



Seeing the Unseen: Discourse Analysis of a Kristang Ghost Story in Singapore

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Abstract

“Seeing the Unseen” is part of “Making Oral Languages Visible”, a cross-disciplinary project that aims to preserve minority languages by adapting oral folktales into bilingual storybooks. The “unseen” in the title indexes (i) the Kristang language, a critically endangered Malay-Portuguese creole in Singapore and (ii) a ghost seen only by the story’s protagonist. Though ghost stories are perennially popular in Singapore, they comprise a nascent genre of study. While previous iterations of this project have focused on the artistic process, this paper offers a close textual analysis of the chosen Kristang folktale. In sum, the paper explores this question: what roles do ghost stories play in a storytelling medium?

A bilingual Kristang native speaker narrated the story, which was recorded, transcribed and translated via anthropological linguistic field methods. Subsequently, each line of the story was classified according to guidelines set forth by Labov’s narrative categories and Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar. These linguistic theories lend an interdisciplinary perspective to the predominantly literary field of storytelling analysis. Most saliently, it was found that the story focused on setting up its historical background over plot-driving actions. Its thematic emphasis on historicity and cultural tradition suggests that ghosts serve memory-making functions. In Singapore’s evolving urban landscape, ghost stories help endangered community members to reanimate and remember their cultures. Crucially, this opens up further discussions on growing language revitalisation efforts, while serving as a reminder that past and personal narratives are indelibly tied to current and collective ones.

Keywords – Kristang, ghost stories, discourse analysis, oral folktales, narrative analysis, Systemic Functional Grammar, language revitalisation, Singapore

1. Introduction: The Unseen

Rashid's (2009, p. 53) ethnological study of ghost storytelling in Singapore notes that spectral encounters are marked by "dimensions of the seeing and the unseen, the ghostly body". The spectrum between the seen and the "unseen" is a subject of fascination in this paper. Just as ghosts are privy only to a few gazes, this paper is concerned with stories and languages that can be classified as "unseen" or unheard.

It is part of a larger cross-disciplinary project called "Making Oral Languages Visible", which aims to preserve minority languages by adapting oral folktales into bilingual illustrated storybooks. A Kristang ghost story was documented and discursively analysed for this paper. The term "Kristang" (meaning "Christian") refers to both the language and its speakers, a Portuguese-Eurasian community primarily located in Melaka and Singapore (Baxter, 2005). With less than an estimated 100 fluent speakers left in Singapore, Kristang is regarded as a critically endangered language (Wong, 2019). The ghost story in question is titled *Kaza Bazitu di Rua Tessensohn* (The House in Tessensohn Road), a personal family story passed down from generation to generation until it reached the author of this paper. It charts the anecdote of a spectral encounter between the collaborator's grandaunt and a ghost who used to be her neighbour. Notably, its unique position in pre-war, pre-independence Singapore history addresses a research gap within the study of local ghost stories (Rashid, 2009; Ng, 2008; Wagner, 2008). Moreover, its historical setting prompts an inquiry into how past narratives are represented and mediated through storytelling.

Crucially, this paper is also a study of the storytelling experience. While previous iterations of the project have focused on the illustrative artistic process (e.g. Peh, 2016), this paper offers a close discourse analysis of the language used in this story. Its focal point is the linguistic medium used to tell such stories, with their discursive context in mind. It is concerned with how the storyteller constructs, communicates and "transfers their experience" (Labov, 2013, p. 11) to the listener. Thus, linguistic theories such as Labov's narrative analysis (2013) and Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (1994) form the methodological cornerstones of this paper. Still, it is worth noting that studies of folklore and ghost stories are situated within a nexus of complementary linguistic, anthropological and literary interests (Fabb, 1997; Hendricks, 1974; Dundes, 1984). In light of these intersections, the analysis and discussion sections will incorporate pertinent issues surrounding this subject.

Ultimately, this paper is an exercise in seeing the unseen. On one level, it attempts to articulate and express discursive features that are not immediately obvious or visible. It also endeavours to raise the visibility of Kristang in Singapore and beyond. Above all, it seeks to explore this question: what roles do ghost stories play in a storytelling medium?

2. Background & Literature Review

2.1 Kristang language and culture

Kristang's roots can be traced back to the Portuguese conquest of Melaka in 1511 (Baxter, 2010), though scholars dispute exactly when Kristang emerged as a distinct variety (Wong, 2019). However, Kristang was definitively acknowledged as a linguistic variety by the 19th century, when Portuguese Eurasians were observed to “speak a language peculiar to themselves which may be denominated as Creole Portuguese” in an 1827 census of Melaka (Dickinson, 1941, p. 260–61). The current Kristang population in Singapore descends from the original Portuguese Malay settlement in Melaka (Wong, 2019), though it remains unclear if the Singaporean and Melakan varieties of Kristang are identical (Wong, 2019, p. 43).

Nonetheless, the Singaporean Kristang community embodies its own unique history and background. The Kristang language was originally maintained and transmitted through homes and religious institutions attended by Portuguese Eurasian communities, such as St Joseph's Church in Victoria Street (Clarke, 1992). Victoria Street grew into a hub for Kristang community activities, even overseeing the staging of Kristang-language plays from 1892 to the early 20th century (Wong, 2019). However, Kristang's decline in favour of English since 1939 has consistently been affirmed by Kristang speakers (Danker, 2003; Matthews, 2002), including the collaborator of this paper. The subsequent mass resettlement of Eurasians to prevent “the formation of ghettos” (Hendersen, 2014, p. 69) after World War II all but sealed Kristang's decline (Wong, 2019, p. 45).

Today, English has overtaken Kristang as its speakers' first language in both Melaka and Singapore (Pillai et. al., 2017; Wong, 2019), the cities with the largest Kristang populations (Baxter, 2005). Kristang's displacement can be attributed to prevailing language attitudes towards English as “a prestige language, a key to employment” (Baxter, 2005, p. 18). Additionally, mixed marriages, urbanisation and migration have all contributed to the dwindling number of Kristang native speakers (Pillai & Khan, 2011). Coupled with the lack of institutional support (Wong, 2019), Kristang is placed critically low on the ethnolinguistic vitality scale (Giles et. al., 1977), a framework commonly used to assess endangered languages (Ehala, 2010).

Consequently, Kristang's status as a minority and critically endangered language dominates its discourse (Wong, 2019). Current research trends surrounding Kristang language and culture revolve around themes of revitalisation and reconnection. Assessment studies have been performed on ongoing revitalization efforts, namely Papiá Cristang (Pillai, 2011) and Kodrah Kristang (Wong, 2019) in Melaka and Singapore respectively. Notably, research on Kristang language documentation and corpus linguistics has culminated in the online dictionary Pinchah Kristang (da Costa, 2020)¹.

¹ Luis Morgado da Costa, *Pinchah Kristang: A Dictionary of Kristang*. https://www.luismc.com/pinchah_kristang/ [website], (accessed on 24 June 2021).

Interestingly, qualitative studies centred around creative or literary sources are increasing as well. Amidst the dearth of available Kristang cultural and learning resources (Pillai, 2013), researchers have drawn from an arsenal of personal affectations to document and reimagine their heritage (Lazaroo, 2020). This forms a parallel with Kristang's current "relative renaissance" (Wong, 2019, p. 43), a cultural movement not seen since the late 19th century (Wong, 2019). For instance, Australian-Kristang author Simone Lazaroo's study of the post-memory is based on family photographs and oral anecdotes (Lazaroo, 2020). The result is a unique intersection of personal imagination and public research, marking the foray into a renewed study of cultural materials.

2.2 Ghosts, storytelling and oral folklore

From the bestselling book series *True Singapore Ghost Stories* to 2019's *Revenge of the Pontianak*, ghost stories remain a fixture in Singapore's popular imagination (Faucher, 2004). Yet, research on this subject is still nascent. Although there exists a general sense of ghost stories' prominence in Singaporeans' lives (Rashid, 2009), there have been few extensive studies that explore exactly what roles ghost stories play in a localised context. Moreover, existing studies on this topic cover either the World War II (Faucher, 2004) or post-independence period (Rashid, 2009; Ng, 2008; Wagner, 2008) in Singapore.

Rashid's ethnological research suggests that ghost stories are a legacy of oral folklore traditions in Singapore (2009). Just as oral folktales are a "warrant, a charter, and often a practical guide" (Malinowski, 1948, p. 85) to its listeners, Singaporean ghost stories function as tools that serve epistemological and sociological functions (Rashid, 2009). Parents and grandparents "inform children of the spirits and ghosts that resided within specific trees, fruits...or spaces" (Rashid, 2009, p. 22) in order to impart and reinforce knowledge of natural and built environments in Singapore. Faucher similarly posits the link between ghost stories and collective memory by delineating that ghost stories "engage us in a scheme of continuity...with recent and distant pasts" (2004, p. 195). Her research reveals that Singaporean ghosts usually haunt locations rather than people (Faucher, 2004), reinforcing the connection between ghosts and shared spaces.

Additionally, ghosts do not possess either a fixed form or characterization in Singapore (Faucher, 2004; Rashid, 2009). Faucher's claim that ghosts comprise a "broad category of multicultural supernatural creatures" (2004, p. 191) resonates with Rashid's observation that her collaborators were "backed by their cultural or religious beliefs" (2009, p. 45). The Chinese collaborators discussed Chinese Hungry Ghosts, while Malay collaborators evoked iconic Malay figures such as the Pontianak, and Indian collaborators called forth Indian gods and spirits (Rashid, 2009, p. 44). Conversely, stories told by "Other" collaborators were not elaborated upon and summarised as an "experience of all the above stories" (Rashid, 2009, p. 26). Therefore, the lack of coverage on Singaporeans subsumed under "Others" (Rashid, 2009, p. 44–45) exemplifies an existing research gap with regard to minoritized groups in Singapore, including the Kristang community.

Circling back to folkloric traditions, ghost stories are prime examples of how linguistic and literary interests intersect in this field. Stories are conventionally regarded as pieces of literature (Labov, 2013; Hendricks, 1974), yet the use of language as their medium forms the subject of interest for linguists (Hendricks, 1974). Though conventionally regarded as disparate fields, literary and linguistic theories often overlap, particularly in the field of narratology (Fabb, 1997; Hendricks, 1974; Dundes, 1984). Anthropological linguists have long been interested in communicative processes such as oral folktales (Salzmann, 1998, p. 257–260), adopting either structural or functionalist approaches to analyse such data (Salzmann, 1998, p. 260–63). Similarly, folklorist Hendricks argues for the integration of linguistic methodology with literary critical theory for a more structured analysis (1974). However, he also concedes that literature’s scope lies beyond language, and appropriate methodologies would have to consider a holistic overview of the “literary dimension” (Hendricks, 1974, p. 13), which comprises features such as plot and character. Consequently, such concerns inform the following methodology section.

3. Methodology

3.1 Field research

Field methodology was performed according to linguistic anthropological guidelines established by Salzmann, Stanlaw and Adachi (2012, p. 27–30). Their guidelines comprise five stages:

Table 1: Guidelines for Research in the Field (Salzmann, Stanlaw & Adachi, 2012)

Stage	Description
A: Preparation	Researchers secure travel arrangements, including expenses and equipment.
B: Field-research	Researchers acclimatize to the environment and form connections within the community.
C: Field-research methods	Researchers collect, observe and record data.
D: Possible sources of tension and stress	Researchers identify potential stress triggers such as a lack of privacy or hygiene (Salzmann, Stanlaw & Adachi, 2012, p. 29).
E: Post-field trip	Researchers analyse the data collected and prepare their findings for publication.

Notably, the bulk of the initial process was dedicated to stages (B) and (C). Stage (A) was not applicable, as field research for this project was performed on home grounds. Engaging a bilingual English-Kristang native speaker under stage (B) was crucial in order to ensure the accuracy of the translation process under stage (C). Fortunately, a suitable bilingual collaborator was found via connections within the Kodrah Kristang group in Singapore.

Only after consent and rapport were established did the collaborator share the oral stories she knew. Subsequently, the stories were recited, recorded and transcribed for archival purposes. The folktale chosen for this paper, "*Kaza Bazitu Di Rua Tessensohn*" (*The Empty House in Tessensohn Road*), is part of the collaborator's personal repertoire, passed down through generations within her family from her grandaunt.

3.2 Discourse Analysis

This portion corresponds to Stage (E) of the field methodology process: data analysis (Salzmann, Stanlaw & Adachi, 2012). Here, finding an appropriate analytical framework was integral in unpacking the text. A qualitative approach was deemed more suitable than a quantitative one, due to the small sample size of the data. Additionally, the open-ended nature of the research question ("What roles do ghost stories play in a storytelling medium?") begets a context-dependent and close textual analysis of the story's narrative.

Crucially, linguistic inquiries into narratives are rooted in discourse analysis (Labov, 2013, p. 5). In turn, discourse has been summarised as language "above the sentence" (Panović & Cameron, 2014, p. 3), echoing Hendricks' call for folkloric analysis to unpack language "beyond the sentence" (1974, p. 20). To look "above" or "beyond" sentence structure implies the analysis of language vis-à-vis the context it is used in, considering social factors such as interaction and performance (Suciu, 2019). Consequently, the common characterization of language as a social practice (Fairclough, 2001, p. 122–125) binds a highly interdisciplinary field otherwise marked by "mobility and diversity" (Suciu, 2019, para. 3).

Still, the varied nature of discourse analysis engenders its lack of a fixed methodology (Suciu, 2019). Broadly speaking, different types of discourse analysis are adapted to a multifarious range of aims and text types (Suciu, 2019; Panović & Cameron, 2014, p. 61–65). For the purposes of this paper, Labov's narrative analysis (Labov, 2013) was chosen as the primary method of discourse analysis.

Narrative analysis is specifically tailored towards oral narratives (Labov, 2013), focusing on extended "sequences of past events" (Labov, 2013, p. 14). This focus differentiates it from other analytical methods that look at shorter speech turns, such as conversational analysis (Labov, 2013, p. 5). Labov further defines narratives as "presentations in discourse" (2013, p. 14), highlighting their discursive background. Like other forms of discourse analysis, Labov stresses the importance of "human values" (2013, p. 14) such as reportability in addition to formal syntactic features (2013, p. 22–23). In particular, Labov is concerned with how storytellers "transfer [their] view of experience" (2013, p. 11) to listeners

and readers through language. Hence, his structural framework assesses how speakers organise their narratives, as outlined below.

Table 2: Labov's narrative construction categories (2013)

Narrative category	Meaning
Abstract	Description of "what the narrative is about" (Labov, 2013, p. 27) i.e. the main event.
Orientation	Background information of "time, place, persons and behaviour" (Labov, 2013, p. 27).
Complicating Action	The "causal" (Labov, 2013, p. 28) course of action that propels the narrative forward.
Evaluation	The "point" (Labov, 2013, p. 30) or explanation of the narrative
Resolution	the conclusion of the complicating action.
Coda	A clause that "brings the time of reference back to the present" (Labov, 2013, p. 32).

Though Labov offers a useful structural foundation, his framework does not directly engage with an organised functional approach to narrative analysis. In order to unravel "meaning in context" (Gujarro, 2014, p. 63) more comprehensively, Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) (1994) framework was consulted as well. The advantage of adopting SFG (Halliday, 1994) is that it allows for a closer analysis of text on the clausal level. Specifically, Halliday's textual process types (1994) outlines six semantically distinct verbal clauses:

Halliday's functionalist framework helps to conceptualize "patterns of experience" (Gujarro, 2014, p. 63) by examining verbal transitivity within clauses. This allows it to probe further into the social and ideological concerns emblematic of discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001, p. 122–125). Thus, each sentence of the story was tagged with a narrative category (Labov, 2013) and a textual process type (Halliday, 1994).

Table 3: Halliday's Textual Processes (1994)

Textual Process type	Meaning
Material	doing, happening
Mental	affection, cognition, perception
Relational	attributive, identifying
Verbal	communication
Behavioural	bodily and social processes
Existential	marks existence

4. Salient findings

Fig. 1: Transcript of *Kaza Bazitu Di Rua Tessensohn*

1. Isti stori jah pasah di yo sa familia.
2. Yo sa Pai sa Tia Anna fikah na Rua Tessensohn tantu anu.
3. Eli kung eli sa maridu fikah nala kung Tia Anna sa susi Elizabeth.
4. Na tras olutu sa kaza, teng ungua familia Kristang.
5. Yo logu falah ungua stori pasada akeli familia di Rua Tessensohn.
6. Mazianti Jepun tomah Singapura, ungua femi di istih familia ja mureh.
7. Isti familia ja fazeh seis dia rezah dianti olotu intarah eli sa korpu na chang dia prosimu.
8. Dia seti pamiang, olotu mudah lonzi kaza di Rua Tessensohn.
9. Olotu medu jenti di Jepun atakah Singapura.
10. Dia seti di anoti Tia Elizabeth olah ungua femi di janella akeli familia sa kaza.
11. Isti femi sibri ropa brancu.
12. Eli andah abesso di janella tantu bes.
13. Tudu jenti Kristang rezah seti dia pra jenti ja mureh.
14. Atih akeli dia olotu rezah dia seti doziora anoti kung porta abertu.
15. Olotu falah spiritu jenti ja mureh logu largah kaza.
16. Tudu jenti rezah impodih impeh di porta abertu.

Fig. 2: English translation of *The Empty House in Tessensohn Road*

1. This is a story passed down from my family.
2. My father's Aunt Anna lived in Tessensohn Road for many years.
3. She and her husband lived there with Aunt Anna's sister Elizabeth.
4. Behind their house lived another Eurasian family.
5. I will tell you the story about that family living in Tessensohn Road.
6. Just before the Japanese invaded Singapore, a lady from that family died.
7. The family held six days of prayers before burying her body the next day.
8. On the seventh day they moved to another house far away from Tessensohn Road.
9. They were afraid that the Japanese would attack Singapore.
10. That night, my grandaunt Elizabeth saw the figure of a woman passing across the window of the house.
11. The woman wore white clothes.
12. She walked past the window many times.
13. All Eurasian people pray for seven days for the dead.
14. Until today, they pray at midnight on the seventh day with the front door open.
15. They say that the spirit of the dead person would leave the house then.
16. All the people praying should not stand in the doorway.

Table 4: Table of findings

Sentence	Narrative Category (Labov, 2013)	Textual Process Type (Halliday, 1994)
1	Abstract	Relational
2	Orientation	Material
3	Orientation	Material
4	Orientation	Existential
5	Abstract	Verbal
6	Orientation	Material
7	Orientation	Material
8	Orientation	Material
9	Evaluative	Relational
10	Complicating Action	Material
11	Orientation	Relational
12	Complicating Action	Material
13	Coda	Behavioural
14	Coda	Behavioural
15	Coda	Verbal
16	Coda/Resolution	Behavioural

4.1 Narrative trends: history in the making

Out of sixteen sentences, seven sentences fall under “Orientation”, the most out of any narrative category. According to Labov, orientation sentences usually cluster near the beginning of each narrative (2013, p. 27). However, the orientation sentences (lines 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11) here are interspersed throughout the narrative, providing contextual information at each juncture. In fact, the first half of the story is dedicated to preamble about such background information before any notion of “plot” (Labov, 2013, p. 14) or complicating action is introduced. For instance, sentences 2–4 establish the familial and neighbourly connections between the characters. Further information about the story’s pre-war historical period and burying rituals are also supplemented in sentences 6–8.

Notably, there is only one instance of an evaluative sentence, which Labov describes as the “point” of a narrative (2013, p. 30). Sentence 9 justifies the neighbouring family’s departure as a fear-driven reaction to the impending arrival of the Japanese.

Sentence 9:

Olotu medu jenti di Jepun atakah Singapura.
 they afraid people of Japan attack Singapore

‘They were afraid that the Japanese would attack Singapore.’

This sentence is nestled between orientation and complicating action sentences, serving as an affective buffer before the main sequence of events unravels. Notably, it is the only sentence in the narrative that carries an affective word (“afraid”) and therefore the only sentence that indexes any emotional response. The result is an undercurrent of fear that pervades the rest of the narrative – though it is worth noting that the source of fear is not the ghost, but the advent of war.

Lastly, the story evinces four coda sentences, even though codas are regarded as an optional category in Labov’s narrative construction (2013, p. 32). Codas anchor the past events described in narratives to the present time of narration (Labov, 2013, p. 32). In this story, the past and present are tied together by the storyteller’s current descriptions of Kristang funeral customs (lines 13–16). The final sentence of the narrative however, presents a classification conundrum between the coda and resolution categories.

Sentence 16:

Tudu	jenti	rezah	impodih	impeh	di	porta	abertu.
all	people	pray	cannot	stand	in	door	open

‘All the people praying should not stand in the doorway.’

Sentence 16 offers an imperative for listeners to follow, effectively fulfilling coda qualities of grounding the past in the present. However, it also provides a possible solution for the ghost’s appearance and apparent restless pacing (line 12). By clearing a path in the doorway, the ghost is conceivably able to move on, thereby exemplifying a resolution to the story’s complicating action. The story’s conclusion (resolution) and its relevance to the present (coda) are hence inextricably tied. Ultimately, the story’s narrative arc hinges less on action-driven events, and more on its contextualisation within present times.

4.2 Textual process trends: actors and speakers

Material process types are most prominent in the story, occupying seven out of sixteen sentences. On this account, the story maintains a sustained connection to actions and happenings in the physical world. Even the spectral ghost partakes in material processes (line 12), tethering and placing her on the same level as all other living human actors in the story. Notably, the ghost is also an actor in a relational process (line 11):

Sentence 11:

Isti femi sibri roba brancu.
 this woman wear clothes white

'The woman wore white clothes.'

This is the only relational sentence the ghost is involved in; consequently, the ghost's "white clothes" are her sole identifying feature. The imagery of "white clothes" does not immediately evoke a particularly spectral nature. Combined with the pedestrian motion of "walking" back and forth past the window (line 12), the ghost is depicted in a manner just like any other human. Her presence neither raises questions nor provokes emotion, as evidenced by the lack of mental process sentences surrounding her appearance. The reader has to rely on prior contextual cues laid out in the orientation sentences (lines 6–8) to glean the supernatural nature of this otherwise self-effacing woman. Hence, the ghost is depicted as a nondescript actor within the story's textual reality.

On another note, the presence of verbal processes (lines 5, 15) imbues a dialogic quality to the story:

Sentence 5:

Yo logu falah ungua stori pasada akeli familia
 I will tell the story about that family
 di Rua Tessensohn.
 of road Tessensohn

'I will tell you about the story about that family in Tessensohn Road.'

Sentence 15:

Olotu falah spiritu jenti ja mureh logu largah kaza.
 They tell spirit people PAST die MOD leave house

'They say that the spirit of the dead person would leave the house then.'

Intriguingly, none of the characters within the story engage in conversation with each other. Instead, verbal processes involve either the self-reflexive storyteller (line 5) or the impersonal third party "they" (line 15), which indexes the Kristang community as a whole. These extraneous and omniscient voices extend the temporal scope of the narrative from the historical past to present times. Moreover, the inclusion of these voices actively involves more Kristang people in the narrative. Rather than being relegated to non-present and passive listeners of the story, Kristang members partake in the narrative as active speakers through verbal processes.

4.3 Correlations: lessons for listeners

Most saliently, three out of four coda sentences correlate with behavioural processes (lines 13, 14, 16). These sentences describe mourning and praying rituals in Kristang culture. As mentioned before, codas tie the narrative's past to the narrator's present (Labov, 2013, p. 32). Behavioural processes reflect "outer manifestations of inner aspects of our experience" (Guijarro, 2014, p. 63), usually constituting bodily processes and habitual actions (Halliday, 1994).

Since behavioural processes are concerned with how humans act (Halliday, 1994), their combination with coda sentences creates a didactic effect. The last few sentences of the narrative (lines 13, 14, 16) offers a didactic checklist of how death rituals are conducted, even in present times. For instance, Eurasians are said to "pray for seven days for the dead" (line 13) and with the "door open" on the last day (line 14). Here, the "outer manifestations" of the rituals are accompanied by the "inner aspects" (Guijarro, 2014, p. 63) of Kristang tradition. In other words, the persistence of rites and rituals are motivated by the internal value placed upon the traditions they belong to. Subsequently, the discursive importance of history, tradition and other relevant themes will be explicated in the section below.

5. Discussion: Dead, but not forgotten

On the surface, *Kaza Bazitu* is hardly a conventional ghost story, lacking strong horror elements symptomatic of this genre (Wagner, 2008). The ghost's appearance is met with little fear, and her presence is treated as fairly commonplace. Neither the ghost, a mute figure in the story's background, nor her haunting form the focus of this narrative. Instead, the storyteller is dedicated to establishing the story's historical context over plot-driving actions. One could even argue that the history itself forms the main plot of the narrative – this is why the complicating action of the story, the ghost's appearance, is resolved by the cultural axiom to "not stand in the doorway" (line 16). It has also been established that the ghost is not the source of horror in this story. Rather, it is the potential outbreak of war (line 9) that strikes fear into the characters, suggesting that horror and ghost stories are rooted in reality and real-life conditions above all else (Faucher, 2004).

Similarly, the story's narrative more closely resembles a historical recount, down to its keen emphasis on details of time, place, and behaviour (Labov, 2013). *Kaza Bazitu* takes place between the late 1930s to the early 1940s, situating it in the pre-war era. Additionally, the close living proximity (line 4) between the narrator's and the ghost's families harks to a time when Kristang enclaves existed, before the mass re-settlement after World War II (Hendersen, 2014). Hence, Kristang cultural rituals are alive and present within the story. For instance, the collaborator has shared that the "white dress" (line 11) donned by the ghost is a wedding dress, in line with Christian Eurasian customs of burying their dead in white (Leicester-Rodrigues, 2017). The extended coda (lines 13, 14, 16) at the end of the narrative also functions as a behavioural blueprint for traditional Kristang customs surrounding death.

If post-independence ghost stories revolve around the theme of defamiliarization (Wagner, 2008), then this pre-war ghost story arguably centres around the concept of re-familiarization (Fialho, 2007). *Kaza Bazitu*'s historical setting reacquaints readers and listeners with lost times and vanishing traditions. It ties into the notion of "spectral tropicality" (Harvey, 2008, p. 24), which grounds Southeast Asian ghost stories in the context of their geographical climate. In particular, Harvey argues that narrative and location cannot be divorced (2008, p. 25). In Singapore's case, ghost stories revive "what has been repressed in this air-conditioned nation" (Harvey, 2008, p. 25), such as the "eerie jungles" (Harvey, 2008, p. 25) and kampongs of yesteryear. Harvey's location-specific hypothesis aligns with observations that Singaporeans default to ethnic-specific ghosts when recounting their personal spiritual experiences (Rashid, 2009). *Kaza Bazitu* is no different; its ghost is the deceased daughter of a Kristang family (line 6) and her hauntings are confined to the window of her family home, binding her to an intimately familiar space. The ghost is thus both a product and a symbol of her historical environment. In turn, every retelling of this ghost story reproduces that same historical setting to a new audience.

Indeed, the external act of storytelling is just as important as the story's internal narrative. Labov's characterization of oral narratives as transformative experiences (2013, p. 5) echoes Fialho's view of transformative reading (2019). On one hand, transformation unfolds when a story transfers from the narrator to an audience through either oral or written mediums (Labov, 2013, p. 3). On the other hand, transformation also takes place when literary works are read in relation to the discursive contexts and communities they inhabit (Fialho, 2019, p. 10–11). In this way, stories allow readers and listeners to critically engage with the environment around them. The discourse of storytelling thus becomes a site of sharing where even "searches for personal heritages" (Wagner, 2008, p. 47) conflate with larger narratives of looming language death and cultural loss.

Ultimately, *Kaza Bazitu* deftly interweaves personal and public spheres by mapping out a family story against sociohistorical discourses. The ghost story's narrative themes of life and death parallel the cultural loss and revitalization Kristang is currently undergoing. Just as the dead spectre is seen only by the protagonist, Kristang faces issues of visibility where it remains unknown to the majority of the Singaporean population (Wong, 2019). In a similar vein, the ghost's lack of speech focalises the potential disappearance of the Kristang language. However, though the reasons for her silence are oblique, the factors behind Kristang's decline are less so. Growing language revitalization movements (Wong, 2019; Pillai et. al., 2017) and an increased engagement with Kristang cultural materials (Lazaroo 2020; Pillai et. al., 2017) offer hope that Kristang might be remembered, and survive in return.

6. Conclusion: Living on

Following the trajectories set forth in this paper, future research can explore potential applications of ghost stories in Singapore and beyond. Ghost stories and their storytellers possess the power to facilitate discourses of “initiation, education and conviction” (Rashid, 2009, p. 24). The discussion of education is particularly impactful, in view of recent developments surrounding folktale-based learning in schools. For instance, folktales are currently used to teach second and foreign languages to children in Vietnam (Pham, 2016). Studies have shown that folktale narratives provide culture-specific contexts for children to broaden their worldviews while exercising their imagination and creative thinking (Pham, 2016). Conversely, Singaporean ghost stories have yet to be considered in this light, despite their enduring prevalence in the country across all age groups (Ng, 2008).

In essence, ghost stories evoke “schemes of continuity” (Faucher, 2004, p. 195) that enable readers and listeners to recall the past in Singapore’s highly urbanised landscape. Ghosts are embodied reminders of people and places that are gone but not quite forgotten. The storytelling medium evinces its potential to unveil and reinforce cultural mores through personal stories. Finally, the discursive act of seeing the unseen foregrounds narratives that are overlooked and subsumed under peripheral ‘Other’ categories. Just as *Kaza Bazitu di Rua Tessensohn* reveals a unique sliver of Kristang culture, this paper looks towards the multitudes of stories from minoritised voices that have yet to be amplified and shared.

Word Count: 4,998

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