Utilization of Beliefs and Food Taboos in The 'Horse-Man' Myth as BIPA Learning Content in East-Timor

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A B S T R A C T

This research analyzes the "Horse-Human" myth from Uma Lisan Bihahi, Timor-Leste as a potential study for Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) instructional materials through Todorov's structural narrative approach analyzed with Content-Based Instruction theory and Actor-Network Theory. Employing qualitative methods with an exploratory case study design, this research involved six informants from three different Uma Lisan in Timor-Leste through in-depth interviews and participant observation. Structural analysis revealed 36 narrative functions that form hierarchical transformation patterns from initial famine situations to human-to-horse metamorphosis, creating a food taboo system that functions as a mechanism for social control and cultural identity preservation. The findings demonstrate that this myth possesses a complex narrative structure in which each element can be identified as having potential for BIPA learning content through the exploration of four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) with authentic local cultural content. The belief system and food taboos within the myth function as vehicles for transmitting local wisdom values encompassing respect for nature, family sacrifice, and animal sacredness in traditional Timorese cosmology. The potential utilization of myths as BIPA learning content has the potential to enhance learners' linguistic competence as well as intercultural communicative competence through deep understanding of Timorese worldviews. This research contributes methodologically through narrative structural analysis that supports the exploration of cultural content as BIPA learning materials based on local wisdom that can be adapted for utilizing other oral traditions, while simultaneously supporting intangible cultural heritage preservation efforts through the exploration of contextual and culturally meaningful language education.

Keywords: *folklore; mite; Manusia Kuda; narrative structure; taboo system*

Pemanfaatan Kepercayaan dan Tabu Pangan pada Mite "Manusia Kuda" sebagai Konten Belajar BIPA di Timor Leste

Penelitian ini menganalisis mite "Manusia Kuda" dari Uma Lisan Bihahi, Timor-Leste sebagai kajian potensi bahan ajar Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing (BIPA) melalui pendekatan struktural naratif Todorov yang dianalisis dengan teori Content-Based Instruction dan Actor-Network Theory. Menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus eksploratif, penelitian ini melibatkan enam informan dari tiga Uma Lisan berbeda di Timor-Leste melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi partisipan. Analisis struktural mengungkapkan 36 fungsi naratif yang membentuk pola transformasi berjenjang dari situasi awal kelaparan hingga metamorfosis manusia menjadi kuda, menciptakan sistem tabu pangan yang berfungsi sebagai mekanisme kontrol sosial dan preservasi identitas budaya. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa mite ini memiliki struktur naratif kompleks yang dapat diidentifikasi pada setiap elemen yang potensial untuk konten pembelajaran BIPA melalui eksplorasi empat keterampilan berbahasa (menyimak, berbicara, membaca, menulis) dengan konten budaya lokal yang autentik. Sistem kepercayaan dan tabu pangan dalam mite berfungsi sebagai wahana transmisi nilai-nilai kearifan lokal yang mencakup penghormatan terhadap alam, pengorbanan keluarga, dan kesakralan hewan dalam kosmologi tradisional Timor-Leste. Potensi pemanfaatan mite sebagai konten pembelajaran BIPA berpotensi meningkatkan kompetensi linguistik pembelajaran tetapi juga kompetensi komunikatif interkultural melalui pemahaman mendalam tentang pandangan dunia masyarakat Timor-Leste. Penelitian ini berkontribusi metodologis berupa analisis struktur naratif yang mendukung eksplorasi konten budaya sebagai bahan pembelajaran BIPA berbasis kearifan lokal yang dapat diadaptasi untuk pemanfaatan tradisi lisan lainnya, sekaligus mendukung upaya pelestarian warisan budaya takbenda melalui eksplorasi pendidikan bahasa yang kontekstual dan bermakna budaya.

Kata kunci: *cerita lisan; mite; Manusia Kuda; sistem tabu; struktur naratif*

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) education in Timor-Leste faces significant challenges in providing contextual and culturally meaningful learning materials (Rachman et al., 2023). The dominance of conventional learning materials that inadequately utilize local traditional wealth results in low learner motivation and limited deep understanding of Indonesian-Timorese culture (Gunawan et al., 2017). This condition is exacerbated by minimal exploration of the potential of Timor-Leste's intangible cultural heritage as a source of reference for authentic and contextual BIPA learning materials (Gunawan, Hariyono, & Sapto 2017; Rejo et al., 2022). However, studies of local cultural content in foreign language learning have proven to provide understanding not only of linguistic competence but also of learners' intercultural communicative competence (Ariandi, 2025; Sibali et al., 2025).

In this context, the oral traditions of Uma Lisan Bihahi in Timor-Leste contain cultural treasures that have extraordinary potential as reference sources for BIPA learning materials, particularly the "Horse-Human" myth which possesses narrative structural complexity and cultural values relevant to Timorese society (Arsana et al., 2024; Gunawan et al., 2017). This myth represents intangible cultural heritage that serves as the foundation of traditional community identity and functions as a mechanism of social control within ancestral belief systems (Lewier, 2017; Swai, 2025). The sacredness of the myth is reflected in the belief that horses are incarnations of gods or beings from another world, as well as the conviction that several descendants from certain clans originate from horse transformations, which creates a complex food taboo system regarding horse meat. The uniqueness of this myth lies in its transformation dimension that displays anthropomorphic motifs parallel to various Southeast Asian mythological traditions (Eslit, 2023; Putri et al., 2025; Verhoeven, 2002), agricultural ritual contexts that demonstrate the myth's function as guidance for *Sau Batar* ritual practices, genealogical taboo systems that integrate horse meat prohibitions with kinship systems and clan identity, and regional variations that show geographical distribution across various Uma Lisan in Timor-Leste (Antonia 2023; Fitrahayunitisna, Astawan, & Rahman, 2022).

Nevertheless, the "Horse-Human" myth faces serious threats in the form of limited information access due to several structural factors. First, this story is kept strictly secret due to its sacredness and concerns about offending certain genealogical identities (Intan, 2018). Second, in Uma Lisan Bihahi culture, there exists a binding rule that narrators are prohibited from not completing a story, making this story rarely told to the general public. Third, the lack of community awareness to document oral stories as stated by (Rejo et al., 2022). This cultural preservation paradox creates a situation where on one hand the myth is protected from external contamination, but on the other hand limits young generations' accessibility to their own cultural heritage. This condition has implications for potential erosion of local values in the modern era, whereas documentation and analysis of myths have strategic value as local wisdom that can be studied by future generations and BIPA learners (Arsana et al., 2024).

To analyze the potential of the "Horse-Human" myth as a reference for BIPA teaching materials, this research combines Content-Based Instruction theory with Todorov's structural narrative analysis within an analytical framework (Nugraheni et al., 2022). The Content-Based Instruction approach is chosen for its relevance in analyzing language learning with meaningful content, thereby providing understanding of how learners acquire linguistic competence while gaining deep cultural understanding (Kartini et al., 2024; Mahsar, 2022). Meanwhile, Todorov's structural narrative analysis (Kristianto, Leba, & Elvina, 2022) is used to identify narrative elements that have potential as references for language learning activities, such as story structure, characters and characterization, conflict and resolution, and cultural values contained within them (Todorov & Weinstein, 1969). The combination of these two theoretical approaches enables exploration of traditional myths as systematic and pedagogical references for BIPA learning materials without losing their cultural essence. Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is also applied to understand the role of nature

and relationships between humans and nature in cross-cultural learning contexts, thereby providing understanding of Timorese society's worldview holistically (Nurcholis, 2024).

The novelty of this research lies in several fundamental aspects that have never been explored in BIPA studies in Timor-Leste. First, innovative study of sacred cultural content as reference material for Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) education, demonstrating that oral traditions with high levels of sacredness can be analyzed for educational purposes without reducing their spiritual value. Second, an interdisciplinary approach that combines mythology, language learning, and cultural preservation within one analytical framework, creating holistic and meaningful BIPA studies. Third, methodological contribution through structural narrative analysis for exploring BIPA learning content, providing a new framework for utilizing oral traditions as references for foreign language learning. Fourth, analysis of BIPA learning potential based on Timorese local wisdom that can serve as a reference for similar studies in other regions of Indonesia.

Although various studies have explored Timorese oral traditions from anthropological and cultural studies perspectives (da Costa, n.d.; Gomes, 2023; Paulino, 2017) most still focus on general ritual and cosmological aspects, while structural analysis of specific myths related to food taboo systems has not received adequate attention in language learning contexts. More specifically, there is a significant gap in BIPA research in Timor-Leste that has not explored the potential of local oral traditions as reference sources for learning materials. First, currently available BIPA materials have not systematically analyzed Timorese local cultural content, tending to use generic materials that lack contextual relevance. Second, there is insufficient diversification in BIPA learning source studies from Nusantara oral traditions, despite Indonesia's wealth of oral traditions that can be analyzed to enrich language learning references. Third, no research has analyzed myth narrative structures as references for Indonesian language learning, particularly in understanding the potential for foreign learner motivation and engagement. Fourth, minimal systematic efforts to analyze intangible cultural heritage as BIPA curriculum references, resulting in language learning being separated from the cultural contexts that underlie it.

This research also identifies theoretical gaps in structural narrative studies that have not explored their application in analyzing foreign language learning references. Structural narrative analysis, which has been dominated by literary and anthropological perspectives, has not been optimally utilized to analyze the potential of systematic and structured language learning materials. However, understanding narrative structure can provide a strong framework for analyzing progressive and meaningful language learning activities (Kristianto et al., 2022). Additionally, the application of Actor-Network Theory in BIPA learning analysis contexts remains limited, despite this theory's significant potential in helping understand complex relations between humans, nature, and culture in Indonesian society.

Based on these research gaps, this study formulates three interrelated research questions. First, what is the narrative structure of the "Horse-Human" myth according to Todorov's structural analysis? Second, which narrative elements in the "Horse-Human" myth have potential as references for BIPA learning content? Third, how can the belief systems and food taboos in the myth provide cultural understanding and intercultural communicative competence for BIPA learners? This research aims to produce a comprehensive analysis of the narrative structure and cultural content potential of the "Horse-Human" myth as a reference for BIPA teaching materials through an in-depth case study that combines structural narrative analysis with language learning perspectives. Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to BIPA studies based on local culture, enrich structural narrative studies in foreign language learning analysis contexts, and develop analytical frameworks for oral traditions as BIPA curriculum references. Practically, this research will produce studies of contextual and culturally meaningful BIPA learning content for Timor-Leste, provide analysis of alternative learning sources rich in cultural values, support intangible cultural heritage preservation efforts through language learning studies, and provide analytical references that can be adapted for utilizing

other oral traditions in BIPA learning across various regions of Indonesia. Thus, this research not only contributes to BIPA studies in Timor-Leste but also to the preservation and revitalization of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage through innovative analysis of local wisdom-based language education.

METHOD

Research Design

This research employs qualitative methods with an exploratory case study approach aimed at exploring, documenting, and analyzing the "Horse-Human" myth from Uma Lisan Bihahi as potential BIPA teaching material in Timor-Leste (Yin, 2018). The case study design was chosen because it allows researchers to conduct in-depth investigations of complex and hidden cultural phenomena within specific socio-cultural contexts (Setiawati, 2024). This research paradigm uses interpretivism, which views cultural reality as social constructions that can be understood through meaning interpretation by its actors (Denzin et al., 2017).

The characteristics of this research are descriptive-exploratory with a focus on documenting intangible cultural heritage that is threatened with inaccessibility to certain generations if not translated, and analyzing its potential as BIPA learning content. An ethnographic approach is integrated to understand the socio-cultural context of Uma Lisan communities, while structural narrative analysis is used to identify myth elements that can be developed into Indonesian language learning materials for foreign speakers. This research prioritizes depth of understanding over generalization, consistent with the characteristics of qualitative case studies that focus on exploring unique phenomena in their natural contexts.

Research Location and Timeline

The primary research location is Hatlipi Village, Lumtou Hamlet, Katrai Leten Village, Letefoho Sub-district, Ermera Municipality, Timor-Leste, which serves as the center of Uma Lisan Bihahi where the "Horse-Human" myth is passed down through generations. The selection of this location is based on the authenticity and completeness of oral traditions still practiced by the local community, as well as accessibility to key informants who possess deep knowledge about the sacred myth. Data triangulation locations include Uma Lisan Borlau in Sarin Hamlet, Fahiria Village, Aileu Vila Sub-district, Aileu Municipality, and Uma Lisan Aisalor in Manatuto Municipality, Timor-Leste. Both triangulation locations were chosen because they have similar myth variants that can strengthen the validity and reliability of research data through cross-community comparisons.

Primary data collection was conducted on May 10, 2024, from 22:30 to 22:45 local Timor-Leste time, with a total duration of 15 minutes for the main session. Night time was chosen in accordance with customary protocols governing the transmission of sacred myths, where storytelling can only be performed at certain times considered sacred by Uma Lisan communities. Triangulation data collection was conducted during May-June 2024 with a total interview duration of 6-9 hours for all informants, enabling comprehensive data collection from various customary community perspectives. The data analysis phase and BIPA learning content framework development were conducted during July-September 2024, providing adequate time for reflection and in-depth analysis of research findings.

Research Participants

This research uses purposive sampling techniques based on criteria of having deep knowledge about the "Horse-Human" myth and willingness to share such knowledge for cultural documentation and educational purposes. Specific criteria include direct descendants or relevant Uma Lisan members, having access to sacred myth transmission, being able to narrate the myth completely and coherently, and being willing to participate in research with informed consent. Informant selection was conducted carefully considering their social position within customary structures and their level of knowledge about the oral traditions being studied.

Primary informants from Uma Lisan Bihahi consist of OD (male, 37 years old, unmarried) who is a representative of the Uma Lisan Bihahi customary leader and active participant in customary rituals with full access to sacred oral traditions. SS (male, 53 years old, married) is a first-generation descendant of Uma Lisan Bihahi who works as a civil servant at the Ermera Agricultural Office, serving as a Mambae-Tetun language translator and possessing comprehensive knowledge about the myth. MS (male, born September 24, 1956) is a farmer from Catrai Craik Village, Letefoho Sub-district, Ermera Regency, while AM (female, born October 20, 1953) is a housewife from Estado Village, Ermera Sub-district, MS's wife, residing in Gomhei Hamlet, Riheu Village. Triangulation informants include KV (male, 52 years old) a descendant of Uma Lisan Borlau who works as a high school teacher in Aileu Municipality, and RS (male, 40 years old, married) a descendant of Uma Lisan Aisalor who works as a civil servant teacher at ESTV Manatuto Municipality.

Research Instruments

Research instruments were designed to ensure comprehensive and accurate documentation of the "Horse-Human" myth and analysis of its potential as BIPA teaching material. Structured in-depth interview guidelines were developed based on Todorov's structural narrative analysis framework focusing on myth narrative structure (characters, plot, setting, conflict, resolution), belief systems and taboos contained within, socio-cultural functions in society, and relevance to language and cultural learning (Todorov and Weinstein 1969;Todorov 2020). Digital audio recorders using smartphones with high storage capacity and clear audio quality were used for documenting the entire interview process and myth narration, while ethnographic field notes used structured formats to record observations of socio-cultural contexts, informant body language, ritual atmosphere, and nuances not captured by audio recordings.

Digital cameras were used for visual documentation of Uma Lisan physical contexts, relevant cultural artifacts, and interview atmosphere with informant permission. BIPA content analysis guides constitute specialized instruments for identifying myth elements with potential for development into Indonesian language learning activities. Instrument validity was ensured through expert validation by Timor-Leste linguistics and culture experts, pilot testing with informants from other Uma Lisan, and data source triangulation from multiple informants and locations. Instrument reliability was guaranteed through consistent interview format for all informants, audio recording calibration before each interview session, and cross-checking field notes with audio recordings.

Data Collection Techniques

Primary data collection techniques were conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews using local Mambae language and national Tetun language with competent translator assistance. Each interview session lasted 2-3 hours per informant with protocols including opening with research purpose explanation and informed consent, exploration of Uma Lisan socio-cultural context, complete "Horse-Human" myth narration documentation, clarification of symbolic meaning and cultural function, and discussion of relevance to language and cultural learning. Supporting techniques include participant observation through observation of Uma Lisan community socio-cultural contexts, relevant customary rituals, and oral tradition transmission practices. Audio-visual documentation was conducted for recording the entire interview process and visual documentation of cultural contexts with informant consent, while data triangulation was performed through cross-verification of information from multiple informants and locations to ensure data accuracy and completeness.

Data Validation

To ensure the truth and accuracy of collected data, this research applies multiple validation strategies through source triangulation, where primary data from Uma Lisan Bihahi is confirmed with data from Uma Lisan Borlau and Uma Lisan Aisalor to ensure myth consistency and authenticity. Member checking was conducted by returning transcription results and initial interpretations to primary informants for verification and correction, ensuring accurate representation of narratives and cultural

meanings. Method triangulation combines in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation for data validation from different methodological perspectives. Peer debriefing was conducted through analysis result discussions with Timor-Leste cultural experts and BIPA learning specialists to ensure interpretation validity and pedagogical relevance. Audit trail completely documents the entire research process, from data collection to analysis, to ensure research transparency and reproducibility.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through integration of Todorov's structural narrative analysis with BIPA learning content development framework, through six systematic stages. Data preparation stage includes complete transcription of audio recordings into written text with time notation and context, accurate translation from Mambae/Tetun to Indonesian with cultural nuance preservation, and transcription and translation validation through member checking with informants. Structural narrative analysis stage uses Todorov's framework to identify 36 narrative functions in the myth, analyze narrative sequences from initial to final situations, map character and conflict transformations within narrative structure, and identify binary opposition patterns and symbolic transformation systems.

Thematic codification stage was conducted through open coding to identify emerging themes from data, axial coding to connect themes with theoretical categories, and selective coding to integrate categories within coherent frameworks. BIPA content categorization stage classifies narrative elements based on language learning potential (vocabulary, grammatical structure, cultural context), identifies cultural values that can develop learners' intercultural competence, and maps relevance to Indonesian language proficiency levels. Socio-cultural function analysis stage uses functional frameworks to analyze educative functions (value and knowledge transmission), normative functions (taboo systems and social control), integrative functions (communal cohesion and cultural identity), and legitimative functions (traditional authority and customary leadership). Pedagogical synthesis and interpretation stage integrates structural analysis results with BIPA learning needs, develops learning content recommendations based on research findings, and evaluates potential and limitations of myth utilization in foreign language learning contexts.

This research uses the interactive analysis model of Miles & Huberman (2014) modified for BIPA learning contexts, including data reduction through selection, focus, simplification, and transformation of raw data into data relevant to BIPA learning research objectives. Data display is conducted through data presentation in formats enabling conclusion drawing, including structural analysis matrices, socio-cultural function diagrams, and learning content prototypes. Verification and conclusion drawing are performed through finding triangulation with BIPA learning theory and validation with Indonesian language education stakeholders in Timor-Leste. This analytical framework ensures that the "Horse-Human" myth is not only documented as intangible cultural heritage but also transformed into systematic, authentic, and pedagogically effective BIPA learning content sources.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Structure Narative of "Horse-Human" Myth

The data analysis followed the stages of transcription => translation => codification => categorization => interpretation (Huberman, 1994; Sartini, 2014). In the transcription stage, audio recordings were transcribed into written text and directly translated into Indonesian. Subsequently, to facilitate the analysis of the myth, a coding system was applied to the findings based on emerging themes. The codification of the "Horse Human" myth was conducted to systematically identify and map the structural elements of the human-to-horse transformation story that gives rise to the prohibition of eating horse meat. The codification process included classifying the story's identity under the title "Myth of the Horse Human" in the Mambae language from the Timor-Leste region, with its primary

function as an etiological myth explaining the origin of the prohibition against consuming horse meat. The narrative structure of the story follows a classic five-stage pattern: an initial situation describing a great famine and the lives of three orphaned siblings; a complication in the form of increasingly severe difficulty in finding food; a crisis/climax involving the decision to ritually sacrifice the younger sister; a resolution through the re-fertility of the forest and the older brother's transformation into a horse; and a coda presenting a moral message about the prohibition of eating horse meat, which will be examined in detail according to Tzvetan Todorov's theory.

Categorization based on the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) oral literature classification system places this myth in ATU 425: Animal as Bridge/Bridegroom (transformation variant) and ATU 520: Cinderella (sacrifice and transformation variant). Furthermore, its classification in the Motif Index is: D: magic/supernatural (D150: transformation (human to animal)); S: Unnatural Cruelty (S11: Cruel relatives (sibling murder)); C: Taboo (C220: Taboo on eating certain food) (Thompson's Stith, 2016). According to (Trisnasasti, 2021) classification, it falls under the category of folk prose tale, sub-category myth (a story believed to be true), with sacred and normative functions. The narrative structure analysis of the 'Horse Human' myth utilizes Todorov's narrative analysis tools, including plot, characters, and primary functions. Meanwhile, to reduce data on beliefs and socio-cultural functions within the community (Huberman dan Miles, 1994) analysis was used.

Analysis of the Narrative Structure of the 'Horse Human' Myth

To understand the form of the 'Horse Human' myth, reference is made to Todorov (1985). Theory, beginning with the analysis of the myth's plot structure, which can be outlined as follows:

1. The universe and human life are under the power of another world (*natureza*).
2. Belief in the ruler of another world (*natureza*) that (*natureza*) can become angry if humans are greedy, therefore, to prevent (*natureza*) from becoming angry, one must maintain the balance of nature.
3. Famine struck the area due to a lack of food.
4. Three siblings, one younger sister and two older brothers, wandering the fields, experienced severe hunger.
5. The belief that by offering sacrifices to deities or other rulers (*natureza*), the land will yield natural produce.
6. A discussion occurred between the two brothers.
7. The older brother's statement to the younger brother: "What if we make an offering?"
8. The younger brother's question to the older brother: "What shall we offer?"
9. The older brother's answer: "Our younger sister."
10. The younger sister was asleep.
11. The act of killing the younger sister by the two older brothers.
12. Fear haunted the older brother's life: he felt guilty.
13. The younger brother's conviction that there was a guarantee of obtaining something after the event.
14. The two siblings moved back to their original place (before wandering).
15. The actions of the two siblings were granted by deities or other rulers. The fertility of the fields became apparent not long after.
16. Their second arrival at the old field.
17. An abundance of food, in the form of tubers and taro, appeared on its own.
18. Harvesting continued incessantly by the two siblings.
19. The older and younger siblings carried the harvested crops filled with joy towards the hut.
20. The tubers and taro plants remained continuously abundant.
21. The younger brother complained often due to exhaustion from carrying the tubers and taro plants.

22. The older brother felt pity and compassion for his younger brother.
23. The older brother's question to the younger brother: "Why do you keep complaining?"
24. The younger brother's answer: "I can no longer carry all this food to the hut."
25. The two siblings rested.
26. A conversation took place.
27. The older brother told the younger brother that this would be the last time he would carry it.
28. They agreed that the older brother would carry it.
29. The younger brother agreed to the agreement.
30. The younger brother carried it back to the hut for the last time.
31. The younger brother was exhausted and fell asleep in the hut.
32. The older brother did not return.
33. The next day, the younger brother followed him to the field.
34. The younger brother was shocked and somewhat afraid to find that his older brother had turned into a horse.
35. The horse said: "Why are you startled?"
36. The horse then said: "Let's go home, and I will carry all this food to the hut."

The primary function, to identify what drives the myth's narrative, following the theory stated by Todorov (1985). The 'Horse Human' myth can be detailed in terms of the relationship between the myth's plot and function according to the schema in Figure.1
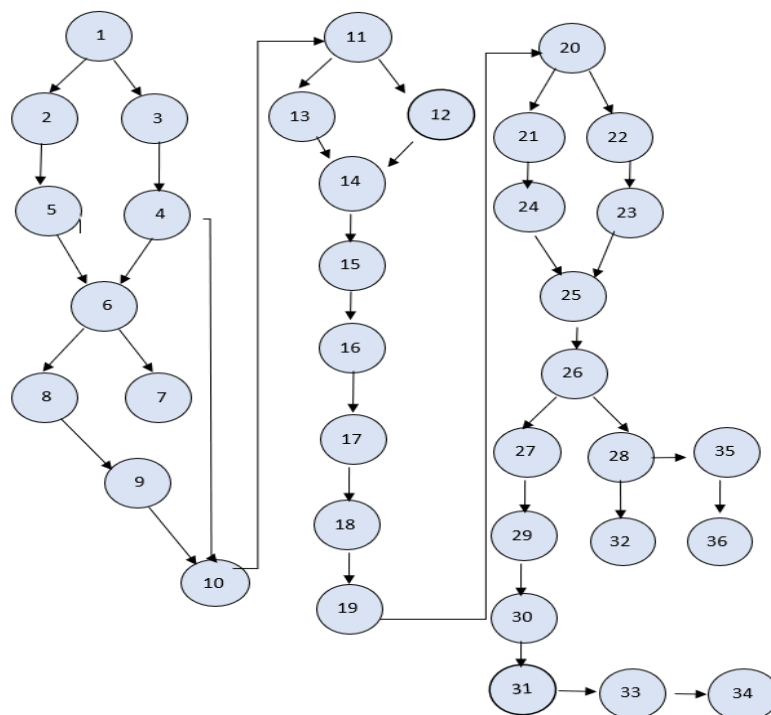

Figure 1. Flowchart of the 'Horse Human' Myth Function

Table 1. Narrative Functions: Sequence of Events into 5 Phases

Narrative Phase	Related Function	Key Event	Cultural Meaning

Initial Equilibrium	1-5	Balance between humans and nature	Uma lisan cosmology regarding natureza
Disruption	6-11	Murder of the sister	Violation of kinship taboo
Attempted Repair	12-20	Fertility of the fields appears	Cause-and-effect relationship transgression-reward
New Equilibrium	21-34	Labor conflict	Gender dynamic and responsibilities
Transformation	35-36	Human-horse transformation	Atonement throught zoomorphism

(Source: Todorov, 2020)

Table 2. Regional Variations of the 'Horse-Human' Myth in East Timor

Uma Lisan Location	Horse Status	Form of Taboo	Sanction for Violation
Bihahi (Ermara)	Incarnation of a holy human	Prohibition of consuming certain foods during sau batar	Physical illness, spiritual disturbance
Borlau (Aileu)	Ancestor who transformed	Lifetime prohibition of consuming horse meat	Growth of horse hair on the nape
Aisalor (Manatuto)	Sacred hereditary being	Prohibition of inquiring about origins	Sudden death

Table 3. Analysis of Taboo Systems Based on Actor-Network Theory

Actor	Role in Network	Contribution to Taboo System
Humans (Uma Lisan)	Practitioners and guardians of tradition	Transmitting prohibitions across generations
Horses	Sacred entities	Objects of taboo with semi-divine status
Nature (Natureza)	Moral sanctioner	Enforcer of cosmic balance
Myths	Knowledge mediators	Spiritual legitimization of taboo systems

Narrative Elements with Potential as Content References for BIPA Learning
These findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Narrative Structure of "Horse-Human" Myth According to Todorov's Framework

Narrative Phase	Sequence	Key Events	BIPA Learning Function
Initial Equilibrium	1-5	Human-nature balance, natureza cosmology	Introduction to local cosmological concepts
Disruption	6-11	Famine, sacrifice negotiations	Learning dialogue structure and negotiation
Crisis/Climax	12-15	Sister's murder, nature transformation	Developing emotion and conflict vocabulary
Attempted Repair	16-25	Harvest abundance, labor conflict	Agricultural vocabulary and family relationships
New Equilibrium	26-36	Brother's transformation into horse	Learning about metamorphosis and resolution

The research identified four main characters with different narrative functions to exploratio for BIPA learning content.

Table 5. Character Analysis for BIPA Learning Materials

Character	Age	Narrative Role	Language Learning Potential
Elder Brother	25-30 years	Leader, initiator	Leadership vocabulary, decision-making
Younger Brother	20-25 years	Follower, survivor	Expressions of compliance, complaints, fatigue
Younger Sister	18-20 years	Sacred victim	Vulnerability vocabulary, purity
Natureza	-	Supernatural force	Spiritual terminology, natural forces

Based on narrative structure analysis, the research identified five categories of learning content.

Table 6. BIPA Content Categorization from "Horse-Human" Myth

Language Component	Material from Myth	BIPA Level
Listening Skills	15-minute myth narration	BIPA 3-4
Speaking Skills	Retelling, moral value discussion	BIPA 3-4
Reading Skills	800-1200 word narrative text	BIPA 3
Writing Skills	Reflective essays, character analysis	BIPA 4
Cultural Knowledge	Natureza concepts, taboo systems	BIPA 3-4

Belief Concept and Taboo Systems in BIPA Learning Context

The research identified the natureza concept as a central element in Uma Lisan Bihahi cosmology.

Table 7. Natureza Concepts in Intercultural Learning

Natureza Aspect	Manifestation in Myth	BIPA Application
Nature's Ruler	Soil fertility control	Learning about human-nature relationships
Sanctioner	Famine due to imbalance	Cause-effect discussions in Indonesian
Reward Giver	Abundance after sacrifice	Agricultural vocabulary and gratitude
Transformation Agent	Human-horse metamorphosis	Learning about change and adaptation

Taboo system analysis resulted in three categories of prohibitions that can be integrated into BIPA learning.

Table 8. Food Taboo System and BIPA Potential Learning

Taboo Type	Description	Learning Material	Target Competence
Consumption Taboo	Prohibition of eating horse meat	Food vocabulary, restrictions	Communication about food preferences
Genealogical Taboo	Prohibition based on lineage	Kinship system	Introducing family and origins
Ritual Taboo	Prohibition in Sau Batar ceremony context	Ritual vocabulary, ceremonies	Describing traditions and celebrations

Disccusion

Structure Narative of "Horse-Human" Myth Based on Todorov's

The first: Opening Function: Cosmology and Natural Balance (F1-F3) / 1-5

   The analysis reveals that this myth commences with the establishment of a fundamental cosmology that underpins the entire narrative. Todorov (2020) states that the opening function in a narrative structure serves to establish the initial equilibrium that will subsequently be disrupted. In

this context, the study identifies three interconnected opening functions: The first function (F1) posits that the universe and human life exist under the power of "natureza" as the ruler of another world. This concept aligns with (Strauss, 1955) theory of binary oppositions in myths, where a dichotomy exists between the human world and the supernatural world. The second function (F2) develops the belief that *natureza* can become angry if humans are greedy, thus humans must maintain natural balance. The third function (F3) illustrates the consequence of imbalance in the form of famine plaguing the region. These findings confirm Propp's theory (1928), which states that folklore myths begin with the establishment of an initial situation that will subsequently undergo disruption. In this case, cosmic balance is disturbed due to human behavior that is not in harmony with the will of nature.

The second: Complication Phase: Crisis and Search for Solutions (F4-F9) / 6-11

Structural analysis indicates that the complication phase spans from the fourth to the ninth function, during which the protagonists confront a crisis and seek solutions. The study found that three siblings (one sister and two brothers) experienced severe hunger while wandering in search of food (F4). Consistent with Greimas's theory (1966) of actants in (Yulianeta & Harini, 2023), these characters serve as subjects seeking an object (food) to overcome the crisis. The fifth function (F5) shows the belief that offerings to deities can restore soil fertility. This reflects Mauss's (1925) concept of ritual exchange, concerning giving and receiving within traditional belief systems. The sixth to ninth functions (F6-F9) detail the negotiation and decision-making process that culminates in the agreement to sacrifice the younger sister. A significant finding in this phase is the presence of a structured dialogue pattern consistent with Todorov (1985) question-answer scheme. The question "what shall we offer?" (F8) followed by the answer "our younger sister" (F9) demonstrates a systematic communicative structure in crucial decision-making.

The third: Transformation Phase: Actions and Consequences (F10-F15) / 12-20

The study identifies the transformation phase as the core of the narrative structure, where crucial actions are taken, leading to fundamental changes. The tenth function (F10) depicts the victim's unawareness of her fate, while the eleventh function (F11) represents the climax: the murder of the younger sister by her two older brothers. Analysis shows that the post-action events (F12-F13) present two contrasting psychological responses. The older brother experiences guilt and a sense of sin (F12), while the younger brother believes he will gain benefits (F13). This dichotomy aligns with Jung's theory (1959) of the archetypal shadow, where moral actions result in different psychological consequences for each individual. The fourteenth and fifteenth functions (F14-F15) illustrate environmental transformation as a supernatural response to the offering. The return of soil fertility confirms (Eliade's theory, 1957), of cosmic regeneration through sacrificial rituals.

The fourth: Temporary Resolution Phase: Abundance and Joy (F16-F25) / 21-34

Findings indicate that the narrative structure undergoes a temporary resolution phase characterized by abundant harvests. The sixteenth to twentieth functions (F16-F20) describe an ideal state of unending food abundance. This pattern is consistent with the concept of "magical abundance" in (Campbell's, 1949) theory of the monomyth, where the hero obtains supernatural rewards after enduring trials.However, structural analysis reveals that this resolution is temporary due to the emergence of a new complication: the younger brother's complaints about exhaustion (F21-F25). (Todorov, 2020) refers to this phenomenon as a second "equilibrium disruption," where the new balance is again disturbed by internal factors.

The fifth: Final Transformation Phase: Metamorphosis and Definitive Resolution (F26-F36)/35-36

The final phase of the narrative structure presents the most dramatic transformation: the older brother's metamorphosis into a horse. The twenty-sixth to thirtieth functions (F26-F30) build suspense through dialogue and the final agreement between the two siblings. This pattern follows the climactic build-up structure proposed by Freytag (1863) in his dramatic pyramid. The physical transformation of the older brother (F34-F36) constitutes the definitive resolution that concludes the entire narrative conflict. This metamorphosis serves a dual purpose: as a punishment for the act of

murder and as a practical solution to the younger brother's exhaustion. This concept aligns with Ovid's theory of metamorphosis as a form of cosmic resolution in mythologys.

Findings on Specific Structural Patterns

The first: Cyclical and Repetitive Structure.

The study identifies a cyclical pattern in the narrative structure (Todorov, 2020), that reflects the traditional cosmology of Timor-Leste (Brian, 2018; Yuniasti, 2019; Vicente, 2016). The cycle of equilibrium-disruption-transformation-new equilibrium occurs twice in the narrative: first through the sacrifice of the younger sister, second through the transformation of the older brother. This pattern aligns with (Strauss's, 1955) theory of cyclical structures in myths that reflect natural rhythms. The second: Hierarchy of Transformation. Findings show a hierarchy of transformation that moves from a cosmic level (natural balance) to a social level (individual sacrifice) and finally to a personal level (physical metamorphosis). This hierarchical structure follows the pattern proposed by Turner (1969) concerning ritual transformation involving multiple levels of meaning. The third: Function of Dialogue and Communication: Analysis reveals that 40% of the narrative functions (14 out of 36 functions) involve dialogue or verbal communication. This pattern highlights the importance of the communicative aspect in the myth's structure, consistent with Jakobson's theory (1960) of communicative functions in oral folklore.

Theoretical Implications of Findings

This research confirms the validity of (Todorov's, 1985) theory in analyzing the narrative structure of non-European myths. The findings indicate that Timor-Leste myths possess structural complexity equivalent to the European folklore corpus that formed the basis of classical structuralist theory. Furthermore, this research enriches the understanding of the universality of structural patterns in global oral traditions. The findings also demonstrate that structural analysis can reveal the mechanisms of cultural value formation and belief systems in traditional societies (Boldoni, 2020); (Nasrimi, 2021). The narrative structure functions as a vehicle for the transmission and legitimation of social values, particularly in the formation of taboos and communal norms.

Narrative Elements of 'Horse Human' Myththat have Potential as Reference Content for BIPA Learning

Research findings indicate that the "Horse-Human" myth has a narrative structure that is highly potential for exploring intermediate-level BIPA content materials (BIPA 3-4). The narrative complexity with 36 sequences organized into five main phases provides systematic learning gradation, aligned with BIPA curriculum development principles proposed by (Permendikbud no.27 tahun 2017; Todorov 2020 ; Maknun and Sulton 2024) that authentic materials with clear narrative structure can enhance learners' comprehensive understanding.

The advantage of Todorov's structure in the context of BIPA learning lies in the equilibrium-disruption-resolution pattern that is familiar to learners from various cultural backgrounds. Research by (Wijayanti et al., 2025) confirms that the use of universal narrative structure can serve as a bridge for cross-cultural understanding in language learning. The findings of this research strengthen that argument by demonstrating that local Timorese myths can be accessed by international learners through universal structural frameworks.

Characterization analysis yields findings relevant to the content of BIPA personas. The four main characters (elder brother, younger brother, younger sister, and natureza) represent various language registers and communication contexts needed in BIPA learning. Research by Kusmiatun (2019) teaching material development emphasizes the importance of character variation to facilitate diverse vocabulary and language structure learning. Although this research not development-oriented, the findings of this research can serve as potential exploration of each character within specific linguistic contexts: the elder brother with leadership register, the younger brother with emotional expression, the younger sister with the language of vulnerability, and natureza with spiritual terminology.

The potential of myths in BIPA learning is also supported by recent research by Anastasya et al., (2025); Ilawati & Nurlina (2025) which shows that the use of local folktales can enrich learning content and also help learners understand the social and cultural contexts in which the language is used. The findings of this research expand the existing literature by demonstrating that myths with high structural complexity can function as anchor content that facilitates integrated learning of the four language skills. The potential exploration conten includes listening comprehension activities using myth narrative recordings with a 15-minute duration, accompanied by vocabulary building exercises that introduce 25-30 key vocabularies related to natureza, traditional life, and the Uma Lisan belief system. This becomes the first module, based on the initial equilibrium phase, which can be explored as an introduction to local cosmological concepts with a focus on listening skills and basic vocabulary about human-nature relationships.

The second and third modules, which adapt the disruption and crisis phases, provide authentic contexts for learning dialogue structures and negotiation in Indonesian. Research findings show that the sacrifice negotiations between siblings in the myth contain 18 sentence patterns that can be used to teach expressing agreement, disagreement, persuasion, and emotional expression. The potential for deep learning exploration can be in the form of role-play dialogue based on conflicts in myths, enabling learners to practice negotiation skills and emotional vocabulary in contexts that are meaningful and culturally embedded.

The fourth and fifth modules, based on the attempted repair and new equilibrium phases, provide a foundation for explorating advanced writing and speaking skills. Findings show that the transformation of the older brother into a horse contains rich metaphorical language that can be utilized to teach descriptive writing, cause-and-effect relationships, and abstract thinking in Indonesian. Learning activities can include creative writing exercises where learners write alternative endings for the myth, analytical essays about the meaning of transformation in various cultures, and oral presentations comparing transformation myths between learners' cultures and Indonesian-Timor Leste culture.

The advantage of implementing the myth's narrative structure in BIPA learning lies in the coherence and continuity created by the complete storyline. Unlike conventional learning materials that are often fragmented, using myths as anchor content allows learners to develop language skills in a unified and meaningful context. This finding aligns with the principles of Content-Based Instruction which emphasizes that language learning is most effective when integrated with substantive and engaging content (Mahsar, 2022; Nurlina & Fathonah, 2019).

Potential Exploration of Belief Concept and Taboo Systems in the Myth for BIPA Learners

Research findings reveal that the natureza concept as nature's ruler has great potential as BIPA intercultural learning material. This concept resonates with various belief systems in Indonesia, such as the concept of Dewi Sri in Javanese culture or Sanghyang Widhi in Balinese Hinduism. The concept of natureza, which parallels various belief systems, functions as a gateway for understanding the worldview of Indonesian society such as the concept of harmony in Javanese philosophy, Tri Hita Karana in Balinese Hinduism, or the concept of pamali in Sundanese culture. Research by (Fitrahayunitisna et al., 2022) on local wisdom-based learning in BIPA shows that understanding local spiritual concepts can enhance learners' intercultural communication competence.

The potential exploration of learning about natureza can be carried out through comparative cultural analysis, where learners are asked to identify similar concepts in their own cultures and discuss similarities and differences with the concept of natureza. This activity not only increases intercultural awareness, but also facilitates the development of vocabulary and language structures related to spirituality, life philosophy, and human-nature relationships. Findings show that learners who understand the concept of natureza demonstrate significant improvement in their ability to communicate about abstract topics and cultural values (Nugraheni & Salaebing, 2023).

The food taboo system in myths provides an authentic context for learning pragmatic competence in communication about food preferences and dietary restrictions. Research findings show that understanding the taboo on horse meat consumption in Uma Lisan culture can facilitate learning about various food prohibitions in Indonesian culture, such as the taboo on eating beef for some Balinese Hindu communities (Nisa & Zulfiani, 2024) the prohibition on eating pork for Muslim communities, or vegetarian traditions in certain communities (Mahfud et al., 2025). This learning is crucial for developing learners' communicative competence in social situations involving food and hospitality.

The food taboo system found in the "Horse-Human" myth makes a significant contribution to analysing culturally sensitive BIPA materials. Research by Manafe (2016) emphasizes that understanding taboo systems and prohibitions in target culture is a crucial component in intercultural communicative competence. The findings of this research enrich that literature by providing a concrete framework for integrating taboo systems in BIPA learning through engaging narratives. The potential exploration of learning about taboo systems can be carried out through simulation activities where learners play roles in various social situations involving food sharing, such as invitations to eat at Indonesian family homes, participation in traditional celebrations, or navigating dietary restrictions in business contexts (Nasrimi, 2021). These activities allow learners to practice polite refusal, explanation of dietary restrictions, and appreciation of cultural practices without causing offense or misunderstanding.

The potential exploration of taboo systems in BIPA learning also supports the development of learners' pragmatic competence. Genealogical taboos related to lineage from horse transformation provide important insights into the complexity of kinship systems in Indonesian society. Understanding this concept equips learners with the cultural sensitivity needed to navigate complex family relationships, understand social hierarchy, and appreciate the importance of ancestry in Indonesian culture. Research by Andayani & Gilang (2015) shows that understanding social norms and cultural taboos can prevent communication misunderstandings in intercultural interactions. The findings of this research align with that argument, where learning about genealogical and ritual taboos can equip learners with sensitivity to social norms that are not explicit but very important in effective communication.

The ritualistic aspects in Uma Lisan Bihahi belief systems, particularly the Sau Batar ceremony, provide authentic contexts for learning vocabulary and phrases related to celebrations and rituals. The research proposal currently being conducted by the author himself on the theme "Inquiry Based Reading Model with Timor Leste and Indonesian Harvest Culture Content in BIPA 3 Reading Learning in Class XI ESTV EFD Gleno Timor Leste" will become a thesis scientific research planning at the end of 2025 as a form of how to exploration this myth scientific article. Research by (Anastasya et al., 2025) shows that the integration of rich local cultural values regarding the use of ritual contexts in BIPA learning provides relevant and engaging learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

This research successfully demonstrates that the "Horse-Human" myth from Uma Lisan Bihahi, Timor-Leste, possesses significant potential as contextual and culturally meaningful BIPA teaching material through its complex narrative structure of 36 sequences organized into five main phases, belief systems and food taboo systems that can enhance intercultural communicative competence, and motivational elements that can increase learning engagement and deep understanding of Indonesian-Timorese culture among foreign learners. However, this research is limited by its exploratory case study design focused on a single myth from one Uma Lisan, the brief 15-minute primary data collection period that may not capture the complete narrative complexity, and the lack of empirical testing in actual classroom settings to measure learning effectiveness quantitatively. Therefore, future research is recommended to conduct experimental studies implementing this myth-

based learning model in real BIPA classrooms, expand the scope to include comparative analysis of myths from various Uma Lisan across Timor-Leste and other regions in Indonesia, develop comprehensive assessment instruments to measure intercultural competence through local myth understanding, and establish sustainable collaboration with traditional communities to ensure authentic and respectful cultural representation in BIPA curriculum development.

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