysis highlights some unique cultural features of the Peranakan Chinese, including the influences of Malay and Chinese culture and language, our findings also show some commonalities with folktales from other cultures. By applying transitivity analysis to supernatural story elements, this study demonstrates how clauses contain key information – including agency, temporal and locative circumstances, and attributive properties of the supernatural characters. This contributes to linguistic research by showcasing how transitivity can be used to analyse literary text, specifically folktales, in a minority language, which can foster a deeper understanding of Baba Malay narratives. Novel lexical items were also documented in the context of supernatural themes in the folktales, contributing to existing literature about Baba Malay and the Peranakan Chinese.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kit Yee Tang completed her master's degree in linguistics at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya. Her research interests include discourse analysis, syntax, pragmatics, and endangered languages. She is particularly interested in the role of language in reflecting social and cultural patterns.

Ayeshah Syed is a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya. She teaches undergraduate and postgraduate courses in languages and linguistics, including discourse analysis and research methodology. In addition to studying health(care) discourse, she is involved in studies of language use in various real-world contexts.