

FROM STRUCTURE TO ECOLOGY: INTERPRETING GREIMAS’S ACTANTIAL MODEL IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at how Greimas' actantial model, ecocriticism, and interpretive research come together to analyze indigenous stories from Southeast Asia in the context of the Anthropocene. While previous applications of the actantial model have focused on heroism, obedience, and resistance in Indonesian folklore, they have not engaged directly with ecocritical perspectives. This research seeks to bridge this gap using interpretive research guided by Ricoeur's hermeneutics. This study explores how indigenous myths construct non-human agency, positioning nature as an active participant rather than a submissive site. The actantial model is applied to narratives such as *The Origin of Paddy*, *The Myth of Batoq Ayau*, and *The Legend of Hudoq Kawit*, revealing how actants shape environmental discourse. Additionally, this study reinterprets transitivity, expanding its scope beyond conventional constraints to position environmental actants as central figures in narrative structures. Findings indicate that integrating Greimas' narratology with ecocriticism increases one's knowledge about human-environment interdependency, offering a fresh ecocritical perspective that challenges anthropocentric ideologies. By reframing narratives to reflect mutuality between human and non-human entities, this study contributes to sustainable ecological stewardship, reinforcing the ethical responsibility essential for environmental resilience in the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Actantial Model, Anthropocene, Ecocriticism, Indigenous Narratives, Non-Human Agency

A. INTRODUCTION

“*Ti Ningaan, Bayee’ Kawit Hudo’ alang an kame’ ataap Uhe atang do kere*”, meaning that “the power of Kawit is what we believe and keep doing until now,” is stated in the *Ngawit* ritual prayer called *Baraa Hudoq Kawit* (Max, 2020). Performed annually during the Bahau people's planting season in East Kalimantan, *Hudoq Kawit* expresses gratitude to nature for the abundance that follows their cultivation efforts. Rooted in this worldview, the ritual embodies the Bahau people's deep recognition of their interdependence with nature. The relationship between nature and humanity is symbiotic and reciprocal, where both coexist in unity, with

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humans relying on nature for sustenance while also protecting it (Mazzocchi, 2020). However, human activities have overtaken the Earth, leading to the designation of the Anthropocene as the geological epoch (Zalasiewicz *et al.*, 2024). Anthropocene discourse attempts to redefine relationships between humans and nature, emphasizing the interdependence of human and non-human agencies (Dürbeck, 2020). There is a need for an innovative analytical tool to decode the narratives shaping our relationship with the environment that evolve to address contemporary issues of agency and materiality in various narrative forms, particularly in light of the Anthropocene's challenges (Clark, 2015; Yadav & Sinha, 2024). It is vital to highlight how the environment is narratively constructed, not only as a backdrop but as an active participant influencing the dynamics of storytelling or discourse. Human beings possess a unique capacity for free will, enabling them to determine their actions and attitudes towards phenomena (Dennet & Caruso, 2021), as Ricœur said, is to question, reflect, ponder, and wonder (Utsler, 2024). Narratives, being human creations, cannot directly represent non-human experience but can inventively do so through anthropomorphism and speculative rendering, which bring humans' projections and biases (Harre *et al.*, 2024). Within these fictional realms, humans often attribute agency and will to 'non-human' entities (Kautz, 2024). It contributes to the favorable narrative that acknowledges non-human agency, thereby fostering a more equitable understanding of human-non-human relations and aiding fiction writers in challenging anthropocentric ideologies (Cadman, 2016). It is part of a fundamental aspect of how humans create meaning through symbolic and semiotic processes (Eco, 1979; Lorusso, 2015). Without this imaginative projection, the rich tapestry of Indigenous myths, legends, and folklores, often drawing inspiration from animistic and dynamic beliefs, would not exist.

Indigenous narratives in Southeast Asia present an invaluable yet underrepresented source of environmental knowledge (Cameron, 2022; Fisher *et al.*, 2017; Thomalla *et al.*, 2018). The lack of studies from Southeast Asian countries could hinder the understanding of indigenous knowledge in nature conservation globally (Abas *et al.*, 2022). In today's environmental crisis, it is crucial to integrate Indigenous perspectives and knowledge systems into the political decision-making process that has left them at the margins (Mussi, 2024). However, meaning is not static. It evolves through structured interactions, whether through syntactical narrative roles or symbolic discourse shaping human agency (Ricoeur, 1981). Ricœur argues that discourse itself is a form of action, suggesting that human agency and meaning arise through a structured symbolic framework in which plot serves as an imitation of action (Helenius, 2021). This intersection implies that formal structures and human interpretation both construct and enact meaning.

The researchers review recent studies that applied the Greimas actantial model to Indigenous peoples' stories in Indonesia. Analysis of Toraja people's folklore narratives reveals syntactic patterns, macrostructures, and central themes of love, loyalty, and obedience, reflecting the community's rich cultural heritage (Nensilianti *et al.*, 2025). The Greimassian approach applied to the oral literature

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of Dayak Kanayatn highlights a heroic character facing challenges (Seli *et al.*, 2020). In a similar way, heroic folklores of Jaka Tarub (Indonesia) and Tanabata (Japan), seen through the actantial model, share similarities and differences in story structure and cultural elements (Wardarita & Negoro, 2017). Greimas's narratology uncovers the story structure of Dayak Desa's *Kana Kinai Abang Nguak*, highlighting earth's triumph over heaven through unity and resistance (Astuti & Taum, 2017).

None of these studies interprets the structure provided by the Greimas model through the lens of ecocriticism to state human and environmental interdependency. Previous research by the first author, though, did not apply the Greimassian model to indigenous narratives, revealing how a political speech obscures environmental concerns and indigenous rights through strategic linguistic choices and placement of the environment as mere exploited resources (Max, *et al.*, 2025). Thus, this research is driven by the question, “How would Greimas's actantial model be interpreted in ecocriticism to reflect human and nature mutuality?”

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Ecocriticism Responds to Anthropocene

Ecocriticism established pathways for addressing the ecological crises of the Anthropocene. As a discipline, ecocriticism dates back to the seminal work of William Rueckert, who coined the word in 1978, together with Joseph Meeker's analysis of literary ecology (Borlik, 2011; Lee, 2022). These basic studies set the literature as a medium for investigating people's relationship with the natural environment (Buell *et al.*, 2011). With notable contributions by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm in *The Ecocriticism Reader* and Lawrence Buell in *Environmental Imagination*, the movement picked up speed during its First Wave in the 1990s (Clark, 2015). Emphasizing literature's ability to raise environmental consciousness and justice, this period honored nature and wilderness writing. Moving into the Second Wave throughout the early 2000s, theorists such as Timothy Clark and Ursula Heise attempted to tackle anthropocentric research and promote debates on the interconnections of ecology, imperialism, and social justice (Alex, 2022). Reflecting on Greg Garrard's book, *Ecocriticism*, which addressed urgent topics like climate change and environmental disasters, the Third Wave included worldwide viewpoints, hence broadening the reach of ecocriticism (Clark, 2019; Tait, 2023). Later, the modern ecocriticism explored other fields like posthumanism, ecofeminism, and environmental justice for underprivileged populations, as emphasized by Stacy Alaimo's *Bodily Natures* (2010) and Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) (Oppermann, 2014).

The history of ecocriticism showcases its progression from foundational studies of literature's relationship with nature to interdisciplinary, global approaches addressing anthropocentrism, environmental justice, ecofeminism, and pressing ecological crises (Hebbbar & Mallya, 2024; Tajane *et al.*, 2024). As it continues to engage with multidisciplinary methods and worldwide issues to expand its

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academic and ethical convictions, ecocriticism's progress exposes a dynamic discipline always adjusting to the intricate ecological challenges of the contemporary world (Yadav & Sinha, 2024). The integration of ecocriticism and narrative theory enhances the connection between critical scholarship and creative practice, promoting the use of narrative to convey critical arguments while acknowledging the critic's contextual relationship with the environment (Al-Khalidi, 2023; James & Morel, 2018).

2. Narrative and Ecology

Narrative is a cognitive process that helps individuals make sense of the world, with shared structures influencing collective memory and cultural identity across society (Ladzekpo *et al.*, 2024; Stibbe, 2023). There are two kinds of narratives: those with mythical aspects intended to educate or share, and those described as individual stories (Kovach, 2021). At its heart, though, narrativity is the skill of being able to communicate human experience through storytelling, which is the account of events that lead to a change (Lambropoulos, 2025). Existing research emphasizes the role of storytelling in fostering empathy for the planet, as seen in participatory ecological storytelling integrating human and nonhuman characters to promote a holistic understanding of sustainability (Talgorn & Ullerup, 2023). It is how narrative nurtures body and spirit, claims voice in silent margins, embodies relational meaning-making, links history and the present as living oral archives, and enacts collective ownership and authority (Holt & Perry, 2023). Key entities such as humans, ecosystems, renewable technologies, and environmental challenges are often depicted as actants within these narratives, embodying roles that align, conflict, or transform to highlight ecological interdependence (Vidal *et al.*, 2024). By analyzing these narrative structures, scholars contribute to a deeper understanding of how storytelling mediates the relationship between humanity and the environment.

Narratives from Asia, seen through ecocriticism and a postcolonial perspective, highlight themes of environmental depletion, human greed, and the importance of preserving traditional wisdom (Dewi, 2017). Indigenous ecological narratives in Southeast Asia offer insight into environmental understanding and sustainability, rooted in traditional knowledge systems that have been passed down through generations (Ellen, 2007; Kakoty, 2018; Rafique *et al.*, 2024). Academic studies have highlighted how indigenous practices, such as sustainable agriculture (Chang *et al.*, 2024; Handayani & Prawito, 2009), forest management (Diansyah *et al.*, 2021; Rerkasem *et al.*, 2009), and water conservation and management (Kadiresan & Khanal, 2018; Wejak, 2023), are embedded within cultural stories and rituals (Max, *et al.*, 2025; Tempone-Wiltshire, 2024), serving as both practical and symbolic guides for ecological stewardship and well-being (Nanson, 2021; Thompson, 2018).

3. Indigenous Storytelling

Storytelling that is powerfully persuasive of change appears to be necessary, given the severity of the current ecological predicament (Nanson, 2021). The endeavor to reestablish the connection between critical systems in our society, including

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science, culture, and traditional knowledge, to achieve sustainability could be facilitated by storytelling (Hofman-Bergholm, 2023). While Indigenous peoples have historically recognized and revered sacred wild spaces, the contemporary notion of wilderness is shaped by national definitions and imbued with complex spiritual and emotional meanings, highlighting the contrast between self-willed wildlands and human-controlled environments, and asking for the need for diverse literary expressions that reflect the intricate history and spiritual significance of these threatened landscapes (Lee, 2022).

Indigenous storytelling employs tactile and multisensory elements that are pertinent to the audience's needs, in addition to metaphor as a means of reflection and visualization (Holt & Perry, 2023). In Southeast Asia, ecological tales have historically been essential in linking communities to their natural surroundings and cultivating a sense of caring for the land. These narratives frequently emphasize the complex interplay between humanity and the natural world, interlacing aspects of spirituality, tradition, and ecological wisdom (Ryan, 2019). Folktales of holy forests, supernatural river guardians, and cautionary narratives on overexploitation function as both cultural heritage and a method to confront modern environmental issues (Pham *et al.*, 2019). These narratives, conveyed via storytelling, evoke communal memory and action (Baldassano *et al.*, 2017; Walsh *et al.*, 2022), linking generations and highlighting the persistent relationship between ecological equilibrium and human welfare (Ansori, 2023).

4. Narrative Actants

Developed in the 1960s, Greimas's actantial model identifies six key roles: Subject, Object, Sender, Receiver, Helper, and Opponent, that interact within a narrative to drive its progression (Landowski, 2015; Schleifer, 2017). This structuralist approach emphasizes the transformation of meaning through predefined roles and interactions, highlighting logical constraints in deep structures that make up narrative 'grammar' (Ricoeur, 1985). In Greimas's view, the necessary conditions for understanding meaning are based on the narrativization of enunciation by setting up the elements that make up meaning units and communicate the meaning of the text, reducing part of the text to the narrative paths described in syntactical terms (Bertrand, 2019; Verbivska, 2022). The actantial model has been widely applied across disciplines, including literary studies, film analysis, and discourse analysis (Çanakplnar *et al.*, 2024). Using the actantial model as a tool to integrate diverse data and indicator narratives across disciplines fosters more constructive dialogue about sustainability and resilience (Ampleman & Vries, 2024).

Greimas's actantial model has long been a valuable tool for analyzing narrative structure, but criticism comes from the notion of structure that often positions non-human entities, such as nature and the environment, as passive objects acted upon by human subjects (Dürbeck *et al.*, 2015). Contemporary econarratives seek to decenter the human perspective, acknowledging the profound and often destructive impact of human actions on the planet and highlighting the intricate web of life beyond humans (Goatly, 2018). Greimas's struggle to adequately represent non-human agency is hindered because they are rooted in linguistic systems that

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prioritize human subjects and transitive actions (Caracciolo, 2018), which set aside the environment, where it should be the primary actor (Caracciolo, 2021).

C. METHOD

Three folktales (*The Origin of Paddy*, *The Myth of Batoq Ayau*, *The Legend of Hudoq Kawit*) from East Kalimantan chosen to illustrate the reading of the Greimassian model with an ecocritical approach. These four texts were selected for analysis using the interpretive method because they illustrate ecological relationships, human agency, and myth-making, making them ideal for developing a new ecocriticism perspective through Greimas' actantial model in response to the Anthropocene. Then, *Circular Commoning of Dayak Bahau*, though this is an academic article, it provides a configuration worth of actantial relations. Scientific texts and academic writings are viewed as constructs that, similar to literary discourse, can be analyzed for their tactical and persuasive use of language, for their objectification effect produced by the text's ability to stratify levels and build internal reference chains (Peverini, 2024).

This study employs Ricoeurian textual interpretation. Textual interpretation in qualitative research, from Ricoeur's hermeneutic perspective, dialectically integrates explanation and understanding to uncover meaning and protect against arbitrary readings (Kublikowski, 2023), requiring researchers to engage reflexively with both methodological design and analytical depth (Piercey, 2024). It starts with the first-order comprehension, to engage with the text for its immediate meaning. Then, distanciation is done via structural analysis, examining text as a discourse with internal coherence and underlying structures highlighting textual indistinctness and the shift from structural analysis to appropriation (Ricoeur, 1976). The final stage is the second-order comprehension to re-engage with the text with enriched understanding (MacAvoy, 2016), fostering a "fusion of horizons" (Ricoeur, 1981). The method's ultimate goal is a truth-seeking dialogue, uncovering profound existential and ethical significance, moving beyond mere explanation (Mei, 2016). Ricoeurian textual interpretation enables understanding of environmental meaning by mediating between structural analysis and existential appropriation, thus bridging narrative, space, and ethical reflection (Soares, 2021). This approach illuminates the intricate interdependence and inherent power imbalances between human and non-human agencies within the Anthropocene narrative, moving beyond anthropocentric views to reveal shared destinies and responsibilities.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Decentering Human Agency? Spirits, Nature, and Power Relations

Greimas's actantial model treats narrative as a semiotic system where actants embody abstract functions in the generative process of meaning-making. The actantial model reframes ecological systems as narrative programs. Entities like nature, climate, or community resilience can function as actants within

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environmental storytelling. It allows critics to analyze how texts construct agency for nonhuman actors and ecosystems by treating nature as a performative actant, therefore decentering human actants. Ricoeur's hermeneutics emphasizes narrative as a site of ethical interpretation, where symbolic mediation and temporal configuration reveal ecological action, deepening the Greimassian actantial model's ecocritical applicability.

The Origin of Paddy

A female deity living in Apo Lagaan wanted fresh fruit when she noticed that humans were living in a famine, lacking food. She asked Ketubung Lunau, the daughter, to find fresh fruit, but she must leave her baby alone. When Bo' Ayaq was alone with the baby, Hunai, she decided to crush the baby's flesh and spread it on the earth, and it became the seed of paddy that became the food for humans. Lunau, who knew about it, was devastated, but the blessing of Amai Tingai, who saw their willingness over Hunai's scarification, revived the life of Hunai. Since then, humans have always treated rice with great respect by always asking for blessings when planting, harvesting, and storing rice.

(Haryo et al., 2019)

The Myth of Batoq Ayau

People who once lived on the banks of Lung Putik River were about to hold Dangai Ritual. They lived in prosperity and peace, and the ritual was meant to express their gratitude. During the ritual preparation, there was news of an attack from another tribe. Tambun and Bungai came to help fight the invaders so the people could make the Dangai happen. Despite the victory made by Tambun and Bungai over the invaders, the people were doomed to death by disaster because when the Dangai was held, they did something that offended the ruler of nature, namely, making fun of a cat.

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Circular Commoning of Dayak Bahau

This narrative is derived not from folklore but from an academic article that elucidates the dynamics of Dayak Bahau's commoning practices. The commoning dynamic is impeded by municipal policy, the economic system, and land use conversion. Nevertheless, by adhering to swidden agriculture and the associated traditions, bolstered by the authority of customary law, the Bahau people maintain their livelihood despite political and ecological transformations.

(Max, Sirimorok, et al., 2025)

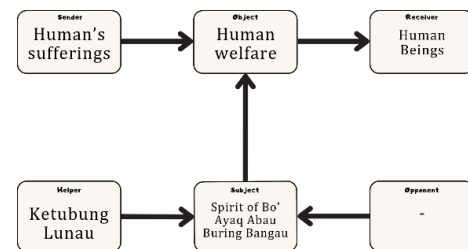


Fig 1. The Origin of Paddy's Actantial Scheme

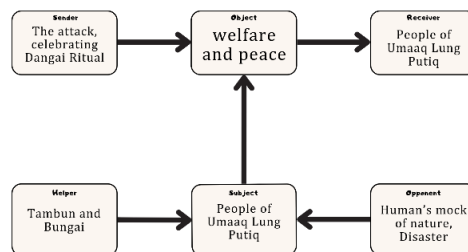


Fig 2. The Myth of Batoq Ayau's Actantial Scheme

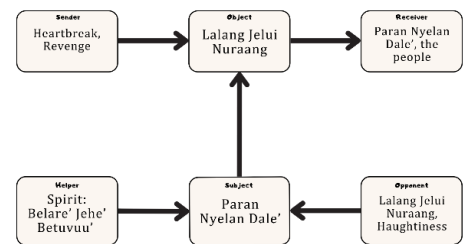


Fig 3. The Legend of Hudoq Kawit's Actantial Scheme

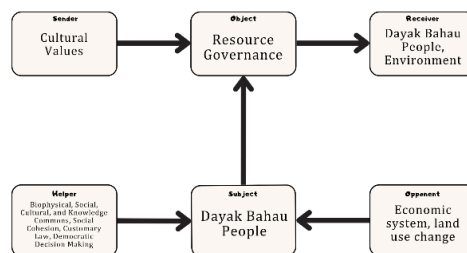


Fig 4. Circular Commoning of Dayak Bahau's Actantial Scheme

In *The Origin of Paddy (TOP)*, Bo' Ayaq acts as the Subject driven by human famine to produce paddy for humanity, implicitly blessed by a mighty spirit. *The*

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Myth of Batoq Ayau (TMBA) shows the Lung Putik River people as the Subject, aiming for a successful Dangai Ritual with help from Tambun and Bungai, but facing opposition from an offended ruler of nature. *The Legend of Hudoq Kawit (TLHK)* features Paran Nyelan Dale’ as the Subject seeking marriage and wealth, aided by Belare’ Jehe’ Betuvuu’ against Lalang Jelui Nuraang’s haughtiness. Finally, *Circular Commoning of Dayak Bahau (CCDB)* positions the Dayak Bahau people as the Subject striving to maintain their livelihood and commoning, supported by swidden agriculture and customary law, despite opposition from municipal policy and economic systems.

In *TOP*, the transformation of Hunai into rice signifies an intervention into ecological cycles that is an act that secures human survival but also requires spiritual reverence to maintain balance. The *TOP* myth portrays rice as a sacred entity born from sacrifice, reinforcing sustainability themes. In *TMBA*, human irrelevance toward nature, symbolized by mocking a cat, leads to destruction, reinforcing the notion that disrespecting ecological relationships results in disaster. *TMBA* highlights nature’s agency, where disrespect leads to disaster, aligning with ecocritical concerns of balance and consequence. Similarly, *TLHK* shows the human operation of nature through ritual, where agricultural power is wielded to settle social disputes, leading to both environmental strain and restoration. *TLHK* intertwines ritual and ecological ethics, showing how human intervention can lead to both destruction and restoration. Meanwhile, *CCDB* reveals a modern manifestation of Anthropocene challenges, where indigenous practices struggle against economic and political forces that threaten their sustainable way of life. *CCDB* provides a real-world ecological framework, demonstrating how indigenous agricultural practices resist modern disruptions.

Each story above demonstrates power relations between human communities, spiritual beings, and nature itself. In *TOP*, divine intervention restores balance after human suffering, showing how spiritual forces hold power over agricultural cycles. *TMBA* highlights the clash between human prosperity and natural retribution, demonstrating that humans are not the sole architects of their fate; disrespect for nature triggers disaster. *TLHK* reinforces the human drive to utilize resources through ritual and agricultural practices, but only through divine sanction does balance return. In the meantime, *CCDB* presents a contemporary struggle where indigenous governance and land stewardship clash against external forces of economic expansion, revealing the asymmetric power relations that challenge sustainability. Embedded within these myths and practices is an ethos of sustainability, emphasizing reciprocity between humans and nature. Indigenous communities, such as those reflected in *TOP* and Dayak Bahau, maintain commoning practices that preserve biodiversity, uphold cultural traditions, and sustain livelihoods despite external pressures. *TMBA* serves as a cautionary tale against careless exploitation of nature, illustrating the potential ecological consequences of human actions. *TLHK* reveals how ritual and agricultural knowledge can lead to prosperity, reinforcing indigenous strategies for resource management.

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The narratives above also embody a dynamic interplay between human and non-human agency, which is spirits, natural forces, and environmental conditions, that shape human destiny as much as human choices do. The transformation of Hunai into rice (*TOP*) underscores the agency of spiritual forces in shaping agricultural abundance. The disaster in *TMBA Ayau* illustrates nature's ability to retaliate against human disrespect. In *TLHK*, famine and epidemics result from the misuse of ritual power, emphasizing nature's role in regulating human prosperity. These stories show that narrative, instead of being limited to a simple view of connections, captures a deep understanding of how different forces work together, highlighting indigenous knowledge about the fragile balance between human goals and the health of the environment in the Anthropocene. Thus, the invitation to decenter human agency is then ambiguous, given that the Anthropocene itself positions humans as the primary cause of environmental changes.

2. Narrative as Ecological Ethics: Language, Agency, and Responsibility

These narratives offer profound insights into how myth, tradition, and ecological knowledge serve as repositories of indigenous wisdom, guiding sustainable practices while highlighting the delicate balance between human ambition and environmental integrity. They caution against reckless exploitation, celebrate harmony with nature, and frame indigenous resistance as a testament to ecological stewardship in the Anthropocene. What is taken is a deep interconnectedness between communities and their natural surroundings. It emphasizes principles of harmony, conservation, and respect for nature. The previous studies that applied the Greimas actantial model to Indonesian folklores for analyzing narrative structures, suggesting themes like heroism (Seli *et al.*, 2020; Wardarita & Negoro, 2017), obedience (Nensiliani *et al.*, 2025), and resistance (Astuti & Taum, 2017), on one hand, provide insight into story composition, but they do not explicitly engage with ecocritical perspectives. Integrating both could enhance narratology by linking environmental themes with formal storytelling models. A shift in interpretation of the actantial model through ecocriticism that is one recognizing human and non-human agencies dynamically, offers insight into the role of indigenous narratives in shaping ecological awareness in the Anthropocene.

The previous studies' method involved a straightforward identification of the six actants to reveal a story's thematic skeleton, keeping the focus squarely on human conflicts and goals. In contrast, this research reconfigures the model's application, treating it not as a fixed template but as a critical lens to investigate socio-ecological power dynamics. Methodologically, it purposefully identifies non-human entities such as forests, rivers, and spiritual beings as potent actants with their own agency, a step beyond mere thematic reading. Theoretically, while past studies remained within the bounds of classical structuralism, this work aligns with a posthumanist narratology, echoing international scholars who call for a move "beyond the human" by examining how stories grant agency to the non-human world. Consequently, the results offer a deeper insight than thematic ecocritical analyses. Instead of merely identifying environmental themes, this study reveals how the very grammar of the Dayak Bahau narrative structurally encodes a worldview of

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interdependence, where the environment's agency is integral to the plot's resolution and the community's ethical framework.

In this view, nature as an actant becomes a "text to be read," and ecocritical narratives function as hermeneutic acts that refigure human–nonhuman relations, enabling communities to interpret resilience and sustainability as lived, storied experiences. Narrative structure indeed shapes raw experience into coherent stories, and in turn, processes how a narrative transforms personal understanding of the experience (Ritivoi, 2006). Approached with ecocriticism, the findings offer new light to interpret the actantial schemes configured in narrative structure. The key finding above mainly shows how indigenous storytelling encodes ecological wisdom and reflects the balance between human and non-human agency, emphasizing sustainability through rituals, reciprocity, and respect for nature, warning against environmental exploitation. The Dayak Bahau's folktales show that spiritual beings safeguard indigenous customs, reminding humans of their interdependence with the land. It also reflects a panpsychism through anthropomorphism. In this way, it becomes an effective strategy to arouse human sympathy for nature, suggesting a more careful attitude that resonates with Naess' "deep ecology" (Ryan & Weisheng, 2024). In addition, the article *CCDB* positions the environment itself as an agent in shaping indigenous resistance to land conversion. This article exposes the resilience of indigenous communities where modern economic forces and political systems threaten traditional ecological knowledge, forcing indigenous people into constant negotiation with external powers. Moreover, it advocates for respect toward indigenous epistemologies, reinforcing the need for sustainable land management practices.

This underscores the narrative structures that mediate human interaction with nature, as symbolic discourse shapes ecological consciousness and the ethical responsibilities tied to environmental engagement, and that responsibility and agency are inseparable (Utsler, 2024). Kirby (2011) notes that culture is inherently natural, where ideas, beliefs, and language are biological and material phenomena embedded within the physical networks of nature itself (Norton, 2025). Just as Ricoeur, who echoes Beneviste, affirms that language gains meaning only through its actual use in discourse, affirming its transcendence and inseparability from lived experience (Ritivoi, 2006). Therefore, beyond the 'interior' meaning of a text, it projects the world and its boundaries. From the viewpoint of actantial grammar, the way language interacts with life shows a complex web of agents and forces that influence meaning and actions in a story, making language an important factor in how events develop. The goal is to attain a collective awareness of our interdependence with all beings, while embracing ethical responsibility, which is key to encouraging care and rejecting outdated notions of human superiority (Lee, 2024).

3. Actants and Agency: Reconfiguring Power in Socio-Ecological Systems

Greimas's actantial model is criticized for having limitations regarding the bound to transitivity (Caracciolo, 2021). That is where "transitivity" is narrowly viewed. In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), to broaden this perspective, transitivity

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falls under the Ideational or Experiential Metafunction, encompassing the entirety of human experience of material, behavioral, mental, verbal, relational, and existential phenomena (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Matthiessen & Teruya, 2024) concerning phenomena, both tangible and intangible. Through this metafunction, humans encode actions, happenings, conditions, and desires. Attempts to circumvent the transitivity system via ‘ergative constructions, filler words, reciprocal verbs, positioning the environment as the subject, and nominalization’ (Caracciolo, 2021) are one of the other available utilizations of the existing structure to develop discourses. Those strategies may work on the sentence level. But for traditional myths, legends, or tales, they will not work well due to the choices of language features that are involved. Therefore, these proposed grammatical changes might serve to create narratives that readily come with the awareness of the Anthropocene to promote non-human agency. However, they are less critically effective for analyzing texts produced without an Anthropocene consideration or more general discourse with the potential for environmental harm. Furthermore, the core of a clause is the verb, and even nominalization still conveys information, as some nouns are derived from verbs that inherently involve an actor or agent (Bloor & Bloor, 2004). Obscuring actors, in addition, can lead to a lack of accountability (Max & Zamruddin, 2020). Thus, while these grammatical shifts might function at the sentence level, they do not readily translate to the narrative level, which is the focus of Greimas's framework. So, promoting a non-human-centered perspective might be achieved, as narrative heavily invests in action, change, and agency, while elements of the environment or non-human can function as parts of narrative action, instruments of description, acquire meaning when articulated, serve as symbols, or advance the plot (Ryan & Weisheng, 2024). It is then that the non-human can provoke reflection, as its significance is highly dependent on humans’ consciousness and agency by ‘rhetorical interaction’ (McAllister, 2024). This understanding aligns with critical perspectives that acknowledge the active role of nonhuman actors in shaping human societies and environmental outcomes, moving beyond anthropocentric views of agency (Latour, 2005). Such interactions highlight how the agency of nonhuman entities, even without explicit intent, contributes to complex socio-ecological systems and demands a re-evaluation of traditional power structures (Peverini, 2024).

Power in the Anthropocene involves connections among institutions, ecologies, and nonhuman entities, underscoring their substantial impact on human experiences without deliberate strategy, thus enriching earth system governance (Burke & Fishel, 2019). Reconstructing actantial structures from narratives reveals perceived power dynamics among participants and helps analysts discern the narrator's focus on experiential versus discursive domains, while also allowing for the validation of power relations through communicative outcomes (Lejot, 2017) and insights into cultural engagements within social contexts (Wang & Roberts, 2005). The actants interact along three axes—desire, power, and transmission—highlighting the dynamics of action and influence (Smeets *et al.*, 2021). This narrative structure parallels the dynamics of power, where episodic, dispositional, and systemic power

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can be considered forces shaping the interactions between actants, influencing their capacity to act and achieve objectives (Clegg, 1993, 2023). Thus, humans aspire to empower non-humans but cannot transcend human perspectives. This means humans can imagine and depict non-human agency in narrative, but they must do it ethically (Utsler, 2024). The goal is to reduce human egoism and allow non-human voices.

E. CONCLUSION

Reinterpreting Greimas’s actantial model through ecocriticism requires a fundamental shift in analyzing narrative structures, moving beyond rigid syntactical roles to embrace a dynamic framework that incorporates non-human agency. Traditional structuralist models focus on predefined narrative functions, yet ecological storytelling highlights the interplay between human ambition, environmental forces, and spiritual entities as active participants in meaning-making. By applying Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, especially his view that texts project a world and gain meaning through lived discourse, the findings reveal that indigenous narratives not only encode ecological wisdom but foster ethical responsibility and non-human agency through symbolic storytelling that invites existential reflection and transformative understanding. The strategy employed in this reinterpretation involves three key components: first, expanding transitivity beyond conventional constraints to account for environmental actants; second, embedding indigenous epistemologies within narrative analysis to foreground ecological wisdom; and third, repositioning narrative as an ethical vessel that reinforces reciprocity and interdependence in the Anthropocene. By integrating these elements, the actantial model evolves to reflect the interconnected agencies shaping ecological consciousness, emphasizing that meaning is enacted through symbolic discourse as well as lived experience. This approach not only refines narratological methods but also fosters ethical storytelling practices, advocating for sustainability and indigenous resistance against environmental exploitation. In this way, indigenous narratives become vital resources for understanding ecological responsibility, demonstrating how myth and tradition encode sustainable principles while offering conceptual strategies for rethinking power, agency, and discourse within environmental storytelling. Future applications include integrating this model into environmental education, conservation policies, and interdisciplinary research, ensuring that indigenous wisdom informs contemporary ecological practices.

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