

Bidayuh lens:

Living as a Bidayuh in Today's World



**Edited by
Su-Hie Ting
Florence Gilliam Kayad**

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3

Narrative Structure of Shün Nyamba Nang, A Collection of Bidayuh Biatah Folk Tales

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Introduction

Folk tale is one of the most common types of oral folk narratives, comprising fairytales, myths and legends which is told orally and passed from one generation to the next (Pham, 2016). Folk tales typically do not have a single author or owner; therefore, it can be changed or adapted from time to time according to what is remembered and told by the storyteller. Thus, it is common to find many variations of the same stories.

Folk tales contain the beliefs, values, culture, and history of a particular community. Armstrong (1996) stated that folk tales can be regarded as the cultural representation of a community. According to Shafei (2002), folk tale are one of the means to preserve culture and identity (Harrison, 2007; Pedersen, 1992).

Folk tales were used in the olden days as a means of education as well as entertainment. This was how important values, beliefs and lessons were passed down and taught to the younger generation. Folk tales transmit important cultural knowledge which guide and influence the lives of the members of the community (Songsin, as cited in Priwan, 2010). According to Satawetin (as cited in Priwan, 2010), the important features of folklore are:

1. it is an old story (from previous generations);
2. it is in the form of a prose;
3. it is told or transmitted orally;
4. it reflects the perception and beliefs of the locals; and
5. it can be a true story that includes moral perceptions.

The plot of a story is a sequence of events, which reflects the train of thought of the storyteller. The plot represents the narrative structure which unfolds over time. Typically, the plot of a story consists of a beginning, a middle and an end in Aristotelian terms. Labov (1972, 1997) isolated the elements of oral narratives and connected them to how language works between people. Labov's (1972, 1997) framework of narrative structures consists of six elements: Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Resolution and Coda. These elements of the narrative structure have specific functions as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Elements of narrative structure

Narrative structure	Elements	Functions
Beginning	Abstract	Signals that the story is about to begin and draws attention from audience
	Orientation	Helps identify time, place, persons, activity, and situation of the story.
Middle	Complicating Action	Provides the “what happened” element in the story. It is the main narrative category.
End	Evaluation	Functions to make the point of the story clear.
	Resolution	Recapitulates the final key event of the story.
	Coda	Signals that the story has ended and brings audience back to the point at which he/she entered the narrative.

(Source: Simpson, 2005)

A reader or listener would naturally expect these elements when they read or listen to narratives and should any element be missing, the story would be regarded as incomplete (Watson, 1973).

Telling stories or narrating seems to be a universal need (Rosen, 1988) and several scholars have proposed that the general structures and functions of narratives are universal as well (Johnstone, 2001). However, Flannery (2004) and Georgakopoulou and Goutsos (1997) stated that narratives are socially and culturally bounded; thus, the structures of these narratives may differ or at least contain some form of differences based on their social or cultural origin. People of different cultures may have different styles and ways of telling stories. This is to ensure that people of that community understand the story and indirectly this satisfies their expectations.

Research on storytelling in the United States found that there are differences in the purpose and the way stories are being told in different parts of the country. Stories told in the Southern part of the United States contain more digression and has an important socialisation function (Davies, 2008). On the other hand, storytelling in the Midwestern part of the United States is realistic and very detailed, full of information to establish reliability of the stories (Johnstone, 1990). Heath (1993) spent many years in two working class textile mill communities in the central area of the Piedmont region in the Carolinas. These communities were only six miles apart in location, but had different functions in their storytelling. In Roadville, the storytelling sessions were meant for entertainment as well as to convey moral lessons, whereas the storytelling in Trackton focused more on conflicts and resolving them (Heath, 1993).

Propp (1968), a Russian scholar who studied the basic structural elements of folk tales, found that while the characters and details of the 100 Russian folk tales differ, there was a similarity in the structure in the folk tales. In other words, the folk tales unfold in certain predictable ways, and include certain types of actions.

Nigerian folk tales have multiple instances of Conflicting Action and Resolution, as found by Ewata, Oyebade, and Onwu (2018) using Labov's (1972) framework. The researchers also found that Nigerian folk tales have followed the typical progression of narrative texts as outlined by Labov (1972). However, there were two additional elements of Finis and Moral in the ending of the folk tales.

Most of the previous studies on folk tales were conducted in other countries. There is a lack of research on local folk tales. Thus, the present study focussed on the narrative structure of Bidayuh folk tales to see whether the structure adheres to Labov's (1972) framework.

The Bidayuh

The Bidayuh community is one of the 27 identified ethnic groups in Sarawak. The Bidayuh make up 8% of the total population of Sarawak and is considered a diverse ethnic group, consisting of six main dialectal groups based on the division of their language (Bongarra, Kayad, & Campbell, 2017). The six Bidayuh dialectal groups are Biatah, Bau-Jagoi, Bukar-Sadong, Tringgus/Sembaan, Salako and Rara.

Within the Bidayuh community, oral folk narratives are a common method used by the people to pass on knowledge as well as to entertain (Ridu, Jitab, & Noeb, 2001). Bidayuh oral folk narratives can be divided into three types which are *dondan* (legends and fables), *sasia* (ethnohistory) and *susud toga* (genealogy) (Ridu, Jitab, & Noeb, 2001). Due to modernisation, folk tales are becoming forgotten by the Bidayuh community themselves. A study by Campbell, Chuah and Ting (2012) revealed that more than 60% of younger Bidayuhs were unaware of the Bidayuh folk tales, having little knowledge of these folk tales as they were not exposed to the stories by the elders.

The Study

Our study involved an analysis of the narrative structure of folk tales of the Bidayuh Biatah in Sarawak. These folk tales or *dundaan* were taken from Howes' (1952) compilation. His initiatives to preserve Bidayuh oral folk narratives began with collecting the *dundaan* from elders of the Biatah group from the areas of Kuab, Bangoh, Mambong and Annah in Padawan. Howes (1952) collected 45 *dundaan* and compiled them in a book entitled "*Shŭn Nyamba Nang: A Collection of Land Dayak Stories*", which basically translates to "As Told by the Elders: A Collection of Land Dayak Stories".

In the book, there are seven sections on folk tales or *dundaan* and one section on poetry or *pantun*. In each section, there are between one to 15 *dundaan*. For the purpose of this study, 25 *dundaan* were analysed to obtain an overview of the patterns of the narrative structures.

The narrative structures of the *dundaan* of the Bidayuh Biatah in Sarawak presented in this chapter were analysed using Labov's (1972) Narrative Analysis Framework (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Labov's narrative analysis framework

	Elements	Description
1.	Abstract	Abstract is usually found in the first line of the oral narrative. It also summarises the story to give a vision of the plot. It that contains a sentence or two clauses that serves as a beginning of a narrative.
2.	Orientation	Introduces the participants to the narrative, time of its occurrence, location where it takes place and initial behaviour of participants.
3.	Complicating Action	Shows what happens to the participants. These events are usually the climax of the narrative where complication occurs and how the participants react and deal with the sudden action.
4.	Evaluation	This is the main point of the narrative. Evaluation can come in various forms; pieces of advice, life lessons, moral values etc.
5.	Resolution	Resolution is also known as the result of the action. Here, the participants of the narrative take actions to solve problems or events occurring in the previous element which is the Complicating Action.
6.	Coda	Coda brings an emotional aspect of the speaker of the narrative. Coda usually acts as a device to bring the audience of the narrative back to the present view.

Characteristics of Bidayuh *dundaan*

In this section, the characteristics of Bidayuh *dundaan* in terms of the universality of narrative structure, the recurring elements and different order of narrative elements are described.

Universality of Narrative Structure

The analysis of the 25 *dundaan* revealed the generic structure for these *dundaan* are as such:

Abstract - Orientation (Complicating Action) - **Complicating Action** (Evaluation) (Resolution) - Climax (Complicating Action) - **Resolution** (Evaluation) (Complicating Action) - Coda

The elements in bold refer to the order based on Labov's (1972) framework. The basic structure of the *dundaan* was similar to Labov's (1972) structure of a narrative, starting with the obligatory elements which were the Abstract, followed by the Orientation, and then Complicating Action and finally the Resolution, with the optional elements, Evaluation and Coda, in some *dundaan*. Out of the 25 *dundaan* analysed, only six contained the same elements in the exact order of narrative proposed by Labov (1972). The other 19 *dundaan* had additional elements and some had elements which were repeated throughout the *dundaan*.

Based on Labov's (1972) narrative analysis framework, only one-quarter of the Bidayuh Biatah *dundaan* had the generic structure that represents the universality of the order of actions in folk tales.

Recurring Elements in Bidayuh Biatah *dundaan*

The analysis revealed that several elements were repeated within the structure, particularly Complicating Action. For instance, in *dundaan Siruai Jadi Manuk Kandang*, there appeared to be a recurrence of several elements such as Complicating Action, Climax, Evaluation and Resolution.

In this *dundaan*, the element of Complicating Action occurred six times followed by Resolution with five times and Evaluation and Climax with three recurrences respectively:

Abstract - Orientation - Complicating Action - Evaluation
- Complicating Action - Climax - Resolution - Evaluation -
Complicating Action - Resolution - Evaluation - Complicating
Action - Climax - Resolution - Complicating Action - Climax -
Resolution - Complicating Action - Resolution - Coda

When these recurrences happen, it shows that within one story, there could be many conflicts happening which would lead to the eventual resolution. It also shows that one action can affect another action, leading towards several climaxes within the story. It reflects the beliefs of the Bidayuh where several different events in life can affect a person simultaneously.

Different Order of Narrative Elements

There were some instances when the order of the elements may not be as proposed by Labov (1972). For instance, in *dundaan Manuk Piit man Padi, nga Manuk Bouh man Siok*, the Complicating Action happened before the Orientation in which the characters were introduced later in the *dundaan*. This *dundaan* was the only *dundaan* in which this element occurred. Other than that, the Complicating Action also served as an ending to the narrative as it occurred after the Resolution and before the Coda which served as a reality check to the audience. The element of Complicating Action occurred three times throughout the *dundaan*.

Abstract - Complicating Action - Orientation - Complicating
Action - Climax - Resolution - Complicating Action - Coda

In this case, the first Complicating Action is told before the Orientation as a way to attract the listeners to the event of the story. Only after the listeners are engaged, then the storyteller would start introducing the characters and setting which is the Orientation.

In this *dundaan*, the Complicating Action came after the Resolution. This indicates that there is a related part of the story which is told in another story – as if there is a part 2 to the story. This Resolution-Complicating Action sequence in *dundaan* creates suspense so that the listeners will be eagerly waiting for part 2 of the story.

Basically, although the general structure may be similar to Labov's (1972), there were differences in terms of the order and repetition in the *dundaan*, particularly Complicating Action and Evaluation.

In the rest of this section, the elements of the structure will be described, namely, abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and coda.

(1) **Abstract**

An Abstract, according to Labov (1972), is a summary of the story to prepare the reader of what the story is going to be on. It is usually found in the first line of a narrative. Labov (1972) stated that to identify the Abstract element of a narrative, phrases such as “there once was”, “once upon a time”, “long, long ago”, and “once there was” were used. The analysis showed that all of the *dundaan* began with an Abstract by mentioning the time in which the *dundaan* took place. However, it was merely a vague description of the time.

In the *dundaan*, the narrative began with a phrase which either indicated the time or the person involved, for instance, to indicate time - *agi ni anu* (the was one day), *ni anu* (one day), *jaman jah* (in the past era), and *so sibungas ong* (since the beginning of the universe). As one could see, these time-indicating phrases were very ambiguous. There were also instances where the Abstract started with phrases to indicate the involvement of a person - *agi ni naan* (there was one human being), *agi daya* (one person) and *ni naan* (one person).

The most used phrase in this study to indicate Abstract was the phrase *agi ni anu* (there was one day) with nine of the *dundaan* starting with this phase, followed by *agi ni naan* (there was a human being) with six *dundaan*. The phrase of “there was one day” sent a vague message regarding the time the event happened. Considering that the *dundaan* were folk tales passed down from generation to generation, the specific time that the event occurred is unknown. Hence, narrators of *dundaan* objectified this phrase as an Abstract to begin their narrations.

(2) Orientation

The next obligatory element found in the *dundaan* is the Orientation. According to Labov (1972), the Orientation introduces the time, place and characters of the said narrative. The presence of these three characteristics is significant to provide an idea of the narrative. However, since the Abstract vaguely mentioned the time, in some of the *dundaan*, the absence of time in the Orientation is expected.

Out of the 25 *dundaan* analysed, only one *dundaan* had the complete criteria of the Orientation as listed by Labov (1972) which are time, place, and character, whereas 16 *dundaan* contained only the location of where the narrative takes place. The lack of time reference in these *dundaan* is expected since folk tales are usually events that happened at an unknown point of time in the past. Therefore, the vague time phrase, *agi ni onu*, was sufficient in this sense because the focus was more on the main story or lesson within the *dundaan*.

A folktale would have at least one character. This is definitely true in the *dundaan* analysed. Five of the *dundaan* had one main character followed by 14 *dundaan* with two main characters and the remaining six *dundaan* with three main characters. This shows that the folk tales do not have a great number of characters. This is because folk tales are usually short and simple, thus, there is no need for a lot of characters.

The characters in the *dundaan* consisted of human beings, both males and females. Three of the *dundaan* had human characters. Six *dundaan* had animals as their characters. These animals were portrayed as having human qualities and were able to talk. For instance, the *dundaan* titled *Busing nga Rimaung* translates to “Cat and Tiger” which portrayed the relationship between these two animals. One day, the cat went to the house of tiger to seek for help in its revenge against the humiliation the cat received from the dog. The cat asked for the tiger for help by training the cat in becoming fierce and menacing. In return, the cat will be of service to the tiger whenever in need. The tiger agreed and thus, training for the cat began. However, when the training was completed, the cat took off and was never found. This irked the tiger as it felt like it was betrayed. Hence, this is the reason why the tiger is still searching for the cat to this day.

The Bidayuh community has a special relationship with the animal kingdom. One of the reasons is because the residential area of the Bidayuh community is close to the natural habitats of animals. The Bidayuh community respects the animal kingdom as they believe that animals are creatures of wisdom and strength. In the *dundaan*, it showed the relationship between humans and animals and how the humans honoured the promise that has been made between them and the animals.

For example, *dundaan Badūh* told the story of a lady named Sikapir who had six children. However, all five of the older children had died and the youngest was dying. The parents were troubled until *Badūh* came along. *Badūh* healed the child and feeling immensely grateful, Sikapir and her husband made a promise to never eat *Badūh*. Hence, the community in the Bibangoh area do not eat *Badūh* to respect the promise that was made.

The human characters in the *dundaan* also interacted with spiritual beings. Back in the days when the Christian faith had not yet been introduced into the Bidayuh community, they hold animistic beliefs. The Bidayuh community also believed in the afterlife and spirited entities. In this study, there were nine *dundaan* which include supernatural theme.

The *dundaan* of *Pimanug surat ka darŭm ong* spoke of the time of civilisation in which the Lord gave letters to mankind. The Lord then ordered human races (Malays, English, Chinese, Indians and Bidayuh), to swim across the sea with their letters with them. The letters of all human races were saved except for the Bidayuh as it perished in the sea.

The *dundaan Simajag Dayung Bikuab, Marui Jadi Batuh* or “Simajag, Lady of Bikuab, Turned into Stone” speaks of a lady named Simajag from the Bikuab area who went to the foot of the hills of Sirupat to get water. When she reached the foot of the hill, it started to rain heavily, so she looked for shelter in a cave. In the cave was a rock and the rock started to hug around her body and it stopped at her neck because her necklace protected her. Her husband came in searching for her and was devastated to have found her in such condition. Her husband went to her every day since to feed her and to be with her. However, one day, she pitied her husband and asked for him to take off the necklace from her neck. As the necklace came off, Simajag completely turned into a rock.

(3) Complicating Action

The Orientation is followed by the Complicating Action of the narrative. Labov (1972) defined Complicating Action as the main story in which the narrative unfolds in which it consists of the conflict as well as the Climax of the narrative. However, because of the nature of stories in general and folk tales specifically, a prominent part of the Complicating Action is the Climax.

In this study, Complicating Action is found to be repeated in some of the *dundaan*. This is because within the story, there may be many conflicts which are resolved and each of these conflicts may or may not be related to one another. It could also be because the main character encounters several different conflicts which resulted in different Resolutions.

The Climax is part of the Complicating Action. Within the context of the *dundaan*, and folk tales in general, the Complicating

Action serves as a rising plot leading to the important point or Climax of the *dundaan*. In the *dundaan* analysed, whenever there is a Complicating Action, it would be followed by a Climax.

(4) **Evaluation**

Labov (1972) described Evaluation as an explicit or implicit purpose by providing attributes towards the narrative such as moral values or life lessons. Within the analysis of 25 Bidayuh Biatah *dundaan*, it was discovered that only five *dundaan* consists of the Evaluation element - *Buak nga Piranuk*, *Tijirak nga Payu*, *Siruai Jadi Manuk Kandang*, *Dayung Mira Anak-I Jadi Situngga* and *Batuh Bakam di Rais Bangoh*. The remaining 20 *dundaan* proceeded from the Complicating Action and the Climax to the Resolution.

The absence of Evaluation was visible in Bidayuh Biatah *dundaan* because of the way the *dundaan* was narrated did not show visible Evaluation. Instead, life lessons and moral values would have to be analysed under the linguistic aspect of semantics and pragmatics to get through the underlying message that was to be conveyed by the Bidayuh Biatah ancestors. This could also be because the Evaluations are embedded within the stories and are implicitly stated. This seemed to be a common trait in most of the *dundaan*.

(5) **Resolution**

In Labov's (1972) Narrative Framework, Resolution refers to the unfolding of a complicated issue or the important point of a narrative and follows after the Climax of the narrative. The main function of a Resolution is to bring all conflicts into control.

Resolutions are significant in the *dundaan* and can be found in several occurrences within the *dundaan* because they led to the closure of the *dundaan*. All of the *dundaan* analysed had the Resolution element in them, making it one of the obligatory elements that exist in a *dundaan*.

(6) Coda

The final element of narrative, Coda, serves as a reality breakthrough for recipients of the *dundaan* by bringing the recipients to the present time. To wrap up a narrative, a narrator uses a sentence to summarise the whole narrative. Labov (1972) classified this under the element of Coda. Coda is the summary of a narrative that brings the receiver of the narrative back into the present with the use of phrases.

Out of the 25 *dundaan* analysed, 17 *dundaan* ended with a Coda whereas the remaining nine *dundaan* ended with a Resolution. To indicate that Coda was the element used, certain common phrases used were *ngapŭi nŭg anu ati* (therefore, up till today), *ngapŭi* (therefore), *ngapŭi sabab ati* (therefore, because of this), *ngapŭi so anu anŭ* (therefore, since that day), *sabab ati* (because of this), *sabab anu* (because of that), *kan ata* (if we), *amai kan* (because if), *yuh inu* (yes), *ka so purug-i* (then all of them) and *guna anŭ* (that use). The most common phrases to indicate Coda were *ngapŭi nŭg anu ati* and *ngapŭi* with four *dundaan* respectively. The Bidayuh Biatah community considers the word *ngapŭi* as a polite term. Provided below is an excerpt from *dundaan Pimanŭg Surat ka Darŭm Ong* which shows an example of Coda.

Ngapŭi sabab ati Daya Bidayŭh dŭh biyŭn surat nŭg anu ati, shŭn nyamba nang (Therefore because of this, the Bidayuh people does not have any letters today, as the elders said).

The main purpose of the Coda is to relate the story to the present and therefore listeners can understand why certain things happen and why the Bidayuh believe in certain ideas and concepts. In this element, the storyteller will find ways to relate the stories to the recipient's life experiences and values.

Conclusion

This study revealed that the Bidayuh Biatah *dundaan* has a general narrative structure which is similar to Labov's (1972) proposed narrative structure which includes Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Climax, Resolution and Coda. However, in some of the *dundaan* analysed, it was discovered that some elements were either repeated throughout the *dundaan* or missing. Elements that were often repeated were the Complicating Action, Climax and Resolution while elements that could be considered as optional were the Evaluation and Coda.

Our analysis revealed that while there is universality in the Bidayuh Biatah *dundaan* narrative structures, there is also uniqueness. Koven (2004) stated that in different cultures around the world, there would tend to be different rules, traditions and patterns which may or may not be exclusive to a particular cultural group. This could be seen in the narrative structures of the Bidayuh folk tales. Although there maybe similarities, especially in terms of the obligatory elements, there are variations in terms of the occurrences and placements of some of the elements.

Oral folk narratives, folk tales included, are regarded as an intangible cultural heritage which needs to be preserved because transmission relies on oral means. The effort to document these oral folk narratives is important for preserving the Bidayuh identity that is captured in the stories. The oral folk narratives can also shape the Bidayuh outlook on life. In this sense, narratives can be a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge, language and art, especially to the next generation. Oral folk narratives are used to educate, entertain and provide shared outlooks on life.

Appreciating cultural heritage, especially intangible ones in the form of oral folk narratives helps people to understand their cultural identity and background. This cultural identity helps members of an ethnic group to understand themselves better as individuals because it is basically a part of who they are.

This study of the narrative structures of the Bidayuh Biatah *dundaan* found in *Shün Nyamba Nang* acts as a steppingstone for future research on the Bidayuh Biatah community. There is still a lot to be

explored in this area as well as on the folk tales of the other Bidayuh subgroups. It is important to document these stories to keep the heritage of the Bidayuh community alive.

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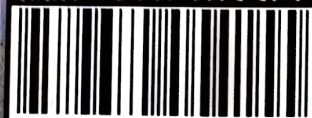
Bidayuh lens:

Living as a Bidayuh in Today's World

This book showcases various aspects of the Bidayuh culture beyond the oft-highlighted visible tangible artifacts. The Bidayuh Lens unravels the intangible cultural heritage of a wonderful unique group living in Sarawak and offers a glimpse of the lens through which the modern Bidayuh sees the world. This book discloses the knowledge that is currently available to a select few on the significance of the different types and ways Bidayuh celebrate Gawai. The book explains the intellectuality and relevance of the old and traditional Bidayuh proverbs in the modern world today. This book also deepens appreciation for the meanings of the much-treasured Bidayuh folktales which, surprisingly or not surprisingly (depending on personal views), share features with oral traditions in other parts of the world. Ethnic stereotypes exist in any society and the Bidayuh lens unveils the changing (and the fixed) representation of the Bidayuh people in newspapers and tourism materials. The authors invite you to take the journey to see the Bidayuh with different eyes.



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