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Sama Culture and Folk Narratives Structures

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Abstract

The understanding of a folk narrative lies in the underlying principles that govern its composition. This study focuses on structures and culture found in the folk narratives of Sama, an indigenous group in Island Garden City of Samal, Philippines. The paper uses the theory on narratology by French-Lithuanian literary theorist, Algirdas Julien Greimas, and cultural theory by Bronislaw Malinowski to analyze the selected Sama folk narratives. The study reveals that the ten (10) Sama folk narratives collected do not completely follow the theory on narratology of Greimas. This is because the theories used are foreign and the folk literature collected are of local origin. Regardless of this, the study shows that Sama folk narratives reflected the ways of their people. Consequently, Sama folk narratives exemplify their cultural practices. They present social, economic, political, and religious practices. The leaders from the Sama folk were requested to validate the cultural texts gathered for this study. This research highlights the structure of Sama literature and illustrates Sama's cultural heritage by gathering and analyzing their folk narratives so that the rest of the population (the new generation) could have the chance to experience their culture and appreciate it. Also, the researcher further emphasizes the relevance of gathering and using local literature to prevent it from vanishing into oblivion.

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Nothing seems more natural to human beings than telling stories. Certainly, there is no human culture without its folk stories and habits of oral tradition. Yet the appreciation of folk narratives has diminished through the years. The scarcity of records on folk narratives or folklore shows that people are not adequately interested in their own culture and history. However, the present study is done to make people appreciative of folklore or folk narratives through a structural analysis to show the relationship of literature to language for scholastic endeavors and entertainment.

Through the study of folk oral tradition all over the world, scholars have noted that it reflects the beliefs, customs, and traditions, aspirations, and ideals of the people. These folkloristic materials are written down and published in books and other publications to be used as primitive man's poetic interpretation of celestial phenomena such as the rising and the setting of the sun (Eugenio, 1985). Thus, folk literature needs to be collected by scholars and be frequently used in the academe.

Folk narratives gathered and studied from around the world such as the myths *Prometheus* and *Pandora's Box*, the legends such as *King Arthur* and *Robin Hood*, the folktales, and fairy tales like Aesop's fables and *Rumpelstiltskin* by the Grimm brothers are still useful today, not just because of their entertainment value, but for their social relevance as well. The Philippines, too, has recorded a limited number of folk literature with many variations because of the many different tribal peoples that inhabit the nation. The preservation of folk literature is made possible by the country's dignified folklorists – storytellers, collectors, historians, and anthropologists (Lopez, 2006).

Although many scholars have done a great job in preserving folk literature, there is still a clamor for more research in the region. The Annotated Bibliography of Mindanao Studies (MSCF, 2005) and the surveys done by Eugenio (1985) and by Manuel (1963) reveal that there is a dearth of folklore studies done on the indigenous peoples of Mindanao. Hence, there is an urgent need to collect and study folk literature for cultural preservation.

In other scholarly endeavors in Mindanao regarding folk narratives, scholars researched and analyzed texts from indigenous groups to be used in the academe. They serve to improve the number of accessible literature in the country such as Corcino's *Davao History* (1998) and *Tausug Folk Literature* by Tuban (1992), while the scholar and historian Tiu wrote several books including *Davao: Reconstructing History from Text and Memory* (2005) wherein he discussed the Sama. Considering that the island of Mindanao has the greatest number of tribes and the largest concentration of indigenous people in the Philippines, it is right to explore further the people of the island. One of these notable

minorities is the Sama of Island Garden City of Samal. This study analyzed the collected folk narratives of the Sama using the theory of structuralism by literary theorists Algirdas Julius Greimas and the cultural reflection theory by Bronislaw Malinowski.

Theoretical Background: Structuralism and Cultural Reflector

The paper used the structural theory by A. J. Greimas, a well-known literary structuralist. In analyzing the Sama folk narratives, the researcher unveiled the narrative structures distinct from the Sama. Using Greimas' theory (1966), the analysis focused only on the actants: Actantial narrative schema - wherein the main actants (acteurs) such as Subject/ Object, Sender/ Receiver, and Helper/ Opposer are categorized as they are found in every folk narrative. This is followed by the structural sequence—wherein the sequences reflected the stages of all human activities. The sequences are: 1. Contractual structures which involve the making/ breaking of agreements or the establishment/violation of prohibitions and the alienation or reconciliation that follows; 2. Performative structures involve the performance of tasks, trials, struggles, and the like; 3. Disjunctive structures involve travel, movement, arrivals, and departures. Correspondingly, the theory of culture by Bronislaw Malinowski is used in the study.

Samal Island – its geography, people, and culture

The Philippines is comprised of an indigenous population categorized into groupings, excluding the Islamic groups. Among the groupings in Davao City are the Mindanao Lumad and other cultural minorities. Mindanao Lumad is a term encompassing the non-Muslim tribes of Mindanao. The term “Lumad” means “born or grown in the place”. The Lumads are composed of ethnic groups and they include the *Bagobo*, *Banwaon*, *B'laan*, *Bukidnon*, *Dibabawon*, *Higaonon*, *Mandaya*, *Manguangan*, *Manobo*, *Mamanaua*, *Mansaka*, *Subanen*, *Tagkaolo*, *Talaandig*, *Tiruray*, and *T'boli*. The cultural minorities, alternatively, are also from Mindanao. They compose of groups specifically, *Badjao*, *Iranun*, *Jama-Mapun*, *Kalagan*, *Kolibugan*, *Maranao*, *Maguindanao*, *Molbog*, *Muslim*, *Palawani*, *Samal*, *Sangil*, *Tausug*, and *Yakan* (Rovillos & Morales, 2001).

Across the strait due east from the mainland of Davao City is the Island Garden City of Samal. It is physically isolated from other municipalities of Davao del Norte province and mainland Mindanao at large. Samal Island is located in the Davao Gulf in Southeastern Mindanao. On January 30, 1998, the island was made a city by virtue of the Republic Act No. 8471. The newly

made city has the official name Island Garden City of Samal, composed of three original municipalities—Babak, Samal, and Kaputian (Jubilado, 2021).

The Sama is considered the early settlers of the Samal Islands. According to most Samaleños, they are indigenous people belonging to the bloodlines of the three former clan leaders: Datu Dawang (Babak leader), Datu Taganiog (Samal leader), and Datu Budas (Kaputian leader) (Arig et al., 2009). The richness of the literature of Samal Island shows the land as a magical place of “giants” and “ancestral domain”. The island is vibrant in resources as the land is called the promised and prophesied land. The Sama ways of acquiring shelter, food, and other necessities are considered blessings from the unknown. Finally, as a landscape, it is also inhabited by undetected beings that are “not like us,” who reside among the Samas. The Sama perform rarer rituals, these places are being trespassed, illegally acquired as private properties, and developed as tourist attractions proceeded in 1997 (Mangahas, 2004).

Materials and Methods

The researcher used the qualitative-descriptive method as the research design. The researcher gathered reliable primary and secondary sources from several books, theses, dissertations, and electronic files. The primary sources are the folk narratives gathered from both published and unpublished sources. The secondary sources are the documents related to structuralism and folk narratives. Some folk narratives were collected by Caina (2005) in her thesis. Some folk narratives were taken from *Folktales of Southern Philippines* from Esteban et al. (2011). All the folk literature collected are published and unpublished.

The folk narratives or subjects of the study are as follows:

Published: *The First Fish Trap* and *The Red Hen*

Unpublished: *Dagom*, *Balete Tree*, *Baga Cave*, *Dinagat*, *The Legend of Ligid Island*, *The Legend of Talikud Island*, *Soltero Kansingan*, and *Princess and the Siu Hoc Tong*.

After gathering the data, the researcher applied the structuralism theory by Algirdas Julien Greimas and the cultural reflector theory by Bronislaw Malinowski on the selected Sama folk narratives. Furthermore, the researcher identified the actants (acteurs), their actions, and quests as a determinant of their narrative sequences as a collected indigenous text. The researcher also showed the cultural practices of the Sama people following their folk literature.

The theory of Malinowski was used to identify the cultural practices of the Sama people. The cultural practices are as follows: social, religious, political, and economic practices.

The researcher also visited the Island Garden City of Samal (IGaCoS) to validate the information gathered. To validate the cultural stories used, the researcher sought guidance from two leaders or elders who voluntarily participated and gave consent to confirm the cultural relevance of the study. Hence, the method used for this study effectively highlighted the culture and structure of Sama folk narratives.

Results and Discussion

The narratives presented in this section are oral narratives classified into types: legends and folktales. Myths were lost during the Christianization of the natives (Caina, 2005). Hence, no myth was collected. Five out of ten narratives are folktales. The five remaining folk narratives in this study are legends. The classification of the narratives is based on the definitions given by Eugenio (2001).

The first folk narrative analyzed is *The Red Hen*. This folktale talks about a widow hen teaching her chicks the value of perseverance. The Sama people in the past, even in the present, enjoy telling stories that demonstrate simple lessons about human nature. The narrative presents the six actants and their plot types which together account for all possible relationships within a story, and indeed within the sphere of human action in general. The actantial model below depicts the following relationships:

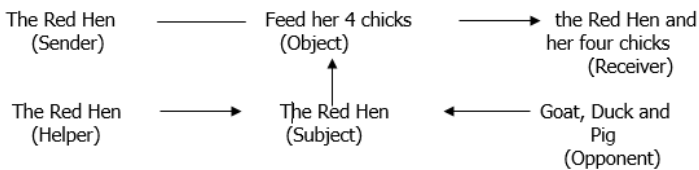


Figure 1. Actantial model of the folk narrative, *The Red Hen*.

Thus, the actantial model presents the fundamental structure of language as well. The subject-verb-object is clearly reflected in the folktale as the Red Hen → feeds → her four chicks. The *Red Hen* narrative has a Performative structure as seen in Figure 1.

The next story, *The First Fish Trap*, is another folktale. This narrative tells the story of a father who teaches his sons how to make fish traps. The narrative

combines a story of quest/ desire with a story of communication. The extraction of the actants and plot types are illustrated clearly in the diagram:

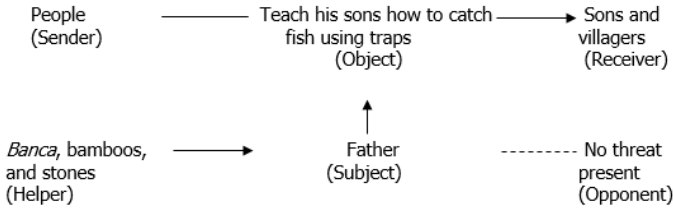


Figure 2. The extraction of the actants and plot types of the folk narrative, *The First Fish Trap*.

Furthermore, Figure 2 shows the fundamental structure of language. The subject-verb-object is in the folktale as the Father → teaches → his sons to catch fish using traps. The *First Fish Trap* has a Performative structure. It involves the performance of tasks, such as learning how to use traps to catch fish.

The next story to be analyzed is the story of a sacred traditional dress of the Sama. The narrative combines plot types and subplots of stories of quest/ desire with a story of communication. For a clearer presentation of the narrative actants, here is an illustration:

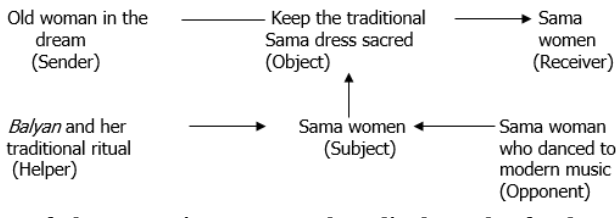


Figure 3. Presentation of the narrative actants that displays the fundamental structure of language.

Figure 3 displays the fundamental structure of language. The subject-verb-object is in the narrative as Sama women → keep → traditional dress sacred. *Dagom* has a Contractual structure as the Sama woman violates the prohibition against the proper use of their traditional dress when she danced stylishly to modern music.

The next legend is the story of a boy who got lost after playing near a big *Balete Tree*. The story combines plot types and subplots of stories of quest/

desire with a story of communication. The actantial model below clearly shows the relationships between actants and plot types:

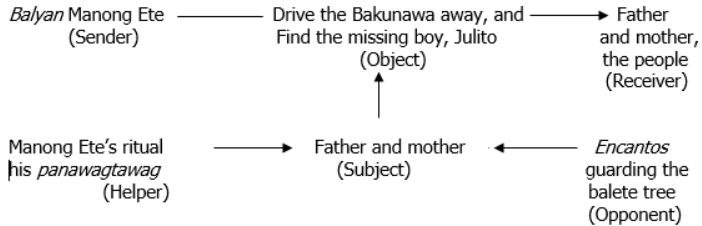


Figure 4. Relationships between actants and plot types.

Figure 4 clearly highlights the fundamental structure of language. The subject-verb-object is in the narrative as the Father and mother → find/drive away → the missing boy/ the Bakunawa. *The Balete Tree* narrative uses two structures. The first structure suggests that there is an involvement in establishing and violating some rules. Second, tasks are Performative to fulfill the objectives of the narrative. Hence, the narrative structures are Contractual and Performative.

The next narrative analyzed is the story, *Baga Cave*. This tells the legend of how Sama people came to know and call a certain cave ‘baga’ or lungs when translated to English. The given narrative combines stories and subplots of quest/desire with a story of communication. The relationship of each actant with each other and the plot types are illustrated in this diagram:

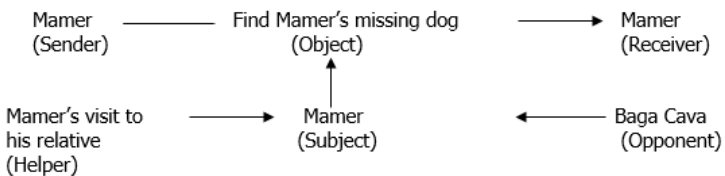


Figure 5. Diagram explaining the relationship of each actant and the plot types in the story, *Baga Cave*.

The Figure 5 model above shows the fundamental structure of language. The subject-verb-object is in the narrative as Mamer → finds → missing dog. The narrative structure is Disjunctive which involves the Subject's movement from one place to another to fulfill his quest.

The succeeding story, *The Dinagats*, is about giants that once dwell on the island of Samal. In the narrative, the relationship of actants and plot types are

described using the actantial model below:

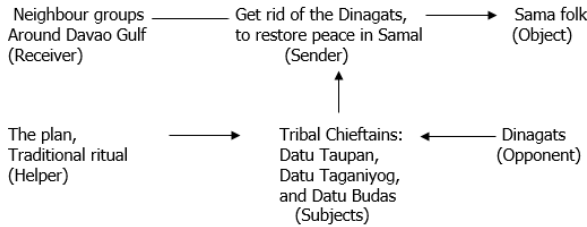


Figure 6. Actantial model which explains the relationship of actants and plot types in the story, *The Dinagats*.

As shown, Figure 6 has the fundamental structure of language. The subject-verb-object is in the *Dinagat* story as the Tribal Chieftains → get rid/restore → of the giants/ restore peace. The narrative *Dinagat* has Performative structures.

The next story is *Legend of Ligid Island*. Similar to the *Dinagat* narrative, the narrative pattern is seen in the actantial model:

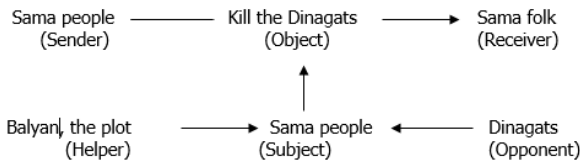


Figure 7. Actantial model of the narrative pattern of the *Legend of Ligid Island*.

Figure 7, as displayed, has the fundamental structure of language. The subject-verb-object is in the story as the Sama people → kill → the Dinagats. The legend has a Performative structure since it involves the performance of tasks and accomplishment of trials and struggles. The Sama people accomplished their goal of killing the Dinagats who were causing them harm. Their struggles are finally over.

Next is the story of star-crossed lovers, Tali and Leucud in *The Legend of Talikud Island*. The given narrative shows a combination of story and subplot of quest/desire with a story of communication. The narrative patterns are clearly illustrated in this actantial model:

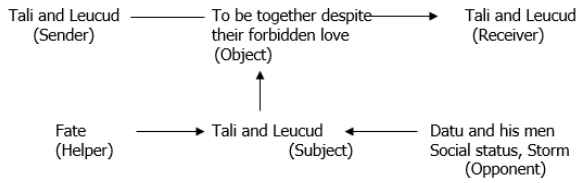


Figure 8. Actantial model of the narrative patterns of the story, *The Legend of Talikud Island*.

Based on Figure 8, the design has the fundamental structure of language. The subject-verb-object is used in the narrative as Tali and Leucud → want to be together → despite their forbidden love. The narrative, *The Legend of Talikud Island*, has a Contractual structure. This structure is concerned with the establishing or breaking of contracts or rules.

The next story tells of the life of *Soltero kansingan*. Soltero kansingan is a hardworking and uncomplaining man who works persistently for his family. It was believed that he found a fortune during one of his days at work. The story exemplifies the idea that a man who is good and hardworking gets a reward. The story combines a story and subplot of quest/desire with a story of communication. The narrative pattern of this story is illustrated by this actantial model below:

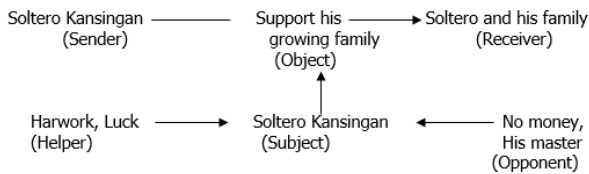


Figure 9. Actantial model of the narrative pattern of the story, *Soltero kansingan*.

Figure 9, as demonstrated above, has the essential structure of language. It has the subject-verb-object is shown as Soltero Kansingan → supports → growing family. The narrative has a Performative structure. It contains Soltero Kansingan’s solution to his trials and struggles.

The tale *Princess and the Siu Hoc Tong* presents a man who wanted very much to see the beautiful princess. The narrative combines a story and subplot of quest/desire with a story of communication. To demonstrate the narrative plot pattern of this story, here is the actantial model:

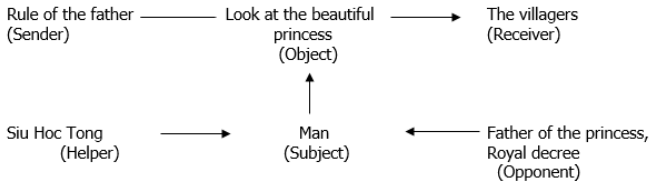


Figure 10. Actantial Model of the narrative plot pattern of the story, *Princess and the Siu Hoc Tong*.

The actantial model in Figure 10 has the fundamental structure of language as well. The subject-verb-object is in *as the Man* → *wants to* → *look at the beautiful princess*. The narrative sequence of *The Princess and the Siu Hoc Tong* are Contractual and Performative. The story also involves a common man who breaks (breaking of agreement) the rule and finds himself effective for doing so. The man went to the beautiful princess' house and whenever he drinks, he looks at her (Performative). The task of finding a way to look at her is accomplished.

In this part of the study, the Cultural reflectors are utilized to uncover the cultural practices of Sama folks based on their folk narratives (Firth, 1957). The ten (10) chosen Sama folk narratives are divided into subthemes to present the cultural practices of the Sama. These cultural practices are social, economic, political, and religious practices.

Social practices

The folktale, *The Red Hen*, encapsulates the story of a widowed hen who happens to take responsibility for her four chicks. Her responsibility includes taking care of them and teaching them values. This is true to the Sama culture; the household is guided by the light of the personal and social responsibility of the mother. While in *The Princess and Siu Hoc Tong* story, it captures the light and funny image of the Sama folk. The brilliant solution to the village's problem adds evidence to the rich imagination of the Sama folks. Siu Hoc Tong is a herbal wine. Wine is known as a symbol of supreme pleasure. Furthermore, drinking Siu Hoc Tong is the Sama's way of celebrating a successful harvest.

Economic practices

The First Fish Trap is a folktale that shows the maritime ways of the Sama. The father represents the Sama people as fishing is one of their livelihoods. The father in the story also presented human values for showing kindness. This

value is forever instilled in the minds and hearts of the children of the Sama. *Soltero Kansingan*, conversely, shows an image of a hardworking farmer in a cornfield. Like the common rural Filipinos, the Samas earn their living by farming, fishing, and engaging in small businesses.

Political practices

The Legend of Talikud Island is a narrative of love. Sama courtship involves a long and complex process. The *datu* does not allow the marriage of Tali and Leucud for the two differ in terms of social status.

Religious practices

This aspect of the Sama culture is apparent in the following stories: The narrative *Dagom* showcases the religious aspect of the ancient Sama. Ancient Sama people believed in *anitos* or spirits. Sama people have retained some of their traditional beliefs even after Christianization. The Samas believe and worship one deity whom they call *Magbabaya*, which means god or creator.

It is noticeable that the Sama culture has high regard for unseen entities and deities as reflected in the next stories (legends); *The Balete Tree* is a common legend among Philippine tribes. The Balete tree signifies life. It is a nourishing and sheltering image of nature. This indicates that the island of Samal conjures life. It supplies mankind with their needs. Aside from that, huge trees, like the Balete are regarded as sacred by the natives. The Samas believe in the existence of supernatural beings and spirits. The *Baga Cave* story presents the central character Mamer who happens to be a faith healer. Healers are common among the tribes found in the country. Most, if not all of the groups, have healers as members of their community. Folk healers are popular because the tribe members run to them in cases of health problems. They conjure up the associations of humans with spirits. The *Dinagat* story tells that most Samas live in the highlands of Samal islands. Some of the Samas are on the shoreline and mixed with different tribes. The *Dinagat* story embodies the belief in rituals. The people on the island made a *panawagtawag* ritual to ask permission and blessing from the *anitos* or deities to kill the Dinagats (giants). *Dinagat* and *The Legend of Ligid Island* both show the existence of giants. In the story *The Legend of Ligid Island*, Sama people ran to the mountains and hid in caves because of the dreadful giants. The people asked the *balyan* to lead a ritual or the *panawagtawag* prayer for the *anitos*. A bamboo raft full of their local food, *amik* is presented to the giants to eat.

Conclusion

It was discovered that based on the definition of the types of narratives, the Sama folk narratives collected were only legends and folktales. Hence, no myth was collected. The analyses presented a structure and revealed that Sama folk narratives do not completely follow the theory on narratology of Greimas. Also, Sama folk narratives exemplify cultural practices such as social, economic, political, and religious practices.

Sama folk narratives hold a significant role in the discovery of ancient treasures. Narratives establish the cultural history of people. They represent the reality of their culture which their forebears had, and by which they fashioned their daily lives. The study revealed that Sama folk narratives reflect the culture of their people. The Sama oral tradition was used not only for entertainment but for the conservation of culture. Also, this study is evidence of the rich imagination of the Sama folks.

The researcher would highly recommend the use of narratology to comprehensively study Philippine folk literature. This would expose how these narratives are structured and what these narratives have in common with other narratives of the world. Students and researchers can use other critical approaches like Phenomenology and Poststructuralism for a more comprehensive study of folk literature.

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