



The Lexical *Negeri* in Malay Proverbs: Inquisitive Semantic Studies

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ABSTRACT

This study employs an inquisitive semantics approach, which remains relatively underutilized in linguistic studies in Indonesia. To date, research on Malay proverbs has tended to focus on the classification of meaning, function, and moral values, and has largely been limited to lexical and cognitive semantic analyses. Studies that specifically examine the rationale behind the selection of particular lexical items in proverbs—especially the word *negeri* - through an inquisitive semantics approach are still very limited. Therefore, this study aims to explore more deeply the meanings as well as the conceptual, cognitive, and cultural background underlying the use of the word *negeri* in Malay proverbs. Operationally, the data consist of Malay proverbs containing the lexicon *negeri*, obtained from the *Pusat Rujukan Persuratan Melayu* (PRPM) and other relevant sources. The analysis is conducted using an inquisitive semantics approach through three stages: script semantics (lexical meaning based on the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*), cognitive semantics, and inquisitive semantics. In addition, the analysis considers metaphorical mapping between the source domain and the target domain to reveal the relationship between linguistic forms and their conceptual meanings. Data were collected using a note-taking technique and analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the word *negeri* in Malay proverbs functions not only as a geographical marker but also as a metaphor representing social concepts, collective identity, power, and the individual's attachment to their community. The use of the word *negeri* reflects the Malay worldview regarding social order and the cultural values that underpin communal life.

Keywords: lexical negeri, Malay proverbs, inquisitive semantics

Leksikal *Negeri* dalam Peribahasa Melayu: Kajian Semantik Inkuisitif

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan semantik inkuisitif yang masih relatif jarang digunakan dalam kajian linguistik di Indonesia. Selama ini, penelitian tentang peribahasa Melayu cenderung berfokus pada klasifikasi makna, fungsi, dan nilai moral, serta masih terbatas pada analisis semantik leksikal dan kognitif. Kajian yang secara khusus menelaah alasan pemilihan leksikon tertentu dalam peribahasa, khususnya kata *negeri*, melalui pendekatan semantik inkuisitif masih sangat terbatas. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggali makna serta latar konseptual, kognitif, dan kultural penggunaan kata *negeri* dalam peribahasa Melayu secara lebih mendalam. Secara operasional, data penelitian berupa peribahasa Melayu yang mengandung leksikon *negeri* yang diperoleh dari PRPM dan sumber relevan lainnya. Analisis dilakukan menggunakan pendekatan semantik inkuisitif melalui tiga tahap, yaitu semantik skrip (makna leksikal berdasarkan KBBI), semantik kognitif, dan semantik inkuisitif. Selain itu, analisis juga mempertimbangkan pemetaan metaforis antara ranah sumber dan ranah target untuk mengungkap hubungan antara bentuk bahasa dan makna konseptualnya. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan teknik catat dan dianalisis melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan simpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kata *negeri* dalam peribahasa Melayu tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai penanda geografis, tetapi juga sebagai metafora yang merepresentasikan konsep sosial, identitas kolektif, kekuasaan, serta keterikatan individu dengan komunitasnya. Penggunaan kata *negeri* mencerminkan cara pandang masyarakat Melayu terhadap keteraturan sosial dan nilai-nilai budaya yang melandasi kehidupan bermasyarakat.

Kata kunci: leksikal negeri, peribahasa Melayu, semantik inkuisitif

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INTRODUCTION

Language represents the system of thought and culture of a society. In the context of the Malay community, language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a medium for transmitting values, norms, and worldviews passed down from generation to generation. Language reflects the cognitive construction and social experiences of its speakers and therefore cannot be separated from the cultural context that underlies it (Rahman, 2021; Suryadi, 2022). One form of linguistic expression rich in cultural values is the Malay proverb. Proverbs not only convey meaning implicitly but also represent ways of thinking, collective experiences, and the local wisdom of the Malay community (Ismail & Daud, 2021; Prasetyo, 2023).

One of the regional languages in Indonesia is Malay. Operationally, Malay proverbs in this study refer to traditional expressions that have fixed meanings, are figurative in nature, and are passed down through generations within Malay communities in Indonesia. The proverb data are obtained from an authoritative source, namely the *Pusat Rujukan Persuratan Melayu* (PRPM), a scientifically documented Malay language database, and are supported by other relevant sources of Nusantara proverbs. Thus, proverbs in this study are understood as linguistic units that carry not only linguistic meaning but also cultural values and systems of knowledge within Malay society.

In Malay proverbs, each lexical element plays an important role in constructing meaning, which cannot always be understood literally. Meaning in proverbs is symbolic and metaphorical, thus requiring an analytical approach capable of revealing the relationship between language, cognition, and human experience (Yusoff et al., 2022). One particularly interesting lexicon to examine is the word *negeri*. Lexically, according to the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI), the word *negeri* refers to a territory or place inhabited by a nation or community. This meaning serves as the basis for analysis at the script semantics

(lexical) stage, which is intended to understand the literal meaning of a word before proceeding to contextual analysis.

However, within the construction of proverbs, the use of the word *negeri* often extends beyond its geographical meaning and develops into a symbol encompassing social, cultural, and even philosophical dimensions. From the perspective of cognitive semantics, this can be explained through the concept of metaphorical mapping between the source domain and the target domain. The source domain refers to the concrete concept used in the proverb, while the target domain refers to the abstract meaning being conveyed. In this context, the word *negeri* as a source domain may represent target domains such as collective identity, power, social order, and the relationship between individuals and their communities (Hassan, 2021; Ariffin, 2023).

To date, studies on Malay proverbs have generally focused on the classification of forms, functions, and the moral values they contain. Semantic studies on proverbs have also been conducted; however, most remain limited to lexical and cognitive meaning analysis. These studies tend to emphasize what the proverbs mean, but have not thoroughly explored why certain lexical items are selected and how cultural background and patterns of thought influence such choices (Putri et al., 2022; Kurniawan, 2023). In other words, the conceptual and philosophical dimensions underlying the use of linguistic elements in proverbs remain underexplored.

To address this limitation, this study employs an inquisitive semantics approach. Inquisitive semantics is an approach that not only examines meaning at the surface level but also seeks to uncover the reasons behind the selection of particular linguistic forms, as well as the relationship between language, cognition, and culture (Yusoff & Abdullah, 2020; Mahsun, 2021; Elmustian & Jalil, 2015). This approach involves three stages of analysis: (1) script semantics or lexical meaning, (2) cognitive semantics, which examines meaning based on speakers' experiences



and knowledge, and (3) inquisitive semantics, which investigates why a particular object is used as a metaphor in proverbs. Thus, this approach enables researchers to explore meaning at conceptual and philosophical levels.

Although inquisitive semantics has begun to develop in Malay linguistic studies, its application in analyzing proverbs remains relatively limited. Recent studies have primarily examined specific objects in proverbs, such as elements of nature, animals, or body parts, demonstrating that lexical selection in proverbs is not arbitrary but is grounded in the empirical and cognitive experiences of the community (Saputra & Lestari, 2023; Wijaya, 2024). However, studies that specifically focus on the use of the word *negeri* in Malay proverbs through an inquisitive semantics approach are still scarce. In fact, the word *negeri* holds broad semantic potential and is closely related to concepts of identity, power, and social attachment within Malay society.

Based on the above discussion, the research gap of this study lies in the limited number of studies that explore the reasons behind the selection of the lexicon *negeri* in Malay proverbs using an inquisitive semantics approach. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the meaning of the word *negeri* in Malay proverbs and to uncover the conceptual, cognitive, and cultural background underlying its use.

The novelty of this study lies in: (1) its focus on a single key lexicon, *negeri*, in Malay proverbs; (2) the use of an inquisitive semantics approach that integrates script, cognitive, and inquisitive semantic analyses; and (3) its effort to relate linguistic analysis to the construction of thought and culture in Malay society in a more comprehensive manner. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the development of semantic studies, particularly inquisitive semantics, and to enrich the understanding of cultural values embedded in Malay proverbs.

METHOD

Qualitative-descriptive methods were used in this research. Fraenkel et al. (2012), Razak (2017)

stated that descriptive qualitative methods are commonly used in social research.

This method is used to uncover linguistic meaning in depth by tracing the reasons behind the selection of particular lexical items and their relationship to the cognitive and cultural aspects of the speech community. The qualitative descriptive method is chosen because this study aims to systematically, comprehensively, and contextually describe and interpret the meaning of the word *negeri* in Malay proverbs.

The data in this study consist of linguistic units in the form of Malay proverbs that contain the lexicon *negeri*. These data are qualitative in nature, as they consist of utterances or expressions with symbolic meanings rather than numerical data. This research is also categorized as a library study, in which data are collected through the examination of various relevant written sources, such as books, dictionaries, scholarly articles, and online resources.

The primary data source is obtained from the *Pusat Rujukan Persuratan Melayu* (PRPM) and is supported by other relevant literature related to Malay proverbs. The data collection technique used is note-taking, which involves identifying, recording, and classifying proverbs containing the word *negeri* in accordance with the research focus. Data analysis is conducted through three stages: (1) data reduction, which involves selecting and simplifying relevant data; (2) data display, which involves organizing the data into a systematic descriptive form; and (3) conclusion drawing, which involves interpreting the data to obtain comprehensive meaning.

Furthermore, within the framework of inquisitive semantics, the analysis is carried out through three layers: (1) lexical meaning analysis to identify the basic meaning of the word *negeri*; (2) cognitive meaning analysis to understand its conceptual meaning within the context of proverbs; and (3) inquisitive meaning analysis to uncover the reasons behind the selection of the word *negeri*, as well as the cultural values and worldview of the Malay community that underlie its use. To ensure data validity, this study employs source

triangulation by comparing data from various references and enhances analytical rigor to ensure the credibility of the findings.

RESULT

The author limits the scope of this study to proverbs that use the word *negeri*. A total of six proverbs were identified from the PRPM. The following are the data collected by the author.

Table
 The Lexical Concept of ‘Negeri’ in Malay Proverbs were identified from the PRPM

No.	Proverbs	Proverbs
1	<i>Hujan emas perak di negeri orang; hujan keris lembing di negeri kita; baik juga di negeri kita.</i> Rain of gold and silver in the land of the people; the rain of javelin daggers in our country; also good in our country.	No matter how luxurious and prosperous someone's country is, their own country is also better.
2	<i>Sayang di anak dilecuti, sayang di negeri ditinggalkan.</i> It's a shame for children to be stripped, it's a shame for a country to be abandoned	It's a pity that the child is scolded, it's a pity for the country, it's a pity to go and migrate to another country.
3	<i>Negeri besar, rumah besar, berapa pun panjang perian takkan terantuk.</i> Big country, big house, no matter how long the day is, you won't stumble.	A rich person is generous, even if many people ask for help he will not become poor
4	<i>Seperti negeri dialahkan garuda.</i> Like a country defeated by Garuda.	A country (village) that is silent.
5	<i>Ibarat negeri berubah rasam; ibarat tahun berubah musim.</i> It's like the country has changed its taste; like the seasons change.	A person whose position is not fixed. rasam = custom, habit.
6	<i>Membawakan cupak ke negeri orang.</i> Bringing cupak to other people's countries.	Using your own customs in someone else's country

Source: PRPM

The findings indicate that the lexicon *negeri* undergoes a semantic extension from merely referring to a place to becoming a symbol of identity, social structure, environmental conditions, and the cultural system of Malay society.



DISCUSSION

Proverb 1

Lexically, the word *negeri* in this proverb undergoes a semantic expansion from merely referring to a geographical area to becoming a space with emotional and psychological dimensions. The phrases “*negeri orang*” (someone else’s country) and “*negeri sendiri*” (one’s own country) form a semantic opposition that not only indicates a difference in place but also a difference in values. The phrase “golden rain” symbolizes luxury and prosperity, while “stone rain” symbolizes hardship or unfavorable conditions. However, the presence of the phrase “still better” indicates that the value of one’s own country remains higher. Thus, lexically, there is a shift from objective meaning (physical conditions) to subjective meaning (emotional value).

From a cognitive perspective, this proverb reflects a process of conceptualization that positions *negeri* as part of personal identity. *Negeri* is no longer understood merely as a location but as a representation of social attachment and individual existence. In this case, a conceptual metaphor is formed in which *negeri* represents identity and a sense of belonging. The oppositional structure between *negeri orang* and *negeri sendiri* reinforces the cognitive mapping that emotional closeness is more important than material conditions.

From an inquisitive perspective, the use of the lexicon *negeri* in this proverb reflects the cultural values of Malay society, which highly regard a sense of belonging, loyalty, and attachment to one’s homeland. This proverb not only conveys a moral message but also represents the collective experience of a society that lives within strong kinship and communal systems. The preference for one’s own *negeri* indicates that social identity is prioritized over material gain. As cited from an Instagram account @balaibahasajawatengah (posted in 2021), the proverb states: “*Rain of gold and silver in another land; rain of daggers and spears in our own land; still, our own land is better.*” This proverb teaches a sense of love and

pride for one’s homeland and encourages people to preserve and maximize its potential. This is in line with Jalaluddin (2014), who emphasizes that the selection of elements in Malay proverbs is based on cultural experiences that prioritize collectivism and social relationships.

Prover 2

Lexically, the word *negeri* in this proverb refers to a place of origin or a social environment that holds significant value. However, this meaning undergoes a shift as *negeri* is positioned as something that can be left behind. The word “*sayang*” (affection/love), which appears twice, indicates a strong emotional value, both toward a child and toward the *negeri*. Meanwhile, the words “*dilecuti*” (whipped/punished) and “*ditinggalkan*” (abandoned) reflect actions that are contradictory to that sense of affection. This suggests a lexical complexity in which something that is loved can, paradoxically, be sacrificed.

From a cognitive perspective, this proverb shows that *negeri* is conceptualized as an entity with emotional value, yet not absolute in nature. Individuals may leave their *negeri* for certain purposes, indicating a dynamic relationship between the individual and the community. In this case, a conceptual metaphor is formed in which *negeri* is a valued entity that can be sacrificed. This conceptualization demonstrates that human actions are not always driven solely by emotional attachment but also by pragmatic considerations. This aligns with the cognitive theory of Lakoff (1980), which states that meaning is shaped by the interaction between experience, values, and human needs.

From an inquisitive perspective, the use of *negeri* in this proverb reflects the social reality of Malay society, which understands life as a process of negotiation among various interests. The proverb conveys the message that under certain circumstances, one must sacrifice something valuable in order to achieve a greater goal. This indicates that Malay society holds a complex understanding of values—not black-and-white, but

contextual. This view is consistent with Omar (2008), who argues that the Malay language reflects a balance between emotional and rational values in social life. Furthermore, Jalaluddin (2014) emphasizes that Malay proverbs often represent life dilemmas faced by the community, thus carrying reflective and contextual meanings. This Malay proverb is also frequently used in Minangkabau culture. As cited from the online newspaper *Beritaminang* in the Minangkabau language: “*Sayang anak dilacuik, sayang di nagari di tinggaan.*” This proverb illustrates the concept of affection and responsibility in a holistic manner, both within the family sphere and in social life.

Proverb 3

Lexically, the word *negeri* in this proverb no longer refers merely to a geographical territory but undergoes a semantic extension into a representation of a broad and structured social space. The word “*besar*” (large/great) attached to *negeri* functions as a marker of quality, indicating vastness, strength, and stability within a system. Thus, *negeri besar* does not simply denote a large area but also implicitly signifies an environment endowed with abundant resources.

From a cognitive perspective, this proverb reflects a process of conceptualization in which *negeri* is understood as a system that determines the conditions of individual life. A *negeri besar* is associated with abundance, security, and ease of access to basic needs. The phrase “*takkan terantuk*” (will not stumble) carries a metaphorical meaning, suggesting that individuals within a large system will not encounter significant difficulties or obstacles. In this context, a conceptual metaphor is formed in which *negeri* represents a structure of power and resource distribution. This aligns with Lakoff’s (1980) theory that humans understand abstract concepts through concrete experiences mapped onto cognitive structures.

From an inquisitive perspective, the use of the lexicon *negeri* in this proverb reflects the Malay community’s view of the importance of social structure in determining quality of life. *Negeri* is

not perceived as a neutral space but as a center of power that regulates the distribution of welfare. Moreover, this proverb has also been found on a social media platform, Instagram, posted in 2025 with the caption: “*Peribahasa negeri besar, rumah besar, berapa pun panjang perian takkan terantuk bermakna seberapa banyak pun pertolongan diberi tidak akan menyusahkan kerana negeri ini kaya.*” This indicates that Malay society possesses an awareness of social stratification and unequal access to resources. This perspective is in line with Koentjaraningrat (2009), who argues that cultural systems influence how societies interpret social and economic relations.

Proverb 4

Lexically, the word *negeri* in this proverb undergoes a semantic extension from referring to a territory to representing a social condition. The phrase “*dialahkan garuda*” provides a hyperbolic nuance, depicting something so powerful or overwhelming that it results in destruction or emptiness. Thus, in this context, *negeri* is not merely understood as a place but as a living space that can lose its social function.

From a cognitive perspective, this proverb shows that *negeri* is conceptualized as a living entity capable of undergoing changes in condition, including emptiness or silence. *Negeri* is viewed as a container of human activity; when such activity disappears, the *negeri* becomes “empty.” This forms a conceptual metaphor in which *negeri* represents a dynamic social condition. This interpretation aligns with Lakoff’s (1980) cognitive semantic theory, which emphasizes that meaning is shaped by human experience of the environment. From an inquisitive perspective, the use of *negeri* in this proverb reflects the experiences of Malay society in observing social changes, such as migration, conflict, or the decline of a region. A “silent” *negeri* is not merely a physical condition but also signifies the loss of social life. As cited from Wikikutip, the proverb “*seperti negeri dialahkan garuda*” refers to a place, village, or country that suddenly becomes empty, deserted,



or eerily quiet—conditions that usually occur due to disasters, disease, or fear. This illustrates that Malay society is highly sensitive to the dynamics of its social environment. This finding is consistent with Jalaluddin (2014), who states that Malay proverbs emerge from careful observation of the realities of community life.

Proverb 5

Lexically, the word *negeri* in this proverb no longer refers to a place, but to a system of life encompassing customs, habits, and social norms. The word “*rasam*” (custom/tradition) clarifies that *negeri* refers to the entirety of the social order.

From a cognitive perspective, this proverb shows that *negeri* is conceptualized as a dynamic and non-fixed system. The comparison with “*tahun berubah musim*” (as the year changes its seasons) reinforces the understanding that change is natural and inevitable. Thus, a conceptual metaphor is formed in which *negeri* represents a changing social system. This indicates that Malay society understands life as a continuously evolving process rather than a static one.

From an inquisitive perspective, the use of *negeri* in this proverb reflects the Malay community’s awareness of social and cultural dynamics. Changes within the *negeri* are understood as part of a life cycle that must be accepted. This proverb has also been found on a social media platform, Facebook, posted by the account Fastaqim Solution in 2021 with the caption: “*Peribahasa ibarat negeri berubah rasam, ibarat tahun berubah musim.*” The proverb explains that a person frequently changes their stance, customs, or promises, indicating instability in their position. This reflects an adaptive attitude within Malay culture toward changing times. This perspective is consistent with Omar (2008), who argues that the Malay language reflects a worldview that is flexible in responding to social change.

Proverb 6

Lexically, the word *negeri* in this proverb refers to a place outside one’s native environment.

However, its meaning develops into a representation of a social space that possesses different norms, customs, and rules. The word “*cupak*,” as a symbol of measurement or standard, reinforces the meaning that what is being carried is a system of values or habitual practices.

From a cognitive perspective, this proverb shows that *negeri* is conceptualized as a cultural system that differs from one society to another. The act of “bringing one’s *cupak*” indicates a mismatch when someone applies their own cultural standards in a different environment. Thus, a conceptual metaphor is formed in which *negeri* represents a system of norms and values.

From an inquisitive perspective, the use of *negeri* in this proverb reflects the experiences of Malay society in interacting with other groups that have different cultures. The proverb conveys a normative message that individuals should be able to adapt to a new environment. As cited from the online newspaper *Laman Riau*: “*Dari kata cupak, muncullah peribahasa sebagai tuntunan ranggi membawakan cupak ke negeri orang.*” This proverb refers to the act of using or imposing one’s own customs, habits, or rules when in another place. This demonstrates that Malay society has a strong awareness of cultural relativity. This perspective aligns with Koentjaraningrat’s (2009) cultural theory, which states that each society possesses a unique value system that cannot be universally imposed.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that the lexicon *negeri* in Malay proverbs undergoes a significant expansion of meaning from a geographical sense to a symbolic one encompassing aspects of identity, social structure, economy, and culture. Lexical analysis reveals a shift from concrete to abstract meanings, while cognitive analysis shows that *negeri* is conceptualized as personal identity, a structure of power, a social condition, and a dynamic system of values. From an inquisitive perspective, the use of the lexicon *negeri* is grounded in the lived experiences of Malay society, which emphasize the

importance of social attachment, the balance between the individual and the community, and the ability to adapt to change. Thus, Malay proverbs not only reflect the function of language as a means of communication but also serve as a representation of ways of thinking and the cultural construction of society as a whole.

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