



Language of Strata and Expression in Construction of *Sampi* Amongst Iban Community  
in Malaysia

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**Abstract**

This study aimed to identify the language of strata and expression in the construction of *sampi* amongst the Iban community in Sarawak, Malaysia. The descriptive qualitative approach was used to analysed eight cultivation prayers (*sampi umai*) taken from the book *Sampi Enggau Biau* arranged by Robert Menua Saleh and Janang Ensiring. Construction of *sampi* explained by content analysis technique. The finding showed the strata of language in the introduction contained initial call, salutation, and self-recognition. The body of *sampi* contained purpose, call, statement of offering (*piring*), commands, and dialogue with gods (*Petara*). The *sampi* ended with a blessing prayer. Construction of *sampi* used expressions of calling, statement, requesting, asking, and answering. The implication of the study showed that the language of strata cannot be fully summarized as the use of language depending on the experience and expertise of the bards. The expression that has been used is affected by the skills of the bard in addressing the language of strata.

**Keyword:** Language of strata, Expression, Construction of *sampi*, Iban cultivation prayer

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**INTRODUCTION**

Iban community is the largest ethnic group with a population of 30.3% of the 2.7 million population in Sarawak (2010 Census, Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2015). This community lives in longhouses which are mostly located in the hinterland of the lowlands and along the river (Ichikawa, 2019; Islam, Abd Wahab & Anggum, 2020; Lyndon, Ragam, Aznie, Saad & Abd Rahim, 2018). The life of the Iban community before the arrival of the British was hunting, farming, and fishing. They migrate from one place to another (Lockard & Saunders, 1992). The oral tradition of the Iban community is practiced for generations. One of the components of oral tradition in the communication of the Iban community is traditional poetry.

Iban traditional poetry is known as *leka main*, covering three categories, namely: entertainment, tradition and culture and requesting (Sandai, Mahmud & Sandai, 2019). The Entertainment category is used for entertaining and joking. Among the traditional poems used for entertainment are *Entelah* (a puzzle), *Dungai* (a poem to entertain the heart), *Ganu* (a joke poem), *Leka Timang* (a praise poem), *Ramban* (a love poem), *Renong* (a war narrative poem), and *Sugi* (an epic poem).

In addition, traditional Iban poetry is also related to tradition and culture. Traditions are rules that have been practiced for generations while culture carries the meaning of civilization (Nurjanah & Arifin, 2018; Salleh, 2014; Siek, & Lee, 2021). Among the traditional Iban poems in Adat Resam and Budaya are *Ai Ansah* (a poem inviting guests to speak), *Leka Geliga* (words of advice before starting a ceremony), and *Nanya Indu* (merisik custom).

Requesting in the Iban community is a pray, usually to God, for his help or protection (Banseng & Sandai, 2017). In the oral tradition requesting is the practice of requesting something or a request in the form of prayers and incantations. *Pengap* (requesting to the Gods), *Sabak* (death mourning song), *Pelian* (healing ritual), *Biau* (prayer ritual accompanied by food offerings) and *Sampi* (mantra) are examples of traditional Iban poetry that fall into the requesting category.

*Sampi* for cultivation is recited in accordance with the cycle or process of hill paddy cultivation, namely cutting, clearing the area, burning, and planting. After cutting down and clearing the cultivation area, *Sampi Mudas Di Umai* (Prayer After Burning the land) is recited. This *sampi* is done after hearing the sound of the Beragai bird, one of the Kihanatan Birds in the Auguri system of the Iban community (Handrianto, Rasool, Rahman, Musta`in, & Ilhami, 2021; Sandin, 1980). After burning, the Ibans choose the rice seeds to be planted. During this selection process, *Sampi Kejang Deka Ngelabuh Ke Benih* (Dropping seeds prayer) is recited so that the rice seeds to be planted are blessed by the gods (*Petara*). This is then followed by *Sampi Nabur Benih Pun* (Sowing the firstborn seed prayer).

*Sampi Nugal/Besimpan* (Planting Paddy prayer) is recited after the firstborn seed is sown in the cultivation area. When the paddy seedlings grew, the Ibans began to clear the grass. During this activity, if pests are disturbing the paddy seedlings, *Sampi Memali Umai* (Protecting Paddy Prayer) is recited. Nevertheless, if this problem becomes worse, *Gawai Umai* (Gawai Huma) is held (Sandin, 1980).

*Sampi Pandung Gawai Umai* (Prayer of Gawai Huma Food Performance Venue) is recited during the *Gawai Umai*. In the ceremony, the Ibans also select new seeds for the following year by reciting *Sampi Gawai Benih/Kejang Deka Nurun Ke Benih* (Gawai Benih Prayer). Finally, a seed-keeping ceremony was held while reciting *Sampi Lebu Nyimpan Padi* (Paddy Saving Prayer) namely a pray recited to store rice so that the stored rice is durable.

Like other indigenous communities, oral traditions play an important role in the traditional life of the Iban people. This tradition includes economic, historical, social, ethical, values (Rita & Handrianto, 2020), beliefs, tradition, and culture as well as the movement of the Iban community in the longhouse. Yet advances in technology and science are shifting the attention of the younger generation towards modern life and lack of emphasis on oral traditions (Banseng & Sandai, 2017). A *bard* known as a *lemambang* demonstrates his skills through the arrangement and use of spontaneously pronounced expressions in the construction of *sampi*. The situation becomes increasingly critical as the population of knowledgeable and experienced elderly people is also declining (Sandai, Mahmud & Sandai, 2019). This adds to the difficulty of getting guidance in compiling the language and rules of the *sampi* and makes young people less interested in their own culture. Therefore, this study was conducted to help the younger generation in understanding and examining the construction of the language of strata and expressions in the construction of *sampi*.

The purpose of this study is to identify the cohesive strata in the three main parts of the construction of *sampi*, namely the introduction, body, and closing to produce a pray. By considering the strata as a construction in the *sampi*, the expressions used were also analyzed. These expressions reinforce the position of the language of strata in the formation of the construction of *sampi*. The research data used is *sampi* cultivation taken from the book Biau Enggau Sampi compiled by Saleh and Ensiring (2001). The selection of the book was made because it contains *sampi* that meets every stage of the Iban community.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The methodology used in this study is literature approach. The data in the study is *sampi umai* (Cultivation Prayer) taken from the book Sampi Enggau Biau compiled by Salleh and Ensiring (2001). The eight *sampi* that were analyzed were *Sampi Mudas Di Umai* (Mantera After Burning), *Sampi Kejang Deka Ngelabuh Ke Benih* (Dropping Seeds Prayer), *Sampi Nabur Benih Pun* (Sowing The Firstborn Seed Prayer), *Sampi Nugal/ Besimpan* (Planting Paddy prayer), *Sampi Memali Umai* (Protecting Paddy Prayer), *Sampi Pandung Gawai Umai* (Gawai Huma Food Performance Venue Prayer), *Sampi Gawai Benih/Kejang Deka Nurun Ke Benih* (Gawai Benih Prayer) and *Sampi Lebu Nyimpan Padi* (Paddy Saving Prayer). Data will be analyzed using document analysis. The focus of the analysis in this study is the language of strata and expressions used in *sampi*.

## RESULT

### Language of Strata in *Sampi*

There are nine strata of language found in the *sampi* of cultivation, namely the initial call, salutation, self-recognition, purpose, call, offering *piring* (meal offerings), instructions, dialogue with *Petara* (Gods), and blessings. Table 1 below shows the position of the language of strata in the three main structural parts.

Table 1. The Position of the Language of Strata in the Main Construction of the Sampi

Main Structures	Total of <i>Sampi</i>	Language of Strata	keywords
Introduction	6	Initial call	Use of numbers Hail such as <i>O ha</i>
	5	Salutation	Regards Chicken as a symbol
Body	6	Self - recognition	Following the tradition
	8	Purpose	Direct Statement Indirect Statement
	8	Calling	Calling to <i>Petara</i> Calling to entity/spirit Calling to Kihanatan bird
	6	Offering ( <i>piring</i> )	Dining presentation statement
Closing		Instructions	Requesting
		Dialogue with <i>Petara</i>	Get certainty
		Blessing Prayer	Prosperity of life, wealth (sustenance), health, and long life

Based on Table 1, the initial call is the first language of strata used in the introductory part of the *sampi*. The initial call used is available in six *sampi*. The initial call begins with the number “*Sa! Dua! Tiga! Empat! Lima! Enam! Tujuh!*” or a shout of “*O ha!*” as many as seven times. The *sampi* language of strata is followed by salutation which is the respect addressed to those in power. There are five *sampi* that use the salutation language of strata. This honor is expressed directly namely:

*Aku bejaku munyi ke tuyu*  
*Ngangau munyi ke mamau*  
*Mutap munyi ke lap*  
*Laban ati enggi aku saru nyampi*  
*Mulut aku saru nyebut ngaga cherita*  
 (Translation: I speak like a fool and mad because I am afraid of the wrong talk)  
 Source: *Sampi Pandung Gawai Umai* (Gawai Huma Food Performance Venue Prayer), line 30-34.

Salutation is also pronounced by using chicken as a symbol. Examples of the use of chicken as a symbol are as follows:

*Aku miau piring miau ading*  
*Enggau manuk enggau pituk*  
*Manuk bedama manuk beberita*  
 (Translation: I hold and wave chickens of a good breed in front of a meal-offering)  
 Source: *Sampi Memali Umai* (Protecting Paddy Prayer), line 1-3.

The last strata of language in the introductory section is the practice of self-recognition, which is the confession or prosecution of practitioners against those in power that they have practiced the practice of *sampi* following the tradition from generation to generation. These strata of language are found in six *sampi*. Examples of self-recognition cited by practitioners are as follows:

*Ukai aku mungkal ukai nanjal ukai empegal*  
*Nunda adat Kuang Empat*  
*Nunda chara Pulang Gana*  
*Nunda tali Bui Nasi*  
*Nunda adat niang Ngumbang*  
*Nunda adat niang Padang*  
*Nya orang tau perih tau ajih*  
*Tau padi tau puli.*  
 (Translation: I follow the customs of tradition *Kuang Empat*, *Pulang Gana*, *Bui Nasi*, the spirit of *Ngumbang*, the spirit of *Padang*. Those are the people who are holy in cultivation)  
 Source: *Sampi Nugal/Besimpan* (Planting Paddy Prayer), line 3-10

In the *sampi* section, the strata of language used are purpose, calling, offering (*piring*) (meal presentation), instructions, and dialogue with *Petara*. The purpose is pronounced in all the *sampi* that are stated directly or figuratively. Direct statements are uttered based on the purpose of the *sampi* while the figurative purpose is as follows:

*Deka ngengkah limau tapah  
Ke bebuah retak seribu.*

(Translation: We want to put a thousand -fruited lemons - a meal-offering or *piring*)

Source: *Sampi Pandung Gawai Umai* (Gawai Huma Food Performance Venue Prayer), line 98-99.

The calling point strata is used in all *sampi*. This call is addressed to *Petara* (Gods), spirits, and Kihanatan Birds. Examples of calls to *Petara* are:

*Aku ngangau petara sida Sempulang Gana*

(Translation: I invoke the Land God, *Sempulang Gana*)

Source: *Sampi Nugal/Besimpan* (Planting Paddy Prayer) line 31.

While the call to spirits is addressed such as Many Stars, Seven Stars, Storms, Paddy spirits, and other related spirits. Examples of requests to spirits are as follows:

*Baru aku ngangauka Kumang Jawai Serantai Tali Sabut  
Bunsu Benih Putih Padi Pulut*

(Translation: Then I called the Goddess of the White Seed of Glutinous Rice)

Source: *Sampi Mudas* (Prayer After Burning the land), line 322-324.

The call to the Kihanatan Bird is as in the example below:

*Nya alai ke diatu aku ngangauka Nendak burung bagak gagau  
bejaku*

(Translation: I call out *Nendak*, Magpie which love to sing)

Source: *Sampi Kejang Deka Ngelabuh Benih* (Dropping seeds Prayer), line 39-40.

The language of strata such offering *piring* (meal preparation) is also pronounced in the filling section. There are six *sampi* that pronounce the offering *piring* (meal presentation). For example:

*Nya alai perengka udah chukup sedia nadai ketimpang*

*Piring udah chukup adang sedia nadai bisi kurang*

(Translation: All *piring* has already prepared adequately, no more no less)

Source: *Sampi Mudas* (Prayer After Burning the land), line 36-38.

The next strata of language in the body section are instructions. An instruction is an order to the authorities to fulfill the request of the practitioner. There are six *sampi* that use the command language strata. For example:

*Ari ili mudik sebuah bangkung*

*Ari ulu undur sebuah bung*

*Ari tanah nyenguk naka punggung*

*Ari langit nilik naka rekung*

*Anang tubuh nyuang tubuh sebatang*  
*Anang tubuh empurus tubuh lebus*  
*Selitka di piring selikapka di ketupat*  
*Ngambi kena peda kena tela*  
*Ngambi kena pegai kena japai*  
*Mai ubat teruba ingat*  
*Mai batu teruba nemu*  
*Mai pengaruh gembar tubuh*  
*Anang nyeridaka ngapa*  
*Engkah di tikai engkah di balai*  
*Engkah di chawan engkah di talam*  
*Ngambi kena simpan kena genggam*  
*Kena saduh kena taruh.*  
*Nya alai baka nya ga kita*  
*Ngabang begulung tikai bekesai lantai*  
*Betambit pintu bekalang alu*

(Translation: If you come, come in large numbers. From the full upstream of a ship, as well as from downstream. From the ground and above the sky must also come. Don't come empty-handed, but bring along sticks and charms. Everything should be carefully placed so that it can be seen and reached, can be stored and grasped. Roll up your mat, close your door and come in droves)  
 Source: *Sampi Mudas* (Prayer After Burning the land), line 48-68.

The last strata of language in the body is the dialogue with *Petara* (Gods). This strata of language is pronounced for certainty. There are seven *sampi* that use these strata of language. Examples are as below:

Human : *Udah nya dih*  
*Kati enti bulan Lima*  
*Tau ngelabuh sempuli padi saba?*

(Translation: Can we bring down the seeds in the fifth month?)

*Petara* : *“Bulan Lima enda tau uchu*  
*Nya timpuh orang begawai numbuhka pengawa*  
*Agi tinggang reba asi lumpang.”*

(Translation: Human: *Petara*: No my grandchildren. The fifth month is a period of celebration)

Source: *Sampi Mudas* (Prayer After Burning the land), line 249-254.

The strata of language in the closing part of the *sampi* is a blessing prayer. A blessing prayer is an application to obtain well-being, wealth (sustenance), health, and longevity. Blessings are found in all the *sampi* studied. An example of such a blessing prayer is:

*Kami lantang senang nguan menua*  
*Bulih padi bulih pengeraja*  
*Gerai ku Selempandai*  
*Gayu ku antu*  
*Nadai apa ku petara*

(Translation: We are prosperous in the world, gaining wealth, health, and longevity)

Source: *Sampi Mudat* (Prayer After Burning the land), line 406-410.

### Expression *Sampi*

Kadir and Hamzah (2017) describe expressions as utterances or word order used to communicate. The expressions in this study reinforce the language of strata found in the *sampi*. The expressions identified in this study were calling, statement, application, asking, and answering expressions.

The calling is the act of a sorcerer calling and summoning the gods known as *Petara*, the entities or spirits (*Bunsu*), and the Kihanatan Bird. Practitioners use this expression in the language of strata of the initial calling in the preamble and the calling in the content section. The calling point serves to invite the gods to come and carry the tree.

Statement expressions are expressions used by sorcerers to convey the meaning or purpose in the *sampi*. In addition, this expression is also used to greet in addition to expressing the offering (*piring*) or meal offerings. Statement expressions are also used in the calling language of strata when the sorcerer invokes while stating the origin of the *Petara* (Gods) being invoked. The expression of this statement is known as an attention sign (Stryker, 1969 in Tarigan, 1981).

Asking expressions are used in the language of strata of dialogue with *Petara* (Gods). This asking is accompanied by a question mark (?). This expression is used to get certainty whether the gods will come by carrying a tree or not. In addition, this asking is used to get certainty in the month whether the Ibans should do cultivation.

The asking expression is followed by the answering expression. This expression is also used in the language of strata of dialogue with *Petara* (Gods). The practitioner answered the Asksings posed as if he were *Petara's* representative to the asking of mankind. This situation creates a two-way communication process that is there is reciprocity between humans and *Petara*.

The expression of application is the statement of the sorcerer when applying and asking for something desired. The expression of this application is used in the content part, that is, in the command language of strata, and the closing part of the *sampi*, that is, the application for blessings. Practitioners ask the gods to come in droves without a single one left carrying sticks and amulets. Practitioners also apply for abundant wealth, longevity, and good health apart from the well-being of life. Table 2 shows the expressions or word order used in *sampi*.

Table 2. The Type of Expression Used in the Construction of *Sampi*

Main part	Language of Strata	Expression	Total of <i>Sampi</i>
Introduction	Initial call	Calling	6
	Salutation	Statement	5
	Self - recognition	Statement	6
Body	Purpose	Statement	8
	Calling	Calling	8
	Offering ( <i>piring</i> )	Statement	6
	Instructions	Requesting	6
	Dialogue with <i>Petara</i>	Asking	7
		Answering	
Closing	Blessing Prayer	Requesting	8

The type of expression clearly appears to be coupled with the language of strata found in the *sampi*. In other words, the expressions construct the language of strata found in the *construction of sampi*. For example, statement expressions are less used in the plate statement language of strata (meal presentation) because only six *sampi* use that language of strata.

## DISCUSSION

The structural theory states the existence of the construction of expression is because the group of words arranged based on the rules to be conveyed by the bard in stages and continuously (Kridalaksana, 2001). The word group in asking is the language of strata found in the construction of *sampi*. While the expression is an idea developed in the group. Zein (1994) asserts that good expressions have a clear structure and position. He added that each position has elements that are interconnected with each other. As such, the expressions used in the language of strata are intended to place the language of strata in the correct position in the construction of *sampi*.

For the Iban community, this initial call is a call to the seven *Petara* Iban namely *Sengalang Burung* (God of War), *Raja Menjaya* (God of Health), *Raja Simpulang Gana* (God of Land), *Raja Biku Bunsu Petara* (God of All Sources), *Raja Selempandai / Selempeta / Selempetoh* (God of Creator), *Raja Anda Mara* (God of Wealth) dan *Ini Inda / Ini Inee / Ini Andan* (Goddess of Justice). The meaning of the call is explained in the book *Biau Enggau Sampi* (Salleh & Ensiring, 2001). The calling point is used when calling *Petara* (Dewa-dewi).

The Iban people use chicken as a sign of respect and salute to *Petara*. The purpose is to tell that they conveyed the message of the son of man to *Petara* through the chicken. Simoons (1991) asserts that "chicken is not only used for culinary purposes but to obtain supplies in chicken fighting activities and for purification or divination purposes" (p. 298). Thus, Pawi (2013) explained that the Ibans consider "chicken is one of the ways to greet for the purpose of purification to achieve their purpose" (p. 149). The expression or word order used during salutation is a statement expression.

Statement expressions are also used when practitioners utter self-recognition. Self-recognition is intended as an acknowledgment that only God determines everything that human beings give up and surrender completely (Candra, Noviyanti & Nurlaily, 2018). Accordingly, the fear of spirits and the gods (*petara*) led the Iban people to admit that they practiced the practice of *sampi* for generations. Practitioners make self-recognition to stay away from the wrath of spirits and the gods (*petara*).

In the content section, the expressions used are statements, callings, applications, asking, and answering. Statement expressions are used to express purpose. Hafid and Putra (2019) describe each traditional prayer poem known as a mantra (pray) has a uniqueness according to its needs and purpose. These needs and purposes are pronounced to gain immunity, to attract the attention of certain people (Handrianto & Salleh, 2019), as an application to the Highest or from a trusted spirit, to gain strength, and so on. Accordingly, the purpose uttered depends on the skill of the practitioner to express it directly or figuratively.

The calling point is again used in the body section. The Iban people specifically call that by mentioning the names of *Petara* such as *Raja Singalang Burong* (God of War) and *Sempulang Gana* (God of Land) during cultivation is because it is an order from *Raja Singalang Burong* himself in the folklore Sera Gunting (Sandin, 1980). The call-in particular is also "one of the ways to get closer to that power and make it easier for mankind's demands to be granted" (Daud, 2001 p. 58). This is in line with the opinion of Yahya (2015) that calling, in particular, is able to strengthen the belief of the Almighty in the beliefs of mankind. Therefore, the Ibans not only call the name *Petara* (Gods) but also call the names of spirits or entities and also the Kihanatan Bird.

Next, the Iban people state a meal-offering known as a *piring* in *sampi*. *Piring* is provided in the form of food and beverages such as rice, betel, cigarettes, betel nut, and *tuak* water, which is a drink made from yeast. However, *sampi* does not necessarily have a *piring* or meal offering (Saleh and Ensiring, 2001). Freeman (1961) once stated, "all requests made especially when cultivation in Auguri practice should be accompanied by a meal-offering (*piring*) or sacrifice or both at once" (p. 157). The presentation is accompanied by a salutation for blessing (Freeman, 1961). Practitioners list plate utensils to draw attention from the *Petara* (Gods) in the *sampi*. If the act can help them to apply for help and get something, a meal-offering should be stated (Dato, Sandai & Dermawan, 2020).

Daud (2001) states that instruction is an affirmation of the statement of purpose because it explains the entire content and the main purpose of a pray uttered. Therefore, it is an order for the *Petara* (Gods), entities, and also the Kihantan birds to fulfill the request of the Iban people in accordance with the purpose of *sampi*. The difference with the traditional Malay mantra is *sampi* in the Iban language instruction sheet in English mantra leads to more orders for power is not out of a place of origin. Yet in the *sampi* in this study, an injunction is an application by inviting power in addition to the request to bring a stick or amulet.

Dialogue with *Petara* or the gods is also found in the contents of the *sampi*. This dialogue aims to gain certainty and is expressed as if the prayers of the Iban people were answered by *Petara*. The Iban people refer to *Petara* (Gods) by calling "*aki*" meaning grandfather. In the dialogue, the Iban asked whether the *Aki* could come on that day or vice versa. They will answer the asking as if two-way communication exists between the sorcerer and *Petara*. In addition to ascertaining the certainty of their arrival, the bards were also asked to ascertain whether their work on that day was right or wrong. Structurally, expression is determined based on position in a given language of strata and context as well as situation (Soenjono, 1988). In this strata of language, expressions that follow that sequence are found in the language of strata of dialogue with *Petara* (Gods).

Noria, Anna, Yow, Hashim, Adilawati, and Bibiana (2020) stated that the Iban people strongly believe in *lemambang*, namely *bard* because they have supernatural powers that can communicate with supernatural powers. Due to this, the Iban people believe that the bard is able to communicate with *Petara* (Gods). The dialogue with the *Petara* (Gods) shows the extraordinary power present in the *lemambang*. This supernatural power caused the *lemambang* to freely ask the *Petara* (Gods) for certainty.

The last language of strata is the blessing prayer in the closing part. Blessing prayer consists of an application to obtain well-being, wealth (sustenance), health, and longevity. According to Daud (2001), the cover is usually associated with the Almighty to describe His power namely the power is responsible for the magic of the recite. However, it is different from *sampi*. The request for the well-being of life is uttered in all the *sampi* studied although some of the *sampi* associate it with the power of *Petara* (Gods).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the identified findings there are two implications inherent in this study. The first implication is that some strata of language cannot be inferred comprehensively. Thus, the use of the language of strata is subject to the experience and expertise of the practitioner. The second implication is that the expressions used in the construction of *sampi* are subject to the practitioner's skill of using the language of strata. Finally, may this study be a reference to individuals who not only want to understand the expression of implicit meaning in the construction of the *sampi* but also to those who practice the beliefs of the tradition itself.

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