



A Survey of Three Selected Techniques in the Analysis of Siswati Folklore

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ABSTRACT

This study's main goal is to examine three folk narrative techniques to evaluate their themes, structure, and cultural importance. This qualitative study makes use of Claude Lévi-Strauss's (1955) structuralist theory, which emphasizes antithesis, mediation, and synthesis; Vladimir Propp's (1928) morphology of folktales, which identifies narrative elements like the initial situation, lack, command, violation, reward, abstention, punishment, and lesson; and Thwala's (2019) structural theory, which describes the ascending, descending, terminative, and turning point phases of narratives. These selected theories are used to assess whether Siswati folktales follow a consistent format or show variance. By analysing their symbolic and functional relationship with human characters, the analysis delves deeper into the role of animals in oral art. Fables, legends, and myths are among the several forms of narrative prose that are recognized, described, categorized, and analysed to emphasize their unique characteristics and cultural purposes. Siswati folktales are discussed as being useful for social cohesiveness and moral teaching in addition to preserving traditional values, beliefs, and customs. To better comprehend the structural and cultural aspects of additional African folktales, the study suggests more investigation into the application of these theories. It also emphasizes how crucial it is to include Siswati folktales in school curricula to preserve indigenous knowledge systems. By comparing the structural approaches used in Siswati folktales, highlighting their cultural significance, and providing ideas on how to categorize and understand them within a larger onomastic and folkloristic framework, this study advances scholarship. In doing so, it promotes a greater understanding of Siswati narrative art and enhances the area of African oral literature.

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INTRODUCTION

Deeply ingrained in the oral traditions of the Siswati-speaking people, Siswati folktales are a dynamic and timeless form of cultural expression. These oral traditions that have been passed down through the years serve as important resources for maintaining the community's values, beliefs, and collective memory in addition to being enjoyable kinds of entertainment. The phrase, 'kwesukasukela' (a long long time ago) draws everyone's attention to gather around the fire. The stories are an essential component of the Siswati people's cultural legacy since they frequently contain teachings about morality, social conventions, and the natural environment. Fischer says a folktale is used broadly to

refer to any traditional dramatic narrative of more or less fixed form, transmitted primarily in oral tradition. Myths, legends, fables, etcetera, are untrue stories told for entertainment and for passing morals and values to children.¹ According to Swales (1990:35), folktales, in general, are part of folk literature, which is more widely referred to as folklore.² They can be classified as one of the categories of folk storytelling.

The methods employed to convey these stories add to the richness of Siswati folktales, in addition to their content. *Bateki* or storytellers, use a range of narrative techniques to captivate their listeners, make difficult concepts understandable, and make their stories memorable and powerful. Mthethwa supports the above statement and further explains that legends are the kind of story that only very old people narrate to their families.³ Myths are told at night when all the duties of the day are done. It is believed that if you tell tales during the day you will grow horns. These strategies, which are frequently understated but effective, support the stories' themes and make them understandable to audiences of all ages. They accomplish several goals, including strengthening the story's emotional resonance, assisting with memory recall, and promoting the dissemination of cultural values. Lastly, the article classifies and interprets various narrative prose genres such as fables, legends, and myths that are found in Siswati folktales. By recognizing, characterizing, and analysing these various formats, the research aims to show how Siswati folktales serve as a vehicle for cultural validation and preservation. Bascom emphasises that understanding a people's folklore completely requires understanding their culture in its entirety. In addition to reflecting the customs and beliefs of the Siswati-speaking people, these narratives also help to preserve and uphold their cultural identity in the face of shifting social and historical conditions.⁴

As a result, this research article offers a thorough and multifaceted examination of Siswati folktales, revealing the structural, functional, and symbolic aspects of these tales using Thwala, Propp, and Lévi-Strauss' theoretical frameworks. By doing this, it advances knowledge of the cultural value of Siswati folktales and their function in preserving and creating the Siswati-speaking people's cultural legacy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research article discovered the underlying patterns and meanings buried in folktales by analysing them through the prism of structural and functional theories. The fundamental framework for comprehending the narrative angle of Siswati folktales is provided by Thwala's theory.⁵ His model provides a clear framework for examining the construction and development of folktales from beginning to the end of it. It breaks the folktale down into four separate phases: Ascending, Turning Point, Descending, and Terminative. This theory is especially useful for determining whether Siswati stories follow a unified structural pattern, which may indicate a common narrative logic among several folktales. A distinct viewpoint on folk tales is provided by Vladimir Propp's method, which focuses on the roles that characters and activities play in the narrative.⁶ Propp recognized a number of story elements that are common to many folktales, including the opening circumstance, absence, command, violation, reward, abstention, punishment, and lesson. This study tries to show the roles that various characters and events play in moving the narrative along and delivering moral lessons by applying Propp's functional analysis to Siswati folk narratives. Comprehension of the granular structure of Siswati tales and how they serve educational purposes requires a comprehension of Propp's approach.

Another angle to the examination is provided by Claude Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology, which focuses on the binary oppositions present in folktales. According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, the basic oppositions seen in myths and folktales such as good vs. evil, nature vs. culture, and life vs. death reflect the underlying conflicts and contradictions that exist inside a community.⁷ The study aims to

¹ John L Fischer, "The Sociopsychological Analysis of Folktales," *Current Anthropology* 4, no. 3 (1963): 235.

² John M. Swales, *Genre analysis* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

³ N.C. Mthethwa, *Silulu SeMaswati* (Alberton: Lectio Publishers, 2014).6.

⁴ William R Bascom, "Four Functions of Folklore," *The Journal of American Folklore* 67, no. 266 (1954): 338.

⁵ J.J. Thwala, "A Glance at Selected Folktale Theories," *International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 4, no. 3 (2019).

⁶ P. Vladimir, *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (New York: The American Folklore Society, 1928).

⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *The Journal of American Folklore* 68, no. 270 (1955): 428-44.

identify the deeper cultural meanings and societal problems that Siswati folktales confront and attempt to resolve by examining these binary oppositions in the stories. By facilitating a more thorough examination of the symbolic and ideological content of Siswati folktales, Lévi-Strauss's framework sheds light on the collective psyche of the Siswati-speaking people.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study which is based on published selected folklore books, unpublished periodicals, dissertations, academic papers as well as selected theory books. The selected books were used as secondary sources for primary sources, the information was gathered from various individuals, i.e. the grandmothers, reviewers, researchers, etc. In this research article, the researcher used the qualitative method to gather information on the topic. The qualitative method is a field of study that crosscuts disciplines and subject matters. According to Tenny, Brannan and Brannan, a deeper understanding and exploration of real-world issues are provided by qualitative research.⁸ Qualitative research aids in the generation of hypotheses as well as the further investigation and understanding of quantitative data, as opposed to gathering numerical data points or intervening or introducing treatments as in quantitative research. It is used to gain insight into people's attitudes, behaviors, value systems, concerns, motivations, inspirations, culture, or lifestyle. In this method, the information was collected from various relevant sources.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

A consistent narrative structure, based on Thwala's four-phase model, was found in the examination of Siswati folktales, with minor modifications to account for various story kinds and moral messages. Identifiable Propp's functions, such as the starting circumstance, lack, command, and reward, reflected universal elements of folktales, while culturally particular functions, such as punishment, emphasized Siswati societal standards. The framework developed by Levi-Strauss shed light on the binary oppositions at the heart of these tales and provided insights into the social conflicts and cultural values that exist within Siswati society. Animals had a particularly important role in these stories because they represented human characteristics and taught moral teachings that emphasized moral repercussions, community collaboration, and respect for nature.

Siswati folktales were further divided into fables, legends, and myths by the study, each of which performed a different cultural role, such as preserving historical events or providing an explanation for natural phenomena. In addition to reflecting Siswati behaviours and beliefs, these narratives are essential to preserving cultural continuity. The findings highlight how crucial these tales are to protecting the Siswati-speaking people's cultural legacy while also highlighting how flexible and relevant they are in modern settings. The study demonstrates the enduring power of Siswati folktales, which despite shifting social contexts, nevertheless serve to inform and uphold society ideals.

DISCUSSION

This study offers a thorough examination of Siswati folktales, utilizing three different theoretical frameworks to reveal the stories' underlying structure and cultural importance. Thwala's Theory (2019): initial situation phase (sigabancanti), ascending phase (sigabalwenyuko), turning point phase (sigabalungucuko), (descending phase (sigabamewukelo), terminative phase (sigabasiphetfo). The four phases that Thwala highlights in his approach to narrative structure. This paradigm is very helpful for figuring out the storyline and action sequence of Siswati folktales. Every stage has a distinct purpose in moving the story along, building suspense, and ultimately bringing about a resolution.

⁸ Steven Tenny, Janelle M Brannan, and Grace D Brannan, "Qualitative Study," 2017.38.

Turning point (sigabalugucuko)

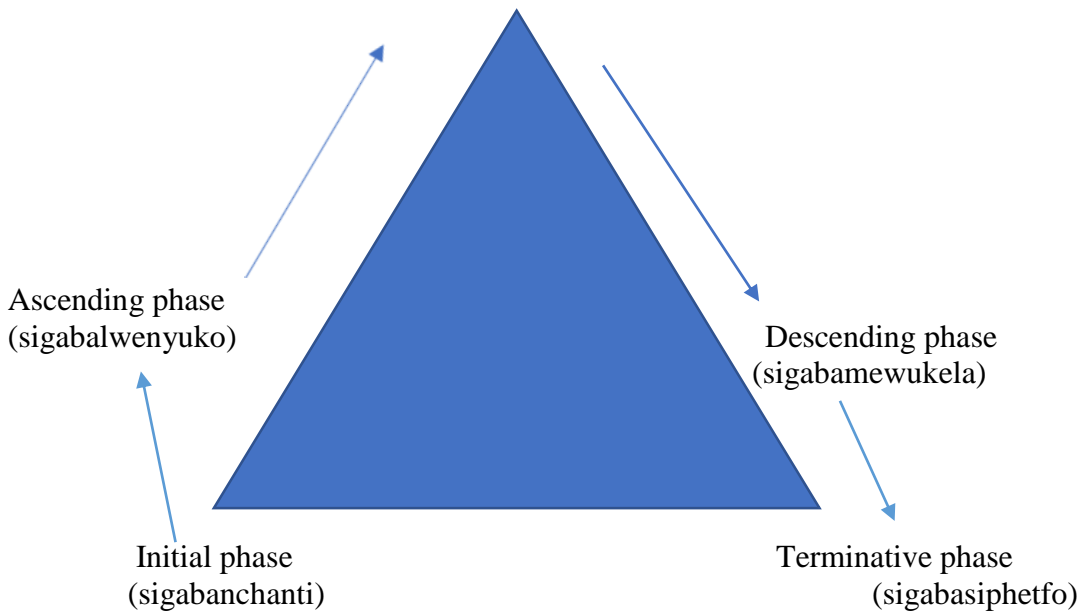


Figure 1: An illustration of Thwala's theory

Propp's elements of folktales offer priceless insights into the customs of human storytelling. Propp's structuralist theory finds a number of roles that make up the fundamental components of a story. His 31 functions show how story forms repeat themselves and also illustrate how these stories reflect a common human experience *simonhlalo* (initial stage), *Insweleko* (Lack) *umyalo* (command), *kwephula* (Violation), *Umvuzo* (Reward), *kungabikhona* (Absentation), *kuphunyuka*, *kubaleka* (Escape), *kulandzela* (Pursuit), *sijeziso* (Punishment), *Sifundvo* (Lesson) are all included in his analysis. Through his theory storytelling is appreciated and its significant influence on cultural heritage and identity. By thoroughly analysing the roles and actions seen in Siswati folktales, Propp's methodology makes it possible to identify the underlying patterns that control the narrative structure. According to Dundes, sequences containing the four motifs of interdiction, violation, consequence, and attempted escape from the consequence are far more common.⁹ Rather than being a required structural slot, the Attempted Escape is an optional one. A story could conclude with the Consequence. In addition, in the event that an escape is attempted, it can succeed or fail.

Table 1: An illustration of Propp's theory

Sequences (<i>Kulandzelana</i>)	Functions (<i>Kusetjentiswa</i>)
I. Interdiction (<i>Umyalo</i>)	Initial situation (<i>Simonchanti</i>) Interdiction/Command (<i>Umyalo</i>) Lack (<i>Insweleko</i>) Lack liquidated (<i>Imphelansweleko/likhambi lensweleko</i>)
II. Violation/Obediences (<i>Kwephula/kulalela</i>)	Absentation (<i>Kungabikhona</i>) Interdiction/Command (<i>Umyalo</i>) Violation/Obedience (<i>Kwephula/kulalela</i>) Consequence (<i>Umphumela</i>)
III. Attempt to escape (<i>Kuphunyuka</i>)	Villainy (<i>Kukhohlakala</i>) Flight (<i>Kubaleka</i>) Pursuit (<i>Kulandzela</i>) Capture (<i>Kutfumba</i>)

⁹ Alan Dundes, "Structural Typology in North American Indian Folktales," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 19, no. 1 (1963): 123.

	(Delay/Ploy) (<i>Kwephuta/Kumfeneta</i>) Escape/Rescue (<i>Kubaleka/Kusindzisa</i>)
IV. consequence (<i>Umphumela/Bunganimbumbu</i>)	Challenge/Contract/ Trickster Contract (<i>Inselelo/Sivumelwano</i>) Deceit/Violation (<i>Kwephula</i>) Deception/Fraud (<i>Inkhohliso/Kukhwabanisa</i>) Defeat/Discovery (<i>Yehlula/Kutfole</i>) Gloat (<i>Kulangatelela</i>) Triumph/Boast (<i>Kuncoba/Kutikhukhumeta</i>)

The Theory of Claude Levi-Strauss

The binary oppositions antithesis (*imphikiswanomcondvo*), mediation (*lokusemkhatsini*), and synthesis (*luhlelomcondvo*) that are present in myths and folktales are the subject of Levi-Strauss's structural anthropology. His method is essential to comprehending the conflicts and deeper cultural meanings that Siswati narratives aim to reconcile. Levi-Strauss believes that the above structure (schemata) is very important and then plays only a secondary role; this means that the decisions taken by people all over the world are based on the same reason. This means Levi-Strauss's theory of showing the unity of the mind is something that exists even when there are differences of opinion.

Binary opposite in Libhubesi Nanogwaja (*The Lion and The Rabbit*):

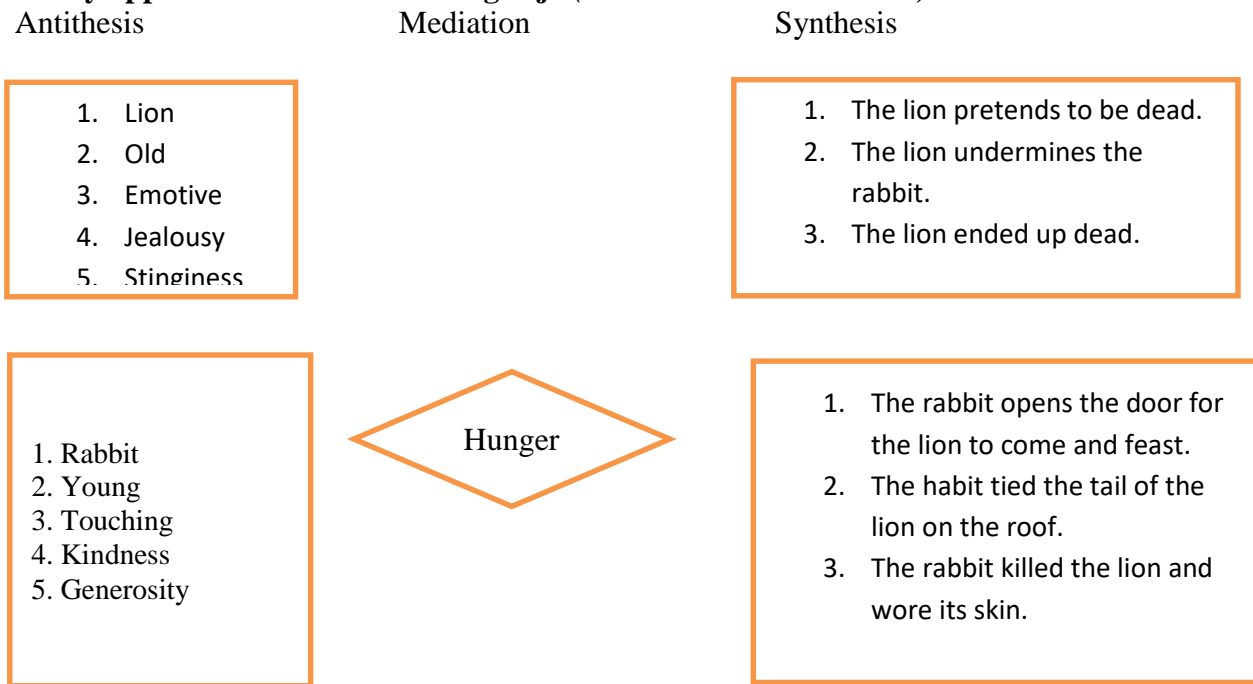


Figure 2: An illustration of Strauss's theory

Symmetry

It is old and young.
Touching and touching
Jealousy and kindness
stinginess and generosity

When discussing folktales, the term "symmetry" frequently refers to well-balanced narrative components, such as how events mirror one another to create an engaging and well-organized tale. In "The Lion and the Rabbit," a folktale, symmetry is evident in the way the rabbit deceives the lion, striking a balance between the two animals with different abilities. In addition, Brading, Castellani,

and Teh emphasise that symmetry, whether it be in the ancient or modern sense, is always linked to the unity of different and equal elements.¹⁰ The resulting symmetry and its specific composition are determined by how this unity is realized and how the equal and different elements are selected. The folktale's moral message, the lion and rabbit's acts mirroring each other, and the story's well-balanced narrative structure are all elements of "Libhubesi Nanogwaja" *The Lion and the Rabbit*. This symmetry adds to the folktale's timeless appeal and moral-educational worth. This paper clarifies how Siswati folktales represent and negotiate cultural values by examining these oppositions.

Function of animals in Siswati folktales: In Siswati folktales, animals are frequently used as stand-ins for human characters or as emblems of specific qualities or immoral behaviours. This section examines the interactions between human characters and animals in these stories, examining the representations of animals and the meanings behind their interactions. In addition, the study looks at the cultural relevance of animals in Siswati oral art and how they serve to uphold social norms and values.

Categorization and interpretation of narrative prose: Fables, legends, and myths are just a few of the narrative prose forms that are included in Siswati folktales. These various forms are recognized and defined in this section, along with their accompanying Siswati folktales. After that, the stories are categorized and understood in relation to Siswati culture, paying close attention to how they support and uphold traditional customs and beliefs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Siswati folktales should be imaginatively adapted for contemporary media, documented and digitally archived, and included in curricula in schools in order to ensure their perpetuation and promotion. According to Dahal and Bhatta, in order to ensure that folk theory does not fade away, folktales should be taught and given specific emphasis.¹¹ The application of structural theories to other cultural contexts, and comparative study with other folklore traditions ought to be published and promoted.

CONCLUSION

The structural methods and cultural importance of Siswati folktales were examined in this study, with particular attention paid to the folktales' conformity to established patterns and their function in social cohesion, cultural preservation, and moral instruction. The study emphasized the symbolic function of animals, the interaction between people and animals, and the categorization of narrative prose into fables, tales, and myths using the frameworks of Thwala, Propp, and Lévi-Strauss. Variations showed how adaptable these narratives were to many circumstances, even if structural aspects frequently matched the applicable theories. The study calls for the integration of Siswati folk narratives in academic and cultural education to ensure their preservation and relevance for future generations, concluding that they are essential for preserving cultural identity and passing down indigenous knowledge.

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¹⁰ Katherine Brading, Elena Castellani, and Nicholas Teh, "Symmetry and Symmetry Breaking," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2023, 13.

¹¹ Hikmat Dahal and Balaram Bhatta, "Folktales: A Moral Message from the Past to the Future Generation," *Nepal Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 4, no. 1 (2021): 34..

pleasurable and enriching. Lastly, I would want to express my sincere gratitude to my family and friends for their constant help, tolerance, and comprehension during this project. Your confidence in me has always given me courage. This study is devoted to everyone who puts forth great effort to protect and honour the rich cultural legacy of the Siswati speaking community

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Ms. Nontokozo Gladys Mdhluli started her career in 2013 as a teacher at Siphumelele Secondary School, where she established her love for language development and education. She began working at the University of Venda as a Siswati lecturer on June 1, 2022. Currently pursuing a doctorate, Ms. Mdhluli is actively involved in Siswati language and culture study, language development, and writing academic articles. Her efforts greatly enhance the intellectual and cultural legacy of Siswati and play a crucial role in its promotion and preservation.