Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences
www.pjlss.edu.pk

https://doi.org/10.57239/PJLSS-2026-24.1.0033

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Prosodic Features in Yakan Oral Narratives: A Phenomenological Study of Intonation, Rhythm, and Stress Patterns of Across Three Municipalities in Basilan, Philippines

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: Jan 10, 2026

Accepted: Feb 20, 2026

Keywords

Prosody
Intonation
Oral Narratives
Yakan Language
Phenomenology
Indigenous Knowledge
Suprasegmental Features
Cultural Preservation
Basilan

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study examines how twelve master Yakan storytellers (pag-ilay) aged 50-72 years experience and utilize prosodic features—pitch, rhythm, stress, and tempo—in oral narratives across Sumisip, Lantawan, and Maluso municipalities in Basilan Province. Through in-depth interviews and performance analysis of traditional genres (kissa, pabasul, tarasul), the research identified five major themes: prosodic features as geographic identity markers, emotional expressivity through pitch and tempo modulation, pedagogical functions facilitating memorization, spiritual dimensions in sacred narratives, and declining prosodic competence among youth. Participants characterized distinct municipal prosodies as "gentle waves" (Sumisip), "sharp peaks" (Lantawan), and "steady streams" (Maluso), emphasizing that prosody represents the nyawa (soul/breath) distinguishing authentic performance from mere recitation. Storytellers urgently reported that younger generations memorize texts but perform with "flat" or "borrowed" prosody lacking cultural authenticity, attributing this decline to absent immersive apprenticeship contexts, dominance of written/digital media, educational standardization, and eroded performance occasions. The study recommends establishing bale' tulay (storytelling houses) for intergenerational transmission, developing audio-annotated materials, creating mentorship programs, integrating prosodic awareness into Mother Tongue-Based education, and urgently documenting elder repertoires. This research reveals prosody as embodied cultural knowledge requiring immediate preservation action before irretrievable loss.

INTRODUCTION

Prosody—encompassing the suprasegmental features of speech such as pitch, rhythm, stress, and tempo—represents a fundamental dimension of human language that conveys meaning far beyond the literal content of words (Ladd, 2008). While segmental phonology focuses on individual consonants and vowels, prosodic phonology examines how these segments organize into larger structures like syllables, feet, and intonational phrases, each exhibiting distinctive patterns of prominence, duration, and pitch movement. Contemporary linguistic theory recognizes prosody as a multifaceted phenomenon operating simultaneously across phonological, semantic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic domains, encoding everything from grammatical structure and information packaging to speaker attitudes, emotional states, and social identities. Cross-linguistic research reveals remarkable diversity in prosodic systems, with languages employing lexical tone to distinguish word meanings, stress-accent systems with contrastive syllable prominence, or phrase-level intonational organization, each reflecting different principles for mapping prosodic form to communicative function (Jun, 2005).

The study of prosody in oral literature offers particularly rich opportunities for linguistic investigation because narrative performance inherently foregrounds prosodic resources as aesthetic and rhetorical devices. Unlike spontaneous conversation where prosody often operates semi-automatically below conscious awareness, oral literary performance involves deliberate manipulation of prosodic parameters to achieve artistic effects, convey characterization, mark narrative structure, and engage audiences emotionally. Tedlock (1971) pioneered the recognition that oral narratives deploy prosodic features to distinguish narrative voices, signal speech types, mark episode boundaries, build dramatic tension, and cue audience participation, observing that "the voice that comes out of the text is not necessarily the voice that went into it"—emphasizing that written transcriptions inevitably efface the prosodic dimensions essential to oral performance (p. 114). This observation motivated the development of ethnopoetic transcription methods attempting to represent prosodic features through typography and notation, though such approaches only partially capture the richness of prosodic variation in live performance. Sherzer (1990) further demonstrated that oral literary traditions develop conventionalized prosodic patterns transmitted across generations that index genre membership and signal performance competence, with communities evaluating performers partly on prosodic authenticity. These foundational studies establish that prosodic features are not mere embellishments to oral narratives but constitute essential dimensions of their aesthetic structure, cultural meaning, and communicative effectiveness.

Phenomenological investigation of prosody offers unique insights into how suprasegmental features are experienced, conceptualized, and manipulated by speakers themselves. Rather than treating prosody as merely objective acoustic reality describable through phonetic measurements, phenomenological approaches examine how prosody is lived and understood from language users' perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). This orientation recognizes that prosodic competence involves not just producing and perceiving acoustic patterns but cultivating embodied sensibilities, aesthetic judgments, and cultural knowledge about appropriate prosodic expression across contexts. Merleau-Ponty's (1962) philosophy of embodiment provides theoretical foundations for understanding prosody as lived experience, emphasizing that speech is fundamentally bodily activity integrating respiration, phonation, articulation, and gesture into coordinated performance. From this perspective, prosodic features are not merely acoustic properties but dimensions of embodied intentionality through which speakers project meaning and engage with others, with learning prosodic patterns involving developing bodily dispositions, cultivating sensory attunement to subtle variations, and acquiring practical knowledge that resists explicit codification. Csordas (1990) extended these insights within anthropological contexts, articulating how embodied cultural knowledge manifests in linguistic practices including prosodic variation, demonstrating that prosody represents culturally shaped bodily techniques rather than universal or purely biological phenomena. This phenomenological and embodied perspective aligns with indigenous epistemologies that view language as inseparable from bodily experience and cultural practice, making it particularly appropriate for studying oral traditions in indigenous communities where prosodic knowledge is transmitted through apprenticeship and immersion rather than formal instruction.

The Yakan language and its oral literary traditions provide an exemplary context for investigating prosody from phenomenological and sociolinguistic perspectives. The Yakan people, indigenous to Basilan Island in the southern Philippines, represent one of thirteen ethnolinguistic Moro groups who have maintained rich oral narrative traditions transmitted through formalized performance practices encompassing diverse genres: *kissa* (historical narratives), *pabasul* (didactic tales), *lulay* (lullaby stories), *tarasul* (poetic dialogues), and *tigmo* (riddles). Each genre exhibits characteristic prosodic features marking generic identity and performance competence, with skilled storytellers, known as *pag-ilay*, demonstrating mastery of genre-specific conventions that distinguish authentic performance from mere recitation. Traditional performance occurred in specific social contexts—evening gatherings during *tennun* (weaving sessions), wedding ceremonies, religious celebrations (*pagtammat*), and community festivals—providing natural occasions for prosodic socialization where younger members absorbed patterns through extended exposure and gradual participation. These immersive apprenticeship contexts facilitated the transmission of prosodic knowledge as embodied cultural competence that resists reduction to

explicit rules or formal instruction. However, contemporary transformations including rapid urbanization, population migration, mass education systems prioritizing literacy and standardized language varieties, electronic entertainment displacing traditional performance occasions, and nuclear family structures replacing extended kin networks threaten these transmission contexts, creating urgent need for documentation before elder storytellers' embodied knowledge is irretrievably lost (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006).

Despite Yakan's importance as an Austronesian language with approximately 130,000 to 180,000 speakers concentrated in Basilan Province, Zamboanga Peninsula, and diaspora communities, linguistic documentation remains severely limited, particularly regarding prosodic features. Existing scholarship, most notably Behrens' (2002) *Yakan-English Dictionary*, focuses primarily on segmental phonology, morphology, and lexical semantics, providing minimal attention to suprasegmental phenomena. No systematic study has examined prosodic variation across Yakan-speaking communities or investigated prosody's functions in oral narrative performance from performers' experiential perspectives. This gap reflects broader patterns in Philippine linguistics where prosodic research lags significantly behind other domains, with most linguistic work on Philippine languages concentrating on morphosyntactic complexity rather than prosodic organization (Himmelmann, 2006). The absence of prosodic documentation is particularly problematic for oral literary traditions where prosodic features constitute primary aesthetic substance and where transmission depends on live modeling rather than written representation. As Florey (2011) observed in her analysis of endangered Austronesian languages, prosodic features are often among the first elements lost during language shift and attrition, as younger speakers may maintain lexical and basic grammatical knowledge while losing nuanced prosodic competence that distinguishes culturally authentic performance from mechanical reproduction.

This study addresses these critical gaps through qualitative phenomenological investigation of how Yakan storytellers experience, conceptualize, and manipulate prosodic features in oral narrative performance. Adopting an emic approach consistent with linguistic anthropological methods (Duranti, 1997; Hymes, 1972), the research seeks to understand prosody from storytellers' own perspectives, recognizing prosodic knowledge as fundamentally practical knowledge accessible through performers' metalinguistic commentary, evaluative judgments, and experiential descriptions rather than purely through acoustic analysis. By focusing on three municipalities in Basilan Province—Sumisip, Lantawan, and Maluso—representing different points along an urbanization-isolation continuum and exhibiting distinct sociolinguistic profiles, the research illuminates how social, cultural, geographic, and environmental factors shape prosodic patterns while simultaneously assessing current vitality of prosodic traditions and documenting elder knowledge before it disappears. This geographic sampling strategy enables examination of prosodic variation as socially meaningful differentiation indexing community identity and cultural values, rather than treating prosodic patterns as uniform across all Yakan speakers.

The urgency of this research extends beyond academic linguistics to encompass cultural preservation and language revitalization imperatives. As Ball (2011) emphasized in UNESCO's framework for mother tongue-based multilingual education, preserving prosodic features of oral narratives is essential for maintaining cultural knowledge transmission systems and supporting educational approaches that honor indigenous linguistic and cultural practices. The documentation of elder storytellers' prosodic repertoires through high-quality audio recording, combined with their metalinguistic knowledge captured through phenomenological interviews, creates archival resources that can support future language maintenance efforts, curriculum development for mother tongue-based education, and community-based cultural revitalization initiatives. Moreover, by foregrounding storytellers' own voices, perspectives, and expertise, this research enacts ethical principles of collaborative, community-engaged scholarship that positions indigenous knowledge holders as authorities rather than merely research subjects (Woodbury, 2011).

This phenomenological study thus contributes to multiple scholarly conversations and practical objectives. It advances theoretical understanding of prosody as embodied cultural knowledge requiring phenomenological investigation rather than purely acoustic analysis. It documents endangered prosodic patterns in an understudied Austronesian language, contributing to

typological knowledge of prosodic diversity. It provides methodological insights into effective approaches for documenting suprasegmental features of oral literary traditions through integration of performance recording, stimulated recall protocols, and ethnographic observation. It illuminates sociolinguistic processes of prosodic variation, change, and endangerment in contexts of rapid social transformation. And it creates practical resources supporting language maintenance and cultural revitalization efforts in Yakan communities. By examining how master storytellers conceptualize prosody not as acoustic phenomenon but as *nyawa*—the soul, breath, and life-force of narrative—this research reveals dimensions of linguistic knowledge that conventional linguistic frameworks often overlook, demonstrating that for oral literary traditions, prosodic features may constitute the very essence of cultural and aesthetic authenticity.

Objectives of the Study

This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of Yakan traditional storytellers regarding prosodic features in oral narratives across three municipalities in Basilan Province: Sumisip, Lantawan, and Maluso. Specifically, this research seeks to:

1. Describe how Yakan storytellers experience, understand, and manipulate prosodic features (pitch, rhythm, stress, tempo) in oral narrative performance
2. Identify the functions and meanings storytellers attribute to prosodic variation across narrative genres and geographic locations
3. Examine storytellers' perspectives on prosodic transmission, change, and endangerment in contemporary Yakan communities

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore Yakan storytellers' lived experiences with prosodic features in oral narrative performance, recognizing prosodic competence as embodied practical knowledge accessible through performers' experiential descriptions, metalinguistic commentary, and performance practices. Data collection occurred over six months (March-August 2025) across three purposively selected Basilan Province municipalities representing diverse sociolinguistic profiles along an urbanization-isolation continuum—Sumisip (moderate urbanization, high multilingualism), Lantawan (agricultural, moderate traditional practice preservation), and Maluso (most isolated and traditional)—and involved twelve master storytellers (ages 50-72, equal gender distribution, four per municipality) selected through snowball sampling based on community recognition, extensive repertoires, and active practice. The researcher, a native Yakan speaker with linguistic training, collected data through three integrated methods: in-depth semi-structured interviews (90-150 minutes) covering biographical experiences, prosodic awareness, variation, and transmission challenges; 36 recorded narrative performances across genres (18.6 hours total) followed by stimulated recall protocols where participants commented on their prosodic choices; and participant observation at six cultural events documenting performance contexts and community evaluations. Data analysis followed Moustakas' phenomenological procedures through seven iterative stages—epoché (bracketing assumptions), phenomenological reduction, horizonalization (312 non-repetitive significant statements from 847 initial statements), clustering into meaning units (14 core themes under five superordinate themes), textural description (the "what"), structural description (the "how"), and synthesis into composite descriptions. Table 1 below shows the distribution of the participants.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Characteristics

Pseudonym	Location	Age	Gender	Years as Storyteller	Primary Genres	Languages	Education
Hja Nura	Sumisip	58	F	32	Pabasul, Lulay	Y, (C), (T)	Grade 8
Imam Karim	Sumisip	65	M	41	Kissa, Tarasul	Y, (C), (T)	High school graduate
Inang Fatima	Sumisip	52	F	28	Lulay, Tigmo	Y, (C)	Grade 6
Bapa' Rashid	Sumisip	67	M	45	Tarasul, Kissa	Y, (C), (T),	College (2 years)

						(E)	
Hja Amina	Lantawan	61	F	36	Pabasul, Kissa	Y	Grade 5
Datu Jamal	Lantawan	69	M	48	Kissa, Tarasul	Y, (C)	Grade 4
Inang Halima	Lantawan	54	F	30	Lulay, Pabasul	Y, (C)	Grade 7
Bapa' Usman	Lantawan	63	M	39	Tarasul, Tigmo	Y, (C)	Elementary graduate
Hja Zaynab	Maluso	68	F	44	Pabasul, Kissa	Y	No formal education
Panglima Said	Maluso	72	M	52	Kissa, Tarasul	Y, (C)	Grade 3
Inang Maryam	Maluso	56	F	34	Lulay, Pabasul	Y, (T)	Grade 4
Bapa' Ibrahim	Maluso	66	M	43	Tarasul, Kissa	Y	Grade 5

***Note**: Languages: Y = Yakan, C = Chavacano, T = Tagalog, E = English; (C) indicates minimal passive competence*

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Objective 1: Experiencing and Manipulating Prosody

The phenomenological analysis revealed five superordinate themes describing the essence of storytellers' experiences with prosody in oral narrative performance. Each theme encompasses multiple subthemes with rich experiential descriptions drawn from participants' own accounts.

Theme 1: Prosody as *Nyawa* (Soul/Breath) of Narrative

All twelve participants described prosody using metaphors emphasizing its fundamental necessity for authentic narrative performance. The most frequent metaphor equated prosody with *nyawa* (soul, breath, life-force), suggesting that narrative texts without appropriate prosody remain lifeless. Hadja Nura (Sumisip) explained: "The words are like the body, but the *tingog* [sound/tone], the way you speak them, the up and down, the fast and slow—that is the *nyawa*. Without it, the story is dead. It's like a person without breath. You can have all the words memorized perfectly, but if you don't have the *nyawa*, it's nothing. It doesn't touch the heart." This conceptualization positions prosody not as decoration added to content but as the animating principle transforming linguistic material into meaningful aesthetic experience.

Participants elaborated this theme by describing how prosody enables emotional connection between storyteller and audience. Imam Karim (Sumisip) stated: "When I tell *kissa* about our ancestors, if I just say the words flat, people's minds wander. But when I give it the right *tingog*, when I let my voice rise and fall like waves, when I slow down at the important parts, suddenly everyone is listening. They feel what the ancestors felt. The prosody—we call it *tunu* [melodic contour]—that's what carries the feeling from my heart to their hearts." This description emphasizes prosody's affective communicative function, serving as the primary channel for emotional transmission in oral performance. Multiple participants described prosody as "the bridge" or "the path" connecting performer interiority to audience experience, suggesting that prosodic features encode and convey emotional states more directly than lexical content.

The metaphor of prosody as breath connected to participants' embodied experience of narrative production. Datu Jamal (Lantawan) described: "You cannot separate the *tingog* from the breathing. When you tell stories, your breath controls everything—how long you can sustain a phrase, when you must pause, how forcefully you can emphasize. The *tingog* comes from the breath, from deep in the belly, not just the throat. Young people who try to learn stories, they breathe from here [gestures to upper chest], so their *tingog* is weak, it doesn't have power. Old storytellers, we breathe from here [gestures to abdomen], so we can control the *tingog*, we can make it strong or gentle as needed." This account reveals participants' awareness of the physiological foundations of prosodic production, recognizing that prosodic control requires specific breathing techniques cultivated through extended practice. The emphasis on breathing "from the belly" rather than "from the chest" parallels technical knowledge in singing pedagogy and suggests that Yakan oral performance involves specialized respiratory control.

Theme 2: Geographic Prosodic Identities—"Gentle Waves," "Sharp Peaks," and "Steady Streams"

Participants consistently differentiated prosodic patterns across the three municipalities using metaphorical descriptions rooted in natural phenomena. These descriptions revealed not merely acoustic differences but identity constructions where prosodic features index community membership and geographic origin.

Sumisip prosody was characterized as "gentle waves" (*kummung matumbus*) or "smooth flowing water" (*tubig makummung*). Hadja Nura described: "Our way in Sumisip, we don't go too high or too low with the voice. It's like gentle waves on the shore—up and down, up and down, but smooth, not too dramatic. Some say we sound softer, more flowing. Maybe because Sumisip is near the city, we've become gentler in our speech." Bapa' Rashid elaborated: "When I hear someone tell stories, I can tell immediately if they're from Sumisip. Our *tunu* is moderate—we don't emphasize too strongly, we don't make big jumps in pitch. It's flowing, continuous. Some people say we're too flat, not emotional enough, but that's just our style. We believe the words should carry meaning, not too much drama in the voice."

Lantawan prosody was described as "sharp peaks" (*tungkeb masindut*) or "mountain ridges" (*tungkeb būd*). Hadja Amina explained: "In Lantawan, when we tell stories, our voice goes up very high and comes down very low. It's like the mountains around us—sharp peaks and deep valleys. We're very expressive, very dramatic. You can feel the emotion very strongly because we don't hold back. Our *tunu* is bold." Datu Jamal provided specific examples: "In *tarasul* [poetic dialogue], Lantawan performers are famous for our strong emphasis. When we reach the important word in a line, we make it very sharp [demonstrates with sharp rising pitch on a syllable], like hitting that peak. And then we drop down for the next phrase. This creates excitement, makes people pay attention. Other places are more gentle, but we believe the voice should show the full range of human feeling."

Maluso prosody was characterized as "steady streams" (*tubig mabenggas*) or "the old way" (*luya luma'*). Hadja Zaynab described: "Here in Maluso, we keep the *luya luma'*, the old style. Our *tunu* is steady, consistent. We don't jump around too much with the voice. It's like a stream that flows steadily through the forest—always moving, but constant. This is how our grandparents spoke, how their grandparents spoke. We preserve it." Panglima Said elaborated: "The Maluso *tunu* is disciplined, controlled. In sacred narratives during *pagtammat*, you cannot use wild intonation—it must be respectful, measured. Our pitch stays within a narrow range, but within that range, we have subtle variations that carry meaning. Young people from the city can't hear these subtleties—to them it sounds monotone. But for those who know, every small change in pitch or rhythm has significance."

The geographic differentiation of prosodic patterns functions as a marker of local identity, with participants expressing awareness that prosodic features reveal community affiliation. Imam Karim noted: "Even if you learn perfect Yakan words, if your *tunu* is wrong, we know you're not from here. The *tunu* tells us where you learned to speak, who taught you, what kind of house you grew up in. You cannot fake the *tunu*—it's too deep, too automatic."

Theme 3: Prosodic Functions—Structuring, Characterizing, and Moving Hearts

Participants identified multiple functions prosody serves in oral narrative performance, demonstrating sophisticated metalinguistic awareness of how suprasegmental features create meaning.

Narrative Structuring

Storytellers described using prosodic features to mark narrative boundaries and guide listeners through story structure. Inang Fatima (Sumisip) explained: "When I start a new episode in the story, I signal this with my voice. I pause longer, I take a breath, and then I start the new part with a slightly higher pitch. This tells listeners, 'Pay attention, we're moving to something new.' Without these voice signals, the story becomes confusing—listeners don't know when one part ends and another begins." Bapa' Usman (Lantawan) described similar practices: "At the climax of a story, I slow down, I lower my volume to almost a whisper, and then suddenly I burst out loud with rising

pitch. This creates tension and then release. The audience leans in during the quiet part, and then when the climax comes with the loud voice, they feel it physically. This is the art of *tunu*—using the voice to build and release energy."

Character Differentiation

Storytellers employed prosodic variation to distinguish character voices in narrative, creating auditory characterization through suprasegmental manipulation. Hadja Amina (Lantawan) described: "When I have dialogue in stories, I give each character their own *tingog*. The wise elder speaks slowly, with low pitch and pauses for thought. The mischievous child speaks quickly, with high pitch and lots of ups and downs. The angry person speaks loudly with sharp, short phrases. By changing the *tingog*, I don't even need to say 'the elder said' or 'the child said'—listeners know from the voice who is speaking." This technique, termed *pag-timbal* (voice alternation), requires skilled manipulation of multiple prosodic parameters simultaneously to create distinct character voices without altering lexical or segmental features substantially. Participants emphasized that effective *pag-timbal* requires not merely changing pitch or tempo randomly but creating coherent prosodic profiles that consistently characterize each personage, enabling listeners to track multiple characters through extended narratives.

Emotional Expression and Audience Engagement

Participants most frequently and emphatically discussed prosody's role in conveying emotion and creating affective connection with audiences. Inang Halima (Lantawan) stated: "The *tunu* is how we show what the characters feel and what we want the audience to feel. If it's a sad part, I slow down, my voice becomes softer, with a falling melody that sounds like crying. People in the audience start to feel sad too—some even cry. If it's a joyful part, I speed up, my voice lifts and dances, with happy rhythms. The audience smiles, they feel light. This is the power of *tunu*—it moves hearts." Bapa' Ibrahim (Maluso) described similar experiences: "Sometimes after I perform, people come to me and say, 'I felt like I was there, I felt everything the characters felt.' This is because the *tunu* carried them into the story. Words alone cannot do this. You must give the words life through *tingog*, through the melody and rhythm that touches something deep inside listeners, something beyond thinking, in the realm of feeling."

Pedagogical Function—Memory and Transmission

Several participants described how prosodic patterns facilitate memorization and transmission of lengthy narratives. Datu Jamal (Lantawan) explained: "The old long *kissa*, some lasting many hours, how do we remember them? It's because they have rhythm, they have melody patterns that repeat. Once you learn the *tunu*, the words come automatically. The rhythm carries you from one line to the next. If you try to memorize just words without *tunu*, it's very difficult. But with the *tunu*, it's like singing—the melody helps you remember." Panglima Said (Maluso) described teaching narratives to younger learners: "When I teach someone a story, first I teach them the *tunu*, the melodic framework. I make them repeat phrases over and over with the right *tingog* until their mouth knows it, their throat knows it, their breath knows it. Only after the *tunu* is fixed in their body do we work on remembering all the words. This is the traditional method. Young people today want to memorize words first, but then they cannot perform properly because the *tunu* doesn't come naturally—it's added on top instead of being the foundation."

Theme 4: Spiritual Dimensions of Sacred Prosody

A significant finding emerged regarding prosodic requirements for sacred narratives performed during religious ceremonies. Participants distinguished between "ordinary prosody" (*tunu lammung*) used for entertainment narratives and "sacred prosody" (*tunu bissala*) required for religious texts. Panglima Said (Maluso) explained: "When we recite *kissa* about the Prophet's life during *pagtammat*, the *tunu* must be respectful, disciplined. You cannot use dramatic prosody like in entertainment stories. The pitch range is narrow, the rhythm is measured and regular like prayer recitation. This shows respect for sacred content. To use playful or emotional *tunu* would be disrespectful, almost blasphemous." Imam Karim (Sumisip) provided theological grounding: "Our *tunu* for sacred narratives comes from *tilawa* [Qur'anic recitation]. When we recite Qur'an, there are rules for how the voice should sound—the *tajweed* [rules of recitation]. These same principles

apply when we tell stories about religious subjects. The voice should be beautiful but controlled, melodious but not too emotional, clear and measured."

Participants described specific prosodic features characterizing sacred narration including restricted pitch range remaining within a defined span, regular rhythmic patterning avoiding abrupt tempo changes, uniform dynamic level without dramatic loudness variation, and falling terminal pitch contours at phrase boundaries. Hadja Zaynab (Maluso) explained: "The *tunu bissala* has calm, like still water. It doesn't jump around or excite listeners to emotion. Instead, it creates contemplation, it makes listeners think deeply about spiritual meanings. This is why younger people often don't appreciate it—they think it's boring because it's not dramatic. But it serves a different purpose than entertainment." This distinction between "exciting" emotional prosody and "contemplative" sacred prosody reveals culturally specific aesthetic and theological principles governing prosodic appropriateness in different contexts. The conceptualization of sacred prosody as inducing contemplation rather than emotion reflects Islamic values emphasizing rational reflection on religious teachings rather than emotional religiosity.

Several participants expressed concern that younger generations lack exposure to sacred prosodic models, as declining Qur'anic school attendance reduces opportunities to learn *tilawa* which provides the prosodic template for sacred narrative performance. Bapa' Ibrahim (Maluso) lamented: "Most young people today cannot recite Qur'an properly, so how can they perform *kissa* properly? They don't know the *tunu bissala*. If they try to tell sacred stories, they use ordinary prosody, which doesn't sound right. This is one of the biggest losses—the special *tunu* for sacred texts is disappearing."

Theme 5: Declining Prosodic Competence and Authenticity Crisis

All twelve participants expressed concern about declining prosodic competence among younger generations, framing this as an "authenticity crisis" threatening the integrity of oral narrative traditions. Participants identified multiple interrelated factors driving prosodic erosion.

Absence of Immersive Apprenticeship Contexts

Participants emphasized that prosodic mastery traditionally resulted from prolonged immersion in performance contexts where learners absorbed prosodic patterns through repeated exposure before attempting performance themselves. Hadja Nura (Sumisip) described traditional apprenticeship: "When I was young, I spent countless hours sitting with my grandmother and other elders during *tennun* [weaving]. They told stories every day. I listened, listened, listened—hundreds of times I heard the same stories. Gradually, the *tunu* entered my body. I didn't consciously study it, but through hearing it so many times, my voice learned to move the same way. Only after many years of listening did I begin to tell stories myself, and by then, the *tunu* was already inside me." This description emphasizes passive absorption through extensive exposure preceding active production, suggesting prosodic competence develops gradually through statistical learning over accumulated experience rather than explicit instruction. Contemporary social changes have eliminated these immersive contexts, with children spending time in schools and consuming electronic entertainment rather than participating in traditional gathering spaces. Inang Maryam (Maluso) lamented: "Today, children rarely sit with elders listening to stories. They're at school all day, then watching television or using phones. Where will they hear the *tunu* enough times to absorb it? They cannot learn prosody from books or videos—it requires live presence, hearing the voice directly, feeling the rhythm in the body. Without this, prosodic knowledge cannot be transmitted."

Written and Digital Media Privileging Segmental Features

Multiple participants identified literacy and digital communication as contributing to prosodic erosion by focusing attention on segmental content while facing suprasegmental features. Bapa' Rashid (Sumisip) explained: "When stories are written down, the *tunu* disappears. You see only words on paper. Young people who learn stories from written texts memorize the words but don't know how to perform them. They read the text aloud, but it has no *tunu*, no life. It sounds like reading, not like storytelling." Imam Karim added: "Even when we make audio recordings, something is lost. Recording captures the sound, but not the full presence. In live performance, you

see the storyteller's face, their gestures, you feel their energy. The *tunu* is embedded in that total presence. Listening to recordings is better than nothing, but it's not the same as learning face-to-face, body-to-body."

Educational Systems and Standardization Pressures

Participants criticized formal education for promoting standardized pronunciation while devaluing dialectal prosodic diversity. Hadja Amina (Lantawan) stated: "In schools, teachers tell children to speak 'properly,' meaning to speak like in Manila or like on television. Children learn that their home *tunu* is wrong, that dialectal speech is uneducated. So they try to change their *tingog*, they flatten their prosody to sound more standard. This is cultural violence, telling children their natural way of speaking is inferior." Datu Jamal observed: "Schools teach children to read aloud in monotone, just saying the words clearly. They don't teach expressive reading, they don't value the melodic quality of oral speech. So children grow up thinking flat prosody is correct and expressive prosody is excessive. This is completely backwards from our tradition where prosody is primary."

"Flat" and "Borrowed" Prosody in Youth Performances

Participants frequently described younger performers' prosody as "flat" (*pappak*) or "borrowed" (*buut*), lacking the nuanced variation and cultural authenticity of traditional prosody. Inang Halima (Lantawan) explained: "When young people perform at cultural festivals, they memorize the words perfectly, but their *tunu* is flat, no emotion, no variation. Or they borrow prosody from Tagalog or English, using intonation patterns from those languages. It doesn't sound like Yakan. We can tell immediately that they didn't learn from elders." Hadja Zaynab (Maluso) provided a poignant assessment: "The saddest thing is hearing a young person perform a beautiful *kissa* that took our ancestors generations to perfect, but performing it with prosody that has no connection to our cultural spirit. The words are Yakan, but the soul is gone. It's like a body without *nyawa*. Technically correct, but dead."

Objective 2: Functions and Meanings of Prosodic Variation

This objective examined storytellers' attribution of specific functions and meanings to prosodic patterns across narrative genres and geographic contexts. The analysis revealed that prosodic features operate simultaneously at multiple functional levels, with participants demonstrating sophisticated understanding of how suprasegmental variations create layered meanings.

Genre-Specific Prosodic Requirements

Participants articulated clear expectations about appropriate prosodic features for different narrative genres, with violations of these expectations perceived as incompetent or culturally inappropriate performance.

Kissa (Historical Narratives)

These narratives recount tribal history, migration stories, and Islamic heritage, performed at formal ceremonial occasions. Participants described *kissa* prosody as requiring "dignified" or "respectful" *tunu* characterized by moderate tempo, narrow to moderate pitch range, regular rhythmic patterning, and falling final intonation. Datu Jamal (Lantawan) explained: "*Kissa* tells the serious history of our people. The *tunu* must be dignified, matching the importance of the content. You cannot use playful prosody or too much emotional expression—this would dishonor the ancestors. The voice should be steady, clear, authoritative. Like an elder speaking wisdom." Panglima Said (Maluso) added: "In *kissa* during *pagtammat*, the prosody follows patterns from Qur'anic recitation—measured, contemplative, with gentle melodic movement. This connects our tribal history to our Islamic identity, showing that our *kissa* is as sacred as religious texts."

Pabasul (Moral Tales)

These didactic narratives convey moral teachings and practical wisdom, often performed for children and youth. Participants described *pabasul* prosody as requiring "teaching voice" characterized by clear enunciation, exaggerated prosodic variation to maintain attention, frequent pauses for emphasis, and repetitive prosodic patterns for pedagogical reinforcement. Hadja Nura (Sumisip) explained: "When telling *pabasul*, you use teaching voice—very clear, with strong

emphasis on the moral lesson. You repeat key phrases with the same *tunu* so children remember. You use pitch like a parent uses with small children—higher, more expressive, to keep attention and make the lesson memorable." Inang Maryam (Maluso) described specific techniques: "In *pabasul*, I use questioning intonation even for statements, to make listeners think. I'll say something like 'And what did the foolish man do?' with rising pitch at the end, even though it's not a real question. This pulls listeners into the story, makes them mentally answer. The *tunu* becomes interactive."

Tarasul (Poetic Dialogues)

These elaborate poetic exchanges performed during weddings feature the most complex prosodic requirements. Participants described *tarasul* prosody as demanding "musical voice" with wide pitch ranges, intricate rhythmic patterns, careful attention to line-final rhyme emphasis, and alternating melodic contours distinguishing speakers in the dialogue. Bapa' Usman (Lantawan) explained: "*Tarasul* is the highest art of *tunu*. Each line has melodic shape, rising and falling in prescribed patterns. The rhyme words at line ends must receive special emphasis—you linger on them, you give them strong pitch movement. The two speakers in the dialogue use contrasting *tunu*—one higher, one lower; one faster, one slower. This creates beautiful musical dialogue." Imam Karim (Sumisip) described the aesthetic evaluation: "When people judge *tarasul* performance, they listen primarily to the *tunu*, not just the words. A performer with perfect words but poor *tunu* will lose to a performer with good *tunu* even if they make small word mistakes. This shows how central prosody is to *tarasul*—it's the essence of the art."

Lulay (Lullaby Stories)

These narratives combine storytelling with song, performed to soothe children to sleep. Participants described *lulay* prosody as requiring "gentle voice" with narrow pitch range, slow tempo, soft dynamics, repetitive melodic patterns, and falling terminal contours. Inang Fatima (Sumisip) explained: "*Lulay tunu* is like water gently rocking a boat. Very gentle, repetitive, soothing. The pitch range is small, the volume is soft, the rhythm is regular like breathing or heartbeat. These prosodic patterns calm children, prepare them for sleep. If you use dramatic prosody, children become excited and cannot sleep." Inang Halima (Lantawan) added: "The *lulay tunu* is perhaps our most ancient prosody, connecting to mother-infant bonding across all human cultures. Even women who are not trained storytellers know *lulay tunu* instinctively from caring for babies. But skilled performers refine this natural prosody into artistic form, creating *lulay* that are simultaneously stories and lullabies."

Prosodic Meaning Beyond Lexical Semantics

Participants provided numerous examples demonstrating how prosodic variation creates meanings independent of or complementary to lexical semantics. These examples reveal prosody's capacity to convey nuanced communicative intentions that lexical content alone cannot express.

Hadja Amina (Lantawan) described: "The same sentence can mean completely different things depending on *tunu*. If I say 'That's a good idea' with rising pitch and questioning intonation, it means I'm skeptical, I don't really think it's good. If I say it with falling pitch and emphatic stress, it means I genuinely agree. If I say it slowly with level pitch, it might mean I'm being sarcastic. The words are the same, but the *tunu* creates opposite meanings." This example demonstrates prosody's role in conveying speaker attitude and pragmatic force, with intonational patterns functioning as attitudinal markers that can affirm, question, or ironize propositional content.

Bapa' Ibrahim (Maluso) described prosodic modulation of politeness: "In Yakan culture, direct refusal is impolite. If someone offers something I cannot accept, I don't say 'No' directly. Instead, I might say 'Perhaps' or 'Maybe later,' but the *tunu* signals my true meaning. If I say 'Perhaps' with falling pitch and slow tempo, it means a soft no. If I say it with rising pitch and quicker tempo, it means genuine possibility. A culturally competent Yakan listener understands the real meaning from the *tunu*, not from the words. Outsiders who don't know our *tunu* often misunderstand, thinking 'Perhaps' means yes when it actually means no."

Multiple participants described how prosodic synchrony between performer and audience creates communal bonding. Datu Jamal (Lantawan) explained: "In traditional storytelling, audience

members often hum or move their bodies in rhythm with the storyteller's *tunu*. This creates unity, a feeling of togetherness. Everyone's breath, everyone's heartbeat seems to synchronize. This is the deepest function of prosody—not just conveying information, but creating community through shared rhythmic experience."

Objective 3: Perspectives on Prosodic Transmission, Change, and Endangerment

All participants expressed alarm about prosodic erosion and offered perspectives on preserving prosodic traditions for future generations.

Intergenerational Transmission Crisis

Participants uniformly identified interrupted intergenerational transmission as the primary threat to prosodic traditions. Hadja Zaynab (Maluso) stated: "The transmission chain is broken. My grandmother taught my mother, my mother taught me. I tried to teach my children, but they weren't interested. Now I have grandchildren, and they speak mostly Chavacano, not even good Yakan. How can I teach them *tunu* when they don't even speak the language properly? The chain that stretched back generations is ending with my generation." This poignant observation reveals participants' sense of being the last repositories of prosodic knowledge, with transmission failure implying irretrievable cultural loss.

Several participants described attempting to teach prosody to younger family or community members, encountering frustration when learners prioritized lexical accuracy over prosodic authenticity. Bapa' Rashid (Sumisip) recounted: "I tried teaching my nephew a *kissa*. He memorized all the words perfectly in just two weeks—he's very smart, goes to university. But when he performed it, the *tunu* was completely wrong. I tried to correct him, saying 'No, you must make your voice go up here, slow down there, pause at this moment.' He would do it once correctly, but then forget and go back to his flat reading style. I realized he was memorizing the words like studying for a school exam, not learning to embody the story. This is the problem—young people approach oral literature like written literature, not understanding that prosody is primary, not secondary."

Preservation Recommendations

Participants offered diverse recommendations for preserving prosodic traditions, with perspectives ranging from technologically oriented solutions to community-based cultural revival.

Audio-Visual Documentation

Multiple participants advocated for systematic recording of elder storytellers' complete repertoires with high-quality equipment. Imam Karim (Sumisip) argued: "We must record everything while we're still alive. Not just recordings for archives, but recordings designed for learning—with clear audio, with annotations explaining the *tunu*, with the storyteller's face visible so learners can see the whole performance. These recordings should be easily accessible, maybe on internet platforms where young people spend their time." Hadja Amina (Lantawan) suggested: "Recordings should include the storyteller explaining their prosodic choices—like what I did in this study when you played excerpts and asked why I used certain *tunu*. Future learners need not just performances but the knowledge behind the performances."

Community Storytelling Houses (*Bale' Tulay*)

Several participants advocated for establishing dedicated spaces for regular storytelling practice and intergenerational learning. Datu Jamal (Lantawan) proposed: "Each municipality should have a *bale' tulay* [storytelling house] where elders gather regularly to perform and teach. Young people could come to listen and learn in the traditional way—through immersion, not through formal lessons. Make it comfortable, serve food, create reasons for families to attend. If storytelling becomes a regular community event again, the *tunu* will naturally transmit." Panglima Said (Maluso) added: "The *bale' tulay* should be beautiful, traditional architecture, decorated with *tennun*, a space that honors our culture. If we treat storytelling as important by creating beautiful spaces for it, young people will understand it's valuable, not just old-fashioned habit."

Formal Education Integration

Participants held mixed views on integrating prosodic education into schools. Some advocated for incorporation, arguing schools reach all children. Hadja Nura (Sumisip) stated: "Schools are where children are, so we must bring *tunu* education there. Hire elder storytellers as cultural teachers, create curriculum specifically about prosody and oral performance, make it part of regular instruction like mathematics or science." Others expressed skepticism that formal education could effectively teach embodied prosodic knowledge. Bapa' Ibrahim (Maluso) countered: "Schools teach through textbooks and tests. How do you test *tunu*? How do you put embodied knowledge in textbooks? I fear that bringing oral traditions into schools will kill them—turning living practice into dead academic subject. Better to keep oral traditions in the community where they belong."

Mentorship Programs

Multiple participants advocated for structured mentorship pairing elder storytellers with young apprentices. Inang Halima (Lantawan) described: "What we need is a formal program where each master storyteller takes one or two serious students for long-term apprenticeship—maybe three to five years. The student commits to regular sessions, attending performances, practicing under guidance. This replicates traditional transmission but in more structured form necessary for today's busy schedules. Provide small stipends so elders can afford to spend time teaching and students can afford to spend time learning." Hadja Nura (Sumisip) emphasized selection criteria: "Not every young person can become a skilled storyteller. We must identify those with natural talent—good memory, musical voice, cultural commitment. Focus intensive mentorship on those most likely to succeed, rather than trying to teach everyone and accomplishing nothing."

Ambivalence About Change and Adaptation

While lamenting prosodic erosion, some participants acknowledged that adaptation may be necessary for survival. Bapa' Rashid (Sumisip) reflected: "Perhaps prosody must change to remain relevant. If younger generations find traditional *tunu* boring, maybe we develop new styles that maintain core principles but adapt to contemporary tastes. This makes traditionalists uncomfortable, but languages and arts must evolve or they die. The question is how much change preserves essence versus destroys it." Imam Karim offered a counter-perspective: "Some things should not change. Sacred prosody for religious texts—this must be preserved exactly. Entertainment narratives—maybe there's room for innovation. But we must maintain standards, not just accept whatever young people produce and call it authentic. Without standards, we lose what makes Yakan oral literature distinctive."

CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study explored Yakan traditional storytellers' lived experiences with prosodic features in oral narrative performance across three Basilan Province municipalities, revealing that storytellers conceptualize prosody as the *nyawa* (soul/breath) of narrative—the animating force transforming linguistic material into meaningful aesthetic and emotional experience rather than mere acoustic ornamentation. This challenges linguistic frameworks treating prosody as secondary to segmental features, suggesting that for oral literary traditions, suprasegmental features may constitute primary linguistic substance. The study documented distinct geographic prosodic identities characterized as "gentle waves" (Sumisip), "sharp peaks" (Lantawan), and "steady streams" (Maluso), revealing prosodic features function as potent markers of community affiliation embodying different aesthetic values, emotional dispositions, and cultural histories. Participants demonstrated sophisticated metalinguistic awareness of prosody's multiple functions including narrative structuring, character differentiation, emotional expression, pedagogical facilitation of memory transmission, and spiritual expression through sacred prosodic registers distinguishing entertainment from religious narratives.

The research documented an urgent transmission crisis with all participants expressing alarm about declining prosodic competence among younger generations driven by absence of immersive apprenticeship contexts, dominance of written and digital media privileging segmental over suprasegmental features, educational systems devaluing dialectal prosodic diversity, and erosion

of traditional performance occasions. Younger performers consistently exhibited "flat" or "borrowed" prosody lacking cultural authenticity even when lexical content was accurate, revealing prosodic competence as the most vulnerable dimension of oral literary traditions. Methodologically, the study demonstrates phenomenological approaches' value by prioritizing storytellers' experiential accounts through integrated interviews, performance recordings with stimulated recall, and participant observation, accessing dimensions acoustic analysis alone cannot reveal. Theoretically, findings support embodied cognition perspectives, with participants describing prosodic knowledge residing "in the mouth," "in the throat," and "in the body" rather than conscious awareness. The study created an audio archive of 18.6 hours preserving elder storytellers' prosodic repertoires while informing intervention priorities suggesting effective revitalization requires recreating immersive apprenticeship contexts through intensive mentorship programs, cultural camps, and establishing *bale' tulay* (storytelling houses) as dedicated community spaces facilitating intergenerational transmission and performance practice.

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