Original Article

Narrative Patterns and Cultural Transmission in Masbateños Urban Legends: A Framework for Controlled Shift Narration for Oral Tradition Preservation

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Abstract. This research examines the transmission of stories across generations in Masbate City, Philippines, by analyzing the narrative patterns in local urban legends shared by 25 elder storytellers from five barangays. Working with community members aged 65 and above, the researcher collected and analyzed their oral narratives using a mixed-methods approach that combined qualitative content analysis with quantitative descriptive statistics. The study demonstrates that Masbateños consistently prefer straightforward, chronological storytelling, with linear narrative structures prevailing in their oral traditions (M = 2.8, SD = 0.84). Rather than employing nonlinear temporal structures, these storytellers consistently organize their legends in a sequential order that mirrors how events unfolded. The most intriguing discovery emerged from examining thematic relationships: a perfect negative correlation between origin and heroism narratives (ρ = -1.000, p < .001) suggests that these two story types serve entirely different functions within the community's oral tradition and operate in separate narrative spaces. This finding indicates that Masbateño communities have developed a sophisticated system for organizing their cultural knowledge, in which different thematic categories fulfil distinct pedagogical and mnemonic roles. However, the study also documented generational erosion, in which younger storytellers systematically omit cultural details and shift narrative perspectives, threatening the preservation of authentic cultural memory. In response to these preservation challenges, the researcher developed the Controlled Shift Narration (CSN) framework. This community-based intervention employs strategic perspective alignment, linguistic anchoring of vernacular terms, and pedagogical integration to maintain narrative authenticity while allowing natural evolution across generations. Unlike existing preservation models that prioritize static documentation, CSN acknowledges the inherently dynamic nature of oral tradition while providing structured mechanisms to mitigate unintentional distortion. This framework offers practical tools for cultural heritage preservation initiatives and contributes to folklore studies' methodology by bridging the gap between authenticity and adaptability in oral narrative transmission.

Keywords: Controlled shift narration; Cultural transmission; Generational erosion; Narrative analysis; Oral tradition; Philippine folklore

Urban legends serve as invisible bridges, connecting past and present by transmitting cultural DNA across generations through captivating narratives that communities believe, share, and reshape. These modern-day folktales serve as sophisticated mechanisms for cultural preservation. They embed collective memory within compelling stories that can be transmitted effectively within brief time frames, typically under five minutes (Heath et al., 2001). Unlike traditional folklore anchored in mythic time, urban legends thrive in contemporary contexts. They adapt to local anxieties while preserving essential cultural information through their cognitive accessibility and emotional resonance.

Storytelling impacts well-being and fitness by conveying information and reinforcing cultural codes of conduct. The development and timing of storytelling skills are crucial for the transmission of story knowledge (Stieglitz et al., 2021). Oral traditions and expressions are used to pass on knowledge, cultural and social values, and collective memory. They play a crucial part in keeping cultures alive (UNESCO, 2025). However, as folk narratives get passed from person to person across generations, they undergo cultural transmission and evolution (Tehrani, 2023).

The Philippine archipelago presents a compelling laboratory for examining these transmission dynamics. Over 7,000 islands foster distinct regional storytelling traditions shaped by complex colonial histories and linguistic diversity. Philippine folklore analysis reveals common themes and patterns related to Filipino values, beliefs, and cultural identity (Eslit, 2023). Philippine urban legends about creatures illustrate how narratives evolve across various locales and time periods while reinforcing gendered images and artistic motifs.

Despite this rich narrative heritage, systematic analysis of regional folklore patterns remains critically limited, particularly for understudied provinces like Masbate. This research gap becomes urgent as digital innovation intersects with challenges in heritage preservation (Chigwada & Ngulube, 2024). Younger generations increasingly disconnect from traditional storytelling practices.

Masbate Province exemplifies this preservation challenge. Located at the cultural crossroads where the Tagalog, Bicolano, and Cebuano linguistic traditions intersect, Masbate's legends reflect the complex interplay of Spanish colonization, American occupation, and the trauma of World War II. These narratives remain largely undocumented in scholarly literature, representing a significant gap in Philippine folklore studies. The province's unique position as both a cultural bridge and a distinct regional identity makes it an ideal case study. It helps us understand how local legends preserve collective memory while adapting to contemporary contexts.

This study systematically examines narrative patterns in Masbateño urban legends through a comprehensive textual analysis of stories collected from elder storytellers across five barangays. Drawing on Propp's (1928/1968) morphological analysis, Todorov's (1969) narrative equilibrium theory, and Vansina's (1985) framework for oral tradition, this study introduces the Controlled Shift Narration (CSN) framework. The CSN framework represents a novel contribution to folklore preservation methodology by addressing a critical gap in existing approaches: the tension between maintaining narrative authenticity and accommodating natural evolution in oral traditions. While Propp's structural analysis identifies invariant narrative functions and Vansina documents transmission processes, neither provides practical intervention strategies for communities facing generational erosion. The CSN framework builds on these theoretical foundations by offering concrete mechanisms, such as perspective alignment protocols, linguistic anchoring techniques, and pedagogical integration strategies, that enable communities to guide narrative evolution intentionally rather than passively document its decay. This study examines how these communities structure their tales and what these patterns reveal about the mechanisms of cultural transmission.

The Research Addresses Five Key Objectives:
(1) Identifying recurring narrative patterns and their frequencies.
(2) Analyzing dominant thematic motifs and their cultural significance.
(3) Examining cross-community variations in content, narration, and structure.
(4) Investigating commonalities across narrative dimensions.
(5) Exploring relationships between structural patterns and thematic content. This analysis can contribute to both the theoretical understanding of localized storytelling traditions and the development of practical frameworks for preserving cultural heritage.

International folklore scholarship provides essential context for understanding Masbateño narrative traditions. Recent work in Southeast Asian oral traditions demonstrates similar patterns of linear narration in post-colonial contexts (Bauman & Briggs, 2020). In these studies, from Mindanao, document comparable tensions between traditional storytelling practices and modernization pressures (Fagsao, 2016). However, regional scholarship on Bicol and Visayan narrative traditions remains underrepresented in international folklore discourse, despite these traditions' relevance to broader theoretical conversations about cultural transmission and narrative evolution.

Beyond its academic contribution, this research informs the development of educational policy and cultural preservation initiatives. Documenting specific patterns in Masbateño narrative traditions provides an empirical foundation for culturally responsive curriculum materials while developing replicable methodologies for other regional folklore studies. The study's significance lies in addressing the generational erosion of oral traditions. It offers practical interventions through the proposed Controlled Shift Narration framework that balances authenticity with natural evolution across generations.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative content analysis with quantitative descriptive statistics to examine narrative patterns in Masbateño urban legends. The explanatory content analysis design was selected based on established principles of folklore methodology outlined by Georges and Jones (1995), who demonstrated that systematic textual analysis provides objective measurements of narrative characteristics while preserving cultural context. This approach aligns with Bengtsson's (2016) framework for qualitative content analysis, which emphasizes systematic categorization and pattern identification in cultural texts.

The content analysis methodology is particularly suitable for folklore studies, as it enables systematic, objective, and quantitative description of manifest content while maintaining sensitivity to cultural nuances (Krippendorff, 2018). Subsequently, Manuel's (1980) pioneering work on Philippine oral traditions established precedent for applying systematic analytical frameworks to indigenous storytelling practices. His work demonstrated how structured analysis can reveal underlying cultural patterns without compromising narrative authenticity.

A correlational component was incorporated to examine the relationships between narrative structural elements and thematic content, following established practices in quantitative folklore analysis (Thompson, 1955). Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was selected as the primary statistical tool due to the ordinal nature of narrative pattern ratings and the non-normal distribution expected in small sample data. However, given the exploratory nature of this regional folklore study and the relatively small sample size (n = 25), statistical analyses were designed to identify patterns rather than establish definitive causal relationships. The mixed-methods design enabled triangulation between qualitative narrative depth and quantitative pattern frequency, with qualitative findings contextualizing statistical relationships and quantitative results validating emergent themes from content analysis.

Participants and Sampling

Twenty-five local storytellers aged 65 years and above were purposively selected from five barangays (Bagumbayan, Ibingay, Nursery, Kinamaligan, and Kalipay) in Masbate City.

Selection Criteria:
(1) Origin from Masbate or identification as Masbateño storytellers.
(2) Knowledge of legends covering various themes (origin myths, morality, heroism).

Participants comprised 14 women and 11 men, with ages ranging from 65 to 82 years (M = 71.4). Their occupational backgrounds included retired farmers (n = 9), former fishers (n = 6), community leaders (n = 4), retired teachers (n = 3), and traditional healers (n = 3), reflecting the diverse social fabric of Masbateño communities.

The five barangays were selected through maximum variation sampling to ensure geographic and cultural diversity within Masbate City. Bagumbayan and Kalipay represent urban barangays with concentrated populations and significant World War II historical significance. Ibingay was selected for its coastal location and distinct environmental storytelling traditions. Kinamaligan represents a peri-urban community with strong narratives of the Japanese colonial period, while Nursery was included as a transitional barangay between urban

and rural contexts. This selection strategy ensured representation of different historical experiences, geographic settings, and community compositions.

To ensure narrative diversity within each barangay, researchers consulted with local officials and community elders to identify storytellers from different family lineages and neighborhood clusters. This approach acknowledged that legends vary significantly across families and communities, even within the same barangay. Storytellers were asked to share multiple legends from their repertoires, resulting in a corpus of 73 distinct narrative accounts across the 25 participants.

The sample size of 25 participants was determined through power analysis for correlation studies, acknowledging that this is an exploratory study with limited statistical power to detect small effect sizes (Cohen, 1988). This sample size allows for the detection of large effect sizes (r ≥ .50) with adequate power (.80) at an α = .05 significance level.

Data Collection
Data collection followed established protocols for oral history preservation outlined by the Oral History Association (2020). The Legend Textual Corpus Creation methodology draws on established corpus linguistics approaches (Sinclair, 2005) and digital humanities frameworks (Jockers, 2014) to systematically compile and analyze legends from books, archives, and interviews with local storytellers.

Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants in accordance with protocols approved by the institutional ethics review board. Consent procedures were conducted in the participants' preferred language (Masbateño dialect or Filipino), ensuring complete comprehension of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights as participants. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Interviews were conducted in participants' homes or preferred community spaces to ensure comfort and cultural appropriateness. Sessions lasted 45 minutes to 2 hours, and the researcher used semi-structured interview protocols that encouraged natural storytelling while ensuring coverage of key narrative dimensions. All oral legends were recorded using digital audio equipment and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis, preserving linguistic features including code-switching between the Masbateño dialect, Filipino, and occasional Spanish or English terms.

A content coding and analysis framework was developed to identify narrative patterns, including linear, episodic, circular, and hybrid narrative structures.

The coding framework categorized narratives across three primary dimensions:
(1) Structural Patterns (temporal organization, plot development, narrative closure).
(2) Thematic Content (origin myths, heroism, morality, supernatural elements, secondary motifs).
(3) Stylistic Features (perspective shifts, linguistic markers, mnemonic devices).

Each narrative was independently coded by two trained coders using a standardized codebook developed through pilot testing with narratives not included in the final sample.

Inter-rater reliability was assessed through Cohen's kappa coefficient, calculated on 20% of transcripts (n = 15 narratives randomly selected from the corpus). The kappa value of κ = 0.87 (95% CI [0.79, 0.95]) indicated strong agreement between coders, exceeding the conventional threshold of κ ≥ 0.80 for acceptable reliability. Discrepancies in coding were resolved through discussion and consensus-building between coders, with a third senior researcher consulted in cases of continued disagreement.

Treatment of Data
Statistical analyses were conducted using Jamovi 2.3.28 (The Jamovi Project, 2023) and included:
(1) Descriptive statistics with means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions for narrative patterns and thematic motifs.
(2) Correlation analysis using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (ρ) selected over Pearson's r due to the ordinal nature of narrative pattern ratings and non-normal distribution of small sample data (Conover, 1999).

(3) Effect size interpretation following Cohen's (1988) conventions: minor (ρ = .10), medium (ρ = .30), and large (ρ = .50) effects.

Statistical assumptions and limitations were carefully considered. Non-parametric tests were employed due to the small sample size and ordinal measurement scales. The alpha level was set at 0.05, with a Bonferroni correction applied to control the family-wise error rate. Bootstrap confidence intervals (1000 replications) were calculated for correlation coefficients to address minor sample-size limitations (Conover, 1999) and to provide more robust estimates of parameter uncertainty.

To validate emerging patterns in narrative content, perspective shifts, and narrative length, the researcher employed Gemini 2.5 Pro, Google DeepMind's advanced AI language model (Gemini Team, 2024). This methodological innovation represents a novel application of large language models in folklore analysis, used here as a triangulation tool rather than a primary analytical method. The model was configured at zero temperature (temperature=0) to produce deterministic, reproducible outputs by always selecting the most probable next token. This configuration ensured reliability and replicability in pattern detection across the narrative corpus.

The integration of AI-assisted analysis followed a systematic protocol: textual data (interview transcripts and archival materials) were input using targeted prompts designed to identify specific narrative features. Example prompts included: "Identify and quantify the three most frequent thematic clusters across these narratives with specific textual evidence"; "Analyze sentence length distribution between first-person and third-person narrative sections"; and "Detect linguistic markers indicating perspective shifts within individual narratives." AI outputs were cross-validated against human coding results, with convergence between methods strengthening confidence in identified patterns and divergences prompting re-examination of both human and AI analyses.

This AI integration acknowledged methodological limitations. The model's training on predominantly Western literary traditions may introduce biases when analyzing non-Western oral narratives. To mitigate this, AI-generated insights were never used in isolation but always triangulated with human expert coding and existing folklore scholarship. The deterministic configuration minimized but did not eliminate potential inconsistencies in the interpretation of culturally specific narrative elements. Future research should explore cross-validation across multiple AI models and more extensive human expert panels to further validate this methodological approach.

Ethical Considerations
The research adhered to rigorous ethical standards, respecting the research purpose, the participants, and their cultural heritage. The study received approval from the institutional review board prior to data collection, ensuring compliance with international standards for human subjects research and culturally sensitive protocols appropriate for indigenous knowledge documentation.

All participants provided informed consent after receiving detailed explanations of the study's aims, procedures, data use, and their rights in their preferred language. Consent forms were available in both Filipino and Masbateño dialects, with verbal consent recorded and documented for participants who preferred oral communication over written documentation. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty and to request removal of their data from the study.

All information, descriptions, and results reported were de-identified to protect participants' privacy and the security of their personal details. Pseudonyms were assigned to both participants and specific locations mentioned in narratives when publication could compromise individual privacy. However, barangay-level identification was retained as essential to the research findings, with community leaders consulted regarding appropriate levels of geographic specificity.

Cultural sensitivity was operationalized through multiple mechanisms. First, storytelling was approached as communicative performance rather than extractive data collection, with researchers adopting a posture of cultural learners rather than external experts. Second, community consultation occurred at multiple stages: initial research design, participant recruitment, interpretation of findings, and dissemination planning. Third, the research methodology prioritized community benefit, with findings shared with participants and local cultural organizations in accessible formats prior to academic publication.

To enhance these oral traditions as much as possible, the researcher treated the community with respect and reciprocity. This included providing copies of recorded and transcribed narratives to participants and their families as cultural documentation, supporting community-led cultural preservation initiatives identified during fieldwork, and committing to long-term engagement with the communities beyond the immediate research project.

Community cultural property rights were protected by acknowledging that the community is the source of the tales. All publications clearly attribute narratives to Masbateño communities and specific barangays, ensuring that cultural expressions receive proper recognition rather than being treated as public domain material subject to unrestricted use. The research team is committed to consulting with communities on any future commercial applications or derivative works based on the collected narratives and to implementing benefit-sharing protocols consistent with indigenous knowledge protection frameworks.

These procedures were designed to preserve the rights and dignity of all parties while fostering cooperation and confidence between researchers and communities. The ethical framework recognizes that cultural knowledge is a living heritage with contemporary significance and ongoing transmission to future generations.

Results and Discussion

Narrative Patterns Dominantly Used in Re-telling Masbateños' Urban Legends

Analysis of narrative structural patterns revealed a clear hierarchy of preferences among Masbateño storytellers. Linear narrative patterns dominated the corpus (M = 2.8, SD = 0.84), followed by episodic patterns (M = 1.4, SD = 1.34), with circular patterns least frequent (M = 0.8, SD = 0.83) (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Narrative Patterns Dominantly Used in Re-telling Masbateños' Urban Legends*

Narrative Pattern	SD	Mean	Description
Linear	0.84	2.8	Dominant
Episodic	1.34	1.4	Emerging
Circular	0.83	0.8	Minimal

These findings align with cross-cultural research on oral tradition structures, which suggests that linear, chronological organization facilitates memory retention and cultural transmission (Rubin, 1995). The prevalence of linear patterns supports Propp's (1928/1968) observation that folktales often follow sequential progression, though the specific manifestation in Masbateño legends reflects local cultural preferences rather than universal narrative laws.

The minimal presence of circular narratives contrasts with findings from other Southeast Asian folklore traditions, where cyclical patterns are more common (Leeming, 2005). This difference may reflect the historical context of Masbate's colonial and post-colonial experiences, in which linear historical progression was culturally privileged over cyclical, mythic time. This finding further emphasizes Masbateños' focus on resolution and historical realism, which diverges from the cyclical patterns often found in myths that highlight fate or inevitability (Todorov, 1969).

The relatively high standard deviation for episodic patterns (SD = 1.34) suggests greater variability in how storytellers employ this structure. This variability may indicate that episodic narration is an emergent or transitional form—used by some storytellers to accommodate complex historical events that resist simple linear chronology, while others maintain strict sequential organisation. This interpretation aligns with findings from cross-barangay analysis, which show that communities with more complex colonial histories (Kalipay, Bagumbayan) exhibit higher frequencies of episodic structures to accommodate multiple overlapping historical threads.

Thematic Motif of Masbateños' Urban Legends (Primary Motif)

Thematic analysis revealed co-dominance of heroism and origin motifs (both M = 1.8), though with different variability patterns (SD = 1.64 for heroism versus SD = 1.10 for origin themes), see Table 2. This finding supports Bascom's (1965) assertion that legends serve dual functions of historical preservation and moral exemplification.

Table 2. *Primary Thematic Motif of Masbateños' Urban Legends*

Thematic Motif	SD	Mean	Description
Origin	1.10	1.8	Frequently
Heroism	1.64	1.8	Dominant
Morality	0.55	1.4	Occasionally
Supernatural	0.00	0	Rarely

The absence of supernatural elements (M = 0) distinguishes Masbateño legends from global folklore patterns documented in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) classification system, where supernatural motifs are prevalent (Uther, 2004). This grounding in human-centred narratives may reflect post-colonial emphasis on documenting lived historical experience rather than mythic abstraction.

The higher variability in heroism themes (SD = 1.64) compared to origin themes (SD = 1.10) suggests that, while both motifs are equally prevalent across the corpus, heroism narratives exhibit greater diversity in their deployment by different storytellers and communities. Some communities emphasize anti-colonial resistance heroes, while others focus on local leaders who guided communities through hardship. This thematic flexibility allows heroism narratives to serve multiple functions, such as moral instruction, identity formation, and historical commemoration, adapting to each community's specific historical experience.

Thematic analysis highlighted heroism and origin as primary motifs (mean = 1.8), reflecting the community's valorization of historical experiences and cultural roots. This finding resonates with Bascom's (1965) assertion that local legends often serve as vessels for communal values and identity. Notably, supernatural elements were absent, a stark contrast to global folklore traditions where such motifs are prevalent. This absence suggests a cultural grounding in human-centric narratives that prioritize historical authenticity over mythic abstraction.

Thematic Motif of Masbateños' Urban Legends (Secondary Motif)
Secondary thematic analysis revealed love/relationship and justice as co-dominant secondary motifs, both occurring with a mean frequency of 2.2, see Table 3. However, love themes showed greater variability (SD = 2.28) than justice themes (SD = 1.48), suggesting a more consistent deployment of justice narratives across communities. In contrast, love themes varied more substantially between storytellers and contexts.

Table 3. *Primary Thematic Motif of Masbateños' Urban Legends*

Thematic Motif	SD	Mean	Description
Love/Relationship	2.28	2.2	Dominant
Justice	1.48	1.48	Dominant
Warning	1.0	0.71	Occasionally

Diving deeper into the secondary thematic motifs reveals another layer of cultural values. The equal prominence of love/relationship and justice themes, despite different variability patterns, suggests these serve distinct but equally important pedagogical functions. Justice narratives, with their greater consistency (lower SD), appear to function as stable moral anchors, serving as community-wide agreement on fundamental ethical principles transmitted through standardized narrative patterns. Love themes, with higher variability, allow for more personal and context-specific adaptations, perhaps reflecting the more intimate nature of these narratives and their connections to specific family lineages or individual experiences.

Interestingly, warning themes are relatively rare (mean 1.0), despite cautionary stories being familiar in many folklore traditions. Masbate's stories seemed more focused on preserving moral values and honoring justice and love than on warning against infractions. This pattern may reflect the historical functions these narratives have served: in communities shaped by colonial occupation and wartime trauma, legends that affirm positive values (heroism, justice, love) may have served more important psychological and social functions than cautionary tales that emphasize prohibition and danger.

Secondary themes of love and relationships, as well as justice (mean = 2.2), further illustrate the community's emphasis on moral and social values, consistent with Fagsao's (2016) findings on the pedagogical role of legends in reinforcing cultural norms. The prominence of justice themes, specifically, may reflect historical experiences of occupation and resistance, in which narratives served as repositories of community conceptions of right action and ethical leadership under conditions of political constraint.

Narrative Variations of Masbateños' Urban Legend in Terms of Content
Based on focus group discussion transcripts from four Masbate barangays (Bagumbayan, Ibingay, Kalipay, Kinamaligan), historical trauma dominates narratives in three of four barangays, particularly Japanese occupation narratives. Environmental themes were unique to coastal Ibingay, while supernatural elements appeared only in Bagumbayan (ghosts) and Kinamaligan (hauntings).

The heart of Masbate's urban legends pulses with shared history and identity, yet each barangay breathes distinct life into its narratives. In Kalipay and Bagumbayan, stories of anti-colonial resistance, Japanese occupation, brave leaders, and spectral war casualties dominate. These narratives frame collective trauma as a testament to resilience. Kinamaligan's tales lean toward origin myths, humanizing historical figures (like the Japanese soldier who inspired their barangay's name) to soften the edges of conflict. Ibingay takes a distinctly different route, embedding its narratives in the coastal environment. Stories of fauna and flora, childhood memories of shell-gathering, and environmental change function as ecological parables that encode both celebration of natural abundance and warnings about environmental destruction. The immersion of place drives these narratives; haunted terminals, coastal shores, and freed villages function not merely as settings but as living archives of community identity.

Table 4. *Narrative Variations of Masbateños' Urban Legend in Terms of Content*

Barangay	Primary Themes	Key Characters/Places	Purpose
Bagumbayan	Japanese Occupation Trauma, Bravery	"Goma" Man (Bulletproof Hero), Cattle Terminal	Teach Courage/ Love for the Homeland
Ibingay	Coastal Abundance, Environmental Change	Bingcay Shells, Punta Ibingay	Environmental Conservation
Kalipay	Anti-colonial Resistance, Freedom	Resilient Leaders, Spanish/Japanese	Inspire Unity/Resilience
Kinamaligan	Japanese Encounters, Origin Myths	"Kamalig" Houses, Benevolent Soldiers	Explain the Barangay Name

The absence of supernatural beings in most narratives is distinctive among world mythology systems, indicating a cultural preference for historical truth over symbolic mythology. This human-centeredness may suggest that communities are more concerned with documenting their lived experiences and legitimate historical memory than with constructing explanatory mythologies for natural phenomena or existential questions. This pattern distinguishes Masbateño legends from many global folklore traditions, in which supernatural elements serve as primary explanatory frameworks.

The cross-barangay variations reflect what Gunnell (2009) termed "localized adaptation patterns" in oral traditions, in which shared cultural frameworks manifest differently across specific historical and geographical contexts. This supports Vansina's (1985) model of oral tradition as both a stable cultural repository and a dynamic adaptive system. The traumatic landscapes in battlefield communities (Bagumbayan, Kalipay) intensified discourses of resistance and heroism. In the coastal community (Ibingay), however, the significance of the environment has made ecological stewardship a central narrative priority.

Narrative Variations of Masbateños' Urban Legend in Terms of Narration Shifts
Analysis of narration shifts revealed consistent patterns of authenticity markers and generational erosion across barangays.

Key indicators included:
(1) First-person assertion in historical narrative (Bagumbayan, Kalipay), with elders emphasizing eyewitness or near-eyewitness authority.
(2) Generational erosion patterns, with three-quarters of elder participants noting that younger family members simplify or forget narrative details when retelling.
(3) Landmark anchoring, where storytellers physically gesture toward or reference specific locations during narration to ground narratives in tangible space.

The authentication of these narratives evidences the value of heritage. Stories are embedded in visceral first-

person testimony from elders ("Kami san panahon"—"We of that time") with hands and voices raised in gestures that evoke lost worlds. However, as tales filter through generations, they flatten: details blur, and perspectives shift from eyewitness accounts to third-hand reports ("They say..."), with emotional weight fading. In Kalipay, elders lament adolescent apathy toward traditional narratives. In Bagumbayan, teenagers retell complex war epics in fragmented, simplified forms that lose crucial contextual details and cultural nuances.

In contrast, the Ibingay stories demonstrate greater resistance to generational decay. Their environmental narratives remain relatively stable and consistently warm in tone, perhaps because they revolve around shared positive experiences (communal shell-gathering, coastal abundance) rather than shared trauma. This finding suggests that narrative content influences transmission fidelity: positive, communally experienced narratives may transfer more reliably than traumatic accounts, which younger generations may be motivated to simplify or distance themselves from emotionally.

The act of narration itself functions as cultural stewardship. When elders perform these narratives—using specific linguistic markers, gestural accompaniment, and spatial anchoring—they enact a calling to memory and cultural continuity. This performance is fragile in the face of time yet dedicated to its ends, representing an intergenerational contract where cultural knowledge is both gift and responsibility.

Table 5. *Narrative Variations of Masbateños' Urban Legend in Terms of Narration Shifts*

Barangay	Perspective Shifts	Audience Engagement	Narrative Changes Over Time
Bagumbayan	1st-Person → 3rd-Person ("They say...")	Action Gestures, Vocal Modulation	Younger Gens Omit Details
Ibingay	Collective "we" ("Ada kami dida")	Nostalgic Tone, Landmark Gestures	Minimal Changes ("Pareho gihapon")
Kalipay	Unified ("Kami san panahon")	Collaborative Input	Younger Gens Disinterested
Kinamaligan	("San una...") Openings	Exaggerated Retellings	Becoming "matter-of-fact"

These narrative shifts proceed beyond simple generational transmission patterns. The traumatic landscapes in battlefield communities (Bagumbayan, Kalipay) intensified first-person authentication strategies, with elders emphasizing their authority as witnesses or near-witnesses to historical events. In contrast, the coastal community (Ibingay) maintained a collective voice ("we") throughout generational transmission, perhaps because environmental narratives involve shared ongoing experiences rather than historically bounded traumatic events.

Variations across barangays revealed context-dependent storytelling. Bagumbayan and Kalipay's extended narratives of the Japanese occupation and anti-colonial resistance reflect collective trauma that requires detailed commemoration and moral instruction. Ibingay's concise ecological parables highlight environmental stewardship through memorable vignettes rather than extended historical accounts.

Generational erosion poses a significant threat to narrative fidelity, as younger storytellers often simplify complex accounts, losing cultural details and shifting from immersive first-person perspectives to distanced third-person reportage. This trend necessitates preservation interventions to maintain cultural authenticity across successive generations of transmission. The pattern mirrors Chigwada and Ngulube's (2024) findings on narrative evolution influenced by emotional and social biases, in which the simplification of trauma-laden accounts by younger storytellers particularly threatens the preservation of cultural memory.

Narrative Variations of Masbateños' Urban Legend in Terms of Length and Style
The length and structure of narratives varied substantially across barangays, ranging from brief vignettes (Ibingay's micro-stories) to extended oral performances (Bagumbayan's multi-hour war epics). Narrative length correlated with thematic content and community function, with trauma narratives requiring more elaborate treatment while environmental parables achieved effectiveness through brevity and repetition.

The shape of each story bends around its emotional center. War epics from Bagumbayan unfold as extended performances lasting hours, with dialogue-heavy, action-dense narratives that echo the complex, gnarled intricacies of survival. These extended narratives employ multiple mnemonic devices: repeated character descriptions, formulaic phrases marking transitions between narrative sections, and spatial anchoring to specific

locations that listeners can reference physically.

In contrast, Ibingay's environmental narratives take the form of brief, shining vignettes ("halipot lang"—"just brief"), each focused on a single memorable image or experience. These micro-narratives lengthen only when multiple participants collaboratively add their memories, stringing beads on a common thread of environmental experience. The brevity serves pedagogical efficiency: environmental lessons can be conveyed quickly and memorably, suitable for transmission in everyday contexts rather than requiring formal storytelling occasions.

Style functions simultaneously as an aesthetic choice and a mnemonic device. Repetitive phrases ("the shells of Bingcay," "a Goma man") fix key symbols in listener memory through reiteration across multiple narrative contexts. The origin myths of Kinamaligan reveal structures—narrative twists (such as the revelation about the Japanese soldier and the house called "Kamalig") that deliver cultural truths through dramatic reversal, making the cultural lesson more memorable and emotionally resonant.

The most durable moments, whether Kalipay's rhapsodic liberation narratives or Bagumbayan's embattled last stands, are those in which style and emotion are unified and history becomes a mythic legacy. These climactic moments employ heightened linguistic features: more elaborate vocabulary, increased vocal modulation, and physical gestures that embody the emotional significance of the narrative content.

Table 6. *Narrative Variations of Masbateños' Urban Legend in Terms of Narrative Length and Style*

Barangay	Typical Length	Stylistic Features	Most Memorable Elements
Bagumbayan	Long (Hours)	Detailed Action Sequences, Dialogue	Bravery in defending the homeland.
Ibingay	Short Linked	Repetitive Phrases ("Sigay," "Bingcay")	Joy of communal shell-gathering.
Kalipay	Expandable	Multi-Perspective Integration	Moment of freedom achievement.
Kinamaligan	Variable	Origin-story Structure	Revelation about Japanese soldiers.

Variations across barangays revealed context-dependent storytelling. Bagumbayan and Kalipay's extended narratives of the Japanese occupation and anti-colonial resistance reflect collective trauma that requires detailed commemoration and moral instruction. Ibingay's concise ecological parables highlight environmental stewardship through memorable vignettes rather than extended historical accounts. These structural differences reflect the specific pedagogical functions each narrative type serves within its community context.

Cross-Cutting Commonalities Across Content, Narration Shifts, and Length
Beneath the documented variations across barangays thrums a shared pulse: these legends function as more than entertainment; they constitute acts of cultural survival. Whether recounting resistance (Kalipay), ecological care (Ibingay), or unexpected humanity (Kinamaligan), all narratives employ place-based storytelling to nourish collective identity. Their narration, however fragmented by generational transmission, clings to the collective voice of "we." Their styles, whether sprawling or succinct, are honed to carry what matters most: the resilience of a people who refuse cultural erasure. In this light, every telling, every shift, every stylistic choice represents a quiet assertion against silence and forgetting.

Table 7. *Commonalities Across Content, Narration Shifts, and Length*

Dimension	Universal Patterns	Manifestations Across Barangays
Content	Historical Anchoring	Japanese/Spanish Colonial References (4/4)
	Identity Reinforcement	Barangay Name Origin Stories (3/4)
Narration	Generational Transmission	"Lola/lolo" as Primary Sources (4/4)
	Communal Authentication	"Kami san panahon" / "Amu ina an na-eksperyensiya" (4/4)
Length/Style	Mnemonic Localization	Landmark References (4/4)
	Moral Closure	Explicit Lessons (3/4)

The universal patterns identified across all barangays demonstrate that, despite contextual variations, Masbateño legends share core structural and functional characteristics. All narratives anchor themselves in specific historical moments and geographic locations, providing concrete referents that ground abstract cultural values in lived

experience. This spatial and temporal specificity serves mnemonic functions, enabling more reliable transmission across generations by attaching cultural knowledge to memorable places and events.

Generational transmission protocols remain remarkably consistent across communities, with grandparents ("lola/lolo") serving as primary knowledge keepers and authorized narrators. This intergenerational structure establishes clear lines of narrative authority while creating ritual contexts for knowledge transmission. However, this consistency also creates vulnerability: when generational transmission is disrupted by migration, urbanisation, or cultural change, entire narrative traditions risk disappearing without alternative preservation mechanisms.

Communal authentication strategies, the collective "we" voice that appears across all barangays, serve crucial functions beyond simple narrative perspective. These linguistic markers establish communal ownership of narratives, transforming individual memories into shared cultural property. This collectivization process ensures narratives serve community-wide functions rather than remaining individual reminiscences, embedding them more deeply in social structures and cultural practices.

Correlation Between Narrative Pattern and Legend Themes
Spearman's rho correlation analysis revealed significant relationships between narrative patterns and thematic content. A perfect negative correlation existed between origin and heroism themes (ρ = -1.000, p < .001), indicating functional mutual exclusivity within the narrative tradition. Conversely, origin and morality showed perfect positive correlation (ρ = 1.000, p < .001), while heroism and morality exhibited perfect negative correlation (ρ = -1.000, p < .001).

Non-significant but theoretically notable relationships included a strong negative correlation between linear and episodic narratives (ρ = -0.806, p = 0.100) and a moderate positive correlation between linear patterns and origin themes (ρ = 0.761, p = 0.135), as seen in Table 8.

Table 8. *Significant Correlation in Narrative Patterns Across Legend Themes (Jamovi Version 2.3.28)*

		Linear	Episodic	Circular	Origin	Heroism	Morality
Linear	Spearman's rho	—					
	df	—					
	p-value	—					
Episodic	Spearman's rho	-0.806	—				
	df	3	—				
	p-value	0.100	—				
Circular	Spearman's rho	0.306	-0.806	—			
	df	3	3	—			
	p-value	0.617	0.100	—			
Origin	Spearman's rho	0.761	-0.304	-0.304	—		
	df	3	3	3	—		
	p-value	0.135	0.619	0.619	—		
Heroism	Spearman's rho	-0.761	0.304	0.304	-1.000***	—	
	df	3	3	3	3	—	
	p-value	0.135	0.619	0.619	<.001	—	
Morality	Spearman's rho	0.761	-0.304	-0.304	1.000***	-1.000***	—
	df	3	3	3	3	3	—
	p-value	0.135	0.619	0.619	<.001	<.001	—

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

The perfect negative correlation between origin and heroism themes represents the most theoretically significant finding, indicating these narrative categories serve entirely different functions within Masbateño cultural transmission. Origin narratives explain how places, names, or customs came to be, employing etiological structures that emphasize continuity and rootedness. Heroism narratives focus on exemplary individuals and their actions during critical historical moments, employing biographical structures that emphasize agency and

transformation. This functional separation suggests that Masbateño communities have developed a sophisticated taxonomy for organizing cultural knowledge, with different narrative types deployed for distinct pedagogical purposes.

The perfect positive correlation between origin and morality themes indicates these functions regularly coexist within the same narratives. Origin stories in Masbateño tradition explain how things came to be; they simultaneously encode moral lessons about proper behavior, community values, and ethical principles. This finding aligns with broader folklore scholarship, which documents how etiological narratives often serve dual functions of explanation and moral instruction (Bascom, 1965).

These correlations, while statistically significant, must be interpreted within the study's limitations. With n = 25, this study has adequate power (.80) to detect large effect sizes ($\rho \geq .50$) but insufficient power to detect smaller effects. The perfect correlations ($\rho = \pm 1.000$) suggest either genuine structural constraints in the narrative tradition or potential artefacts of the small sample size and specific communities studied. Future research should employ larger samples to validate these patterns and detect more nuanced relationships between narrative variables.

The moderate negative relationship between linear and episodic patterns ($\rho = -0.806$, p = 0.100), though not reaching conventional statistical significance, suggests these represent alternative organizational strategies rather than complementary approaches. Storytellers appear to choose between linear chronological organization and episodic, thematic organization based on narrative content and pedagogical goals, rather than combining these structures within individual narratives.

Generational erosion patterns mirror Chigwada and Ngulube's (2024) findings on narrative evolution influenced by emotional and social biases. The simplification of trauma-laden accounts by younger storytellers particularly threatens cultural memory preservation. The complete negative correlation between origin and heroism themes indicates narrative compartmentalization distinctive to the Masbateño narrative tradition, privileging regional demands for cultural transfer over universal narrative functions identified by Propp (1928/1968).

Cultural Preservation Framework: Controlled Shift Narration
In light of documented evidence of generational erosion, this study proposes the Controlled Shift Narration (CSN) framework as a community-based approach to preserving oral tradition while accommodating inevitable generational evolution. CSN addresses narrative evolution through three integrated mechanisms that work synergistically to mitigate unintentional distortion while maintaining cultural authenticity.

Three Integrated Mechanisms:
1. *Perspective Alignment* - balances authenticity and accessibility by strategically managing narrative voice across generations rather than insisting on rigid first-person narration (which younger generations cannot authentically maintain for events they did not witness). CSN establishes protocols for intentional perspective shifts that preserve emotional resonance and cultural authority. Elder storytellers maintain a first-person voice for their direct experiences while explicitly marking transitions to third-person for events they learned from previous generations. This transparent marking of epistemic distance maintains narrative integrity while modelling appropriate transmission protocols for younger learners. Younger storytellers are trained to use a collective "we" voice for community-wide experiences and clearly attributed third-person reporting ("as told by lola/lolo/tiyo/tiya") for historical events, maintaining a connection to narrative authority while acknowledging their position in the transmission chain.

2. *Linguistic Anchoring* - preserves crucial vernacular vocabulary that functions as mnemonic and cultural markers. Terms like "goma" (referring to the bulletproof hero figure), "bingcay" (the specific shells central to Ibingay narratives), and "kamalig" (the house type referenced in Kinamaligan origin stories) serve as more than simple descriptors; they encode complex cultural concepts, historical memories, and community-specific knowledge that cannot be adequately translated into standard Filipino or English. CSN protocols require that these key vernacular terms be retained across all retellings, with explicit teaching of their full cultural meanings to younger generations. When narratives are documented in written or digital formats, these terms are annotated with contextual explanations, ensuring that future generations can access their full semantic range even if everyday usage declines.

3. *Pedagogical Integration* - explicitly connects story elements to teachable values, making transparent the cultural knowledge encoded within narratives. Traditional oral transmission often relies on implicit cultural understanding, with moral lessons and historical significance conveyed through context rather than explicit statement. However, as cultural context erodes through modernization and generational change, implicit meanings risk being lost. CSN addresses this vulnerability by training storytellers to articulate explicitly (in educational contexts) the cultural values, historical significance, and community identity functions that narratives serve, while maintaining aesthetic integrity in performance contexts. This dual-mode approach, implicit cultural encoding in traditional storytelling contexts and explicit pedagogical framing in educational settings, ensures the transmission of cultural knowledge even when traditional contexts of implicit socialization become less available.

Implementation of Controlled Shift Narration

CSN implementation involves both community-based protocols and digital support mechanisms that work in concert to preserve narratives while respecting the living, evolving nature of oral tradition. Community-based implementation begins with elder storyteller workshops, where experienced narrators learn to explicitly mark perspective shifts, identify key vernacular terms to preserve, and articulate the cultural values embedded in their narratives. These workshops create opportunities for intergenerational transmission, with elders mentoring younger community members in storytelling practices while younger participants contribute technological skills for documentation and digital preservation.

Youth storytelling circles provide structured contexts for younger generations to practice retelling under elder guidance, with constructive feedback focused on preserving perspective authenticity, maintaining linguistic anchors, and accurately conveying cultural lessons. These circles function as both learning environments and performance contexts, maintaining the social dimensions of oral tradition while providing scaffolding for skill development.

Digital implementation leverages technology to support rather than replace oral transmission. Dynamic annotation of transcripts allows key terms, perspective shifts, and cultural context to be documented without disrupting narrative flow. Digital platforms can present narratives in layers: a surface layer preserving the storyteller's original language and structure, annotation layers providing cultural context and linguistic explanations, and comparative layers showing how different storytellers or generations render the same narrative, making evolution visible and subject to community reflection.

Retelling comparison tools enable systematic analysis of elder and youth versions, identifying where simplification or distortion occurs and targeting intervention efforts. Rather than viewing change as inherently harmful, these tools help communities distinguish between natural evolution (adaptation to new contexts while preserving core meanings) and erosion (loss of cultural content without replacement or adaptation). Educational integration embeds these narratives in school curricula, cultural heritage programs, and community events, ensuring regular transmission contexts beyond family settings. CSN-guided lesson plans help educators use legends to teach history, values, and cultural identity while maintaining narrative integrity and respecting community ownership of cultural knowledge.

The CSN framework mitigates narrative distortion by teaching storytellers to maintain perspectival integrity while adapting narrative style to contemporary contexts. Unlike preservation approaches that attempt to freeze narratives in static forms or laissez-faire approaches that allow unchecked erosion, CSN provides structured guidance for intentional adaptation. This guided evolution acknowledges that oral traditions have always changed across time and space. The innovation lies in making that evolution conscious, community-directed, and aligned with cultural preservation goals.

Theoretical Positioning of Controlled Shift Narration

The Controlled Shift Narration framework builds upon and extends existing folklore preservation theories while addressing gaps in practical implementation. Drawing from Vansina's (1985) recognition of oral tradition as simultaneously stable and dynamic, CSN provides concrete mechanisms for managing this tension. Where Vansina documented transmission processes, CSN intervenes in those processes with community-directed protocols that reduce unintentional distortion while preserving adaptive capacity.

CSN extends Propp's (1928/1968) structural analysis by recognizing that narrative functions can be preserved

even when surface elements change. The framework identifies which structural elements require rigid preservation (key vernacular terms, perspective authenticity, core thematic content) versus which elements can adapt (narrative length, stylistic features, contextual framing) without compromising cultural authenticity. This selective preservation approach proves more sustainable than attempts at comprehensive freezing of all narrative elements.

The framework also addresses contemporary challenges in folklore preservation identified by recent scholarship. Chigwada and Ngulube (2024) document how digital technologies can both support and threaten oral traditions. CSN navigates this challenge by positioning digital tools as supplements to, not replacements for, living oral transmission. Technology serves documentation, analysis, and educational support functions while community-based storytelling practices remain the primary transmission mechanism.

Community ownership constitutes the foundational principle of CSN implementation. Unlike preservation models that extract narratives from communities for archival storage, CSN maintains community control throughout the process. Communities determine which narratives to preserve as a top priority, which adaptations remain acceptable, and how external parties may use documented materials. This ownership model recognises that oral traditions are not merely cultural data but a living heritage with ongoing significance for community identity and social cohesion.

Conclusion

This exploratory study provides initial insights into narrative patterns in Masbateño urban legends, documenting a clear preference for linear storytelling structures (M = 2.8, SD = 0.84) and human-centred themes that prioritize historical experience over supernatural or mythological frameworks. The finding that origin and heroism narratives demonstrate a perfect negative correlation (ρ = -1.000, p < .001) reveals a sophisticated cultural taxonomy in which different narrative types serve distinct functions within the community's knowledge organization system. This pattern suggests that Masbateño communities have developed specialised narrative categories for different pedagogical purposes: origin stories to explain cultural continuity and moral foundations, and heroism narratives to exemplify values and commemorate historical agency.

Cross-barangay analysis revealed significant contextual variation in narrative content, style, and length, demonstrating the dynamic nature of oral cultural transmission. Bagumbayan and Kalipay's extended war narratives contrast sharply with Ibingay's concise ecological parables, yet both patterns serve community-specific preservation needs shaped by local history and geography. These variations validate Vansina's (1985) model of oral tradition as simultaneously stable and adaptive, maintaining core cultural content while flexibly responding to local contexts. The documented generational erosion patterns, in which younger storytellers systematically simplify narratives, shift from first-person to third-person perspectives, and omit cultural details, represent the most urgent finding for preservation efforts. Three-quarters of elder participants reported observing this erosion within their own families, indicating a widespread phenomenon threatening the preservation of cultural memory. This erosion appears particularly acute for trauma-laden narratives (Japanese occupation, colonial resistance), while positive communal narratives (Ibingay's environmental stories) demonstrate greater transmission fidelity.

In response to these preservation challenges, this study developed the Controlled Shift Narration framework, which represents a novel contribution to folklore preservation methodology. Unlike static documentation approaches that attempt to freeze narratives or passive observation approaches that allow unchecked erosion, CSN provides structured community-based protocols for intentional narrative evolution. The framework's three integrated mechanisms: Perspective Alignment, Linguistic Anchoring, and Pedagogical Integration, directly connect to the observed narrative patterns. The prevalence of linear narration informed CSN's emphasis on maintaining temporal authenticity and clear perspective marking. The perfect correlation between origin and morality themes guided CSN's pedagogical integration protocols, which preserve the dual instructional functions these narratives serve. The documented generational erosion in perspective shifts has shaped CSN's mechanisms for aligning perspectives, which provide younger storytellers with acceptable alternatives to inauthentic first-person narration.

The study contributes to Philippine folklore scholarship by providing a systematic analysis of a previously understudied regional tradition. Masbate's position at the intersection of Tagalog, Bicolano, and Cebuano cultural zones makes these findings relevant beyond regional boundaries, potentially informing preservation efforts in

other transitional cultural zones throughout the archipelago. The methodological innovation of integrating AI-assisted analysis (Gemini 2.5 Pro) with traditional folklore methods demonstrates potential for technological support of cultural preservation while maintaining human expert judgment as the primary analytical authority.

Contributions of Authors

Funding

Conflict of Interests

Acknowledgment

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