

PERSONIFICATION IN CONTEMPORARY MERANAW SONGS: REFLECTIONS OF THE CULTURAL CHANGES AMONG MERANAW YOUTH

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Abstract

This study, titled *Cultural Identity in Contemporary Meranaw Songs: A Reflection of Cultural Changes Among Meranaw Youth*, examines the evolving aspects of Meranaw youth culture as depicted in their contemporary songs. The primary objective is to identify and provide a detailed interpretation of these cultural changes based on the lyrics of the songs. The specific objectives of the study are: (a) to identify the words and phrases in contemporary songs that reflect cultural changes in Meranaw society, (b) to recognize the aspects of Meranaw culture that have shifted, and (c) to explain the reasons behind the cultural changes portrayed in these songs. The study utilized a descriptive-qualitative design and analyzed the content of twenty-five (25) contemporary Meranaw songs. Three main aspects of Meranaw culture were identified as having changed: (1) the culture of clothing, grooming, and behavior, (2) the culture of courtship and marriage, and (3) moral values. The primary factors contributing to these changes include (1) family influence, (2) the influence of social media, (3) the influence of prevailing language and culture in society, (4) the impact of education, and (5) the influence of social institutions. The implications of the study include: (1) the traditionally closed Meranaw culture has become more open to changes due to interactions not only within the Philippines but also with other countries; (2) globalization has fostered an openness among Meranaw youth to new knowledge; (3) the cultural changes among Meranaw youth have made a significant contribution to economic growth; and (4) the recognition and acceptance of cultural changes by the Meranaw contribute to creative expression, which can boost tourism.

Keywords: Contemporary Meranaw Songs, Cultural Change, Meranaw Culture, Gen Z Youth, Influence.

INTRODUCTION

The Meranaw people have long maintained a "closed culture," mainly due to their geographical and cultural upbringing. They have guarded their traditions, fostering a strong sense of identity through *kambilangatao*. This cultural principle emphasizes values such as cooperation, love, respect, and ethical behavior in every aspect of life. The Meranaws' deep appreciation for *kambilangatao* has solidified their unity as a community.

Firmly rooted in their identity as a Moro group in the Philippines, the Meranaws have resolutely upheld their Islamic faith, language, and culture despite external threats. They have fought to preserve these aspects, especially as the world undergoes rapid technological and cultural shifts that challenge their traditional way of life.

Kambilangatao, as reflected in the contemporary songs of Meranaw youth, offers a glimpse into how Generation Z interacts with modern society. The exposure of young Meranaws to various societal influences shapes their behavior, thoughts, and worldviews. This exposure also creates new perspectives and values, reflecting the evolving culture they navigate. Language and culture remain vital tools for these youth as they engage with fellow Filipinos, gaining new

knowledge and awareness that influence their views on life. As technological advancements reshape communication and thinking, misunderstandings and confusion often arise among people who must be aware of these changes. This friction can strain relationships and social connections. Recognizing this, the researcher aims to explore the modern culture of Meranaw Generation Z, examining how their actions and values are perceived by their fellow Meranaws and Filipinos from other cultural backgrounds. By understanding their evolving culture, the study hopes to provide insights into this generation's resilience and how they meet life's challenges, inspiring us with their adaptability.

The research delves into contemporary Meranaw songs, which serve as expressions of the thoughts and beliefs of the youth. These songs are not merely entertainment but reflect the real-life experiences of Meranaw youth. According to Abdulrauf Batua-an Abulasis, a Meranaw music group JASAB '06 leader, writing and singing contemporary Meranaw songs is part of their cultural heritage, showcasing the youth's new outlook on life.

This period of cultural transformation, shaped by modern technology and the internet, is evident in songs from 2000 to the present. These contemporary Meranaw songs reflect the struggles of young Meranaws in today's society. The study aims to provide new knowledge about their perspectives and beliefs, contributing to a deeper understanding of Meranaw youth as part of the Moro group and as members of the larger Filipino society. This knowledge may strengthen social harmony between Meranaws and non-Meranaws in their communities.

While many studies have focused on Meranaw language and culture, they mainly examined traditional aspects of Meranaw life. This study, however, uncovers new information about the culture of Meranaw Generation Z, offering insights that still need to be documented. This exploration will help define the evolving identity of young Meranaws and shed light on cultural elements that may still need to be fully understood by other Filipinos or even older Meranaws.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study on the cultural changes among Meranaw youth, as reflected in contemporary Meranaw songs, has two main objectives: a general objective and specific objectives.

The general objective is to identify the cultural shifts of Meranaw youth in the present day by analyzing contemporary Meranaw songs. The aim is to provide a descriptive interpretation of how these changes are expressed in the song lyrics and to understand the reasons behind these cultural shifts. To address the issues mentioned earlier, the researcher seeks to meet the following specific objectives:

- 1) Identify the words and phrases in contemporary songs that reflect cultural changes within Meranaw society.
- 2) Determine which aspects of culture mentioned in the 25 analyzed songs have changed.
- 3) Identify the factors that contributed to the cultural changes depicted in the contemporary songs.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This study utilized a descriptive or qualitative method to gain a deeper understanding of the customs and relationships among people. In analyzing the content of contemporary Meranaw songs, content analysis was used to determine the new cultural aspects of Meranaw youth. In describing the new culture of Meranaw youth based on contemporary Meranaw songs, using the theories of acculturation and cultural anthropology, an emic or insider perspective was considered in the cultural analysis since the researcher belongs to the Meranaw ethnic group. The emic approach is a way of analyzing cultural phenomena from the viewpoint of someone within the culture. Interviews were also used in the study, where the researcher conducted interviews with Meranaw youth from Generation Z. This helped provide sufficient analysis of the new culture of Meranaw youth in the present time.

Study Location

The study was conducted in Marawi City, located in the province of Lanao del Sur, the homeland of the Meranaw people in the Philippines. Traveling from Iligan City takes almost an hour to reach Marawi City. Marawi is the capital of Lanao del Sur and has a cold climate due to its high-altitude location. This city originates from the Meranaw tribe, who now reside in various parts of the Philippines. They are known as a significant indigenous group of the Moro people. Marawi's economy is based on agriculture and trade. Lanao del Sur is known for its fertile land and vast mountains, which produce various crops. Rivers surround the area, providing water resources like different kinds of fish, which contribute to the livelihood of the Meranaw as farmers and fishers. The Meranaw people are also adept at trade, both locally and internationally. The study of the modern culture of Meranaw youth, as reflected in the songs analyzed in this research, is not limited to the Meranaw in Lanao del Sur but covers all Meranaw across the Philippines who are influenced by the creative works of contemporary Meranaw youth. The first image shows the map of Lanao del Sur, and the second image shows the map indicating the location of Marawi City.



Figure 1: Map of Lanao Del Sur Showing the Location of Marawi City



Figure 2: Map of Lanao Del Sur

Data Used

According to Abdulrauf Batua-an Abdulasis, the leader of the band JASABS '06, contemporary songs are a favorite pastime of Meranaw youth because they reflect actual events in their lives. Groups of young Meranaws have shared that listening to contemporary songs brings them happiness as these songs express the feelings, customs, and values of Meranaws. It serves as a form of self-expression for them. These songs were used as data in the study due to their recognition by Meranaw youth as today's most popular genre of Meranaw literature. Mr. Abulais of the band Jasabs 06 noted that contemporary songs are liked and popular among Meranaw youth because they relate to the content of the songs, which often reflect their life stories. In selecting contemporary songs, only those that contain Meranaw culture were chosen, as the study aimed to analyze and explore the new culture of Meranaw youth. Only twenty-five (25) songs were analyzed, as out of the 150 songs collected, only twenty-five (25) contained elements of Meranaw youth culture. The researcher established the following criteria for selecting contemporary Meranaw songs as data for the study:

- 1) Pure Meranaws must write the song in the Meranaw language.
- 2) The authors of the songs must be local Meranaw singers who are well-known in the singing profession.
- 3) The selected songs must have been written from 2000 to the present.
- 4) The songs must depict the culture of Meranaw youth.
- 5) All twenty-five (25) contemporary songs analyzed are recorded and available on YouTube and are listened to by Meranaw youth.

Selection of Informants

The role of informants was crucial in this research to deepen the understanding of the emerging cultures among Meranaw youth. To confirm his observations as a fellow Meranaw, the researcher conducted interviews through open conversations with groups of young Meranaw men and women in the City of Marawi.

Through these interactions, the researcher gained insight into both the old and new cultures of Meranaw youth, recognizing that these cultures change over time. Therefore, this study adopts an emic perspective.

The researcher considered the following criteria in selecting informants to help clarify the emergence of new cultures from the viewpoint of Meranaw youth:

- 1) Young Meranaws are part of the Meranaw ethnic group in the Philippines.
- 2) Young Meranaws who belong to Generation Z (Gen Z).
- 3) Young Meranaws from Generation Z living in the City of Marawi.

The informants needed to belong to the Meranaw ethnic group because the study focused on uncovering the contemporary culture of Meranaw youth. Additionally, informants aged 18 to 30 were considered because Meranaw youth in this age group, categorized as Gen Z, are more knowledgeable about modern trends and developments in contemporary Meranaw youth culture.

Secondly, they are familiar with and are part of a group that uses modern language and communication methods. Their lives are dependent on technology, cell phones, and the internet.

DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher divided the analysis into three parts to present the study findings.

First, the researcher examined the words and phrases used by the songwriters in their respective songs. These words and phrases depict the culture of Meranaw youth embedded in the songs analyzed. The description of each word and phrase was presented using a table.

Second, the researcher discussed and explained which aspects of Meranaw youth culture were reflected in the songs analyzed. It was explained here which parts of the culture had changed by highlighting statements from the songs that illustrate the new culture of Meranaw youth. This means that the study identified and explained the elements of the culture that have evolved and the aspects that have been diminished or are gradually disappearing from the perspective and recognition of contemporary Meranaw youth.

Third, the researcher identified factors contributing to the cultural changes among Meranaw youth. This section explains why today's youth recognize a new culture that is different from the traditional one to which Meranaws were accustomed. These reasons were based on the results of the interviews conducted with the Meranaw youth informants.

RESULTS

Based on the analysis of contemporary songs by the Meranaw, it was found that there is a new culture among the Meranaw youth described in the words and phrases used by the authors in their songs. Three aspects of Meranaw culture were discovered: (1) Culture of Clothing, Orderliness, and Behavior, (2) Culture of Courtship and Marriage, and (3) Moral Values. The aforementioned modern culture is recognized and accepted by most Meranaw youth today. They are young people living and experiencing the advancements of technology. This is the era of the internet, which changes Meranaw youth's lives. They are the youth who embrace the changes happening in their surroundings. The study proved that some of the traditional cultures of the Meranaw have changed. Here are the changes in the culture of Meranaw youth identified in the survey:

1. The culture of clothing, orderliness, and behavior of Meranaw women has changed.

In clothing, the Gen Z Meranaw women can be divided into two groups: (a) those who prefer wearing loose clothing like abaya (Islamic dress) due to the influence of Islam, and (b) those who have entirely forgotten traditional attire and adopt a new style and way of dressing. They wear tighter and shorter clothes, including tight jeans with holes. Some do not cover their heads with a veil, revealing their hair. In grooming, Meranaw women are divided into two groups: (a) those who do not wear makeup and (b) those who wear makeup, use perfume, and groom their eyebrows and eyelashes. In terms of behavior, most Meranaw youths have changed their behaviors, while others still maintain proper conduct.

2. The study found that Gen Z Meranaw youth have recognized a new way or style of courtship. The traditional culture of courtship has been largely forgotten.

Here are the new methods or styles of courtship recognized by Meranaw youth today: (a) Courtship through online communication. (b) Courtship in public places. (c) The suitor goes to the house where the young women live. (d) Courtship among Meranaw youth involves physical interaction with each other. (e) Courtship is initiated by women towards the men they like. (f) Courtship between married women and single men.

3. In the marriage culture, some traditional steps have been forgotten by Meranaw youth, while others are still recognized and followed today.

In marriage:

- 1) The practice of engagement (pamamanhikan) remains recognized by Meranaw youth as part of traditional marriage customs.
- 2) Giving a dowry (betang) to the bride's family from the groom's family persists.
- 3) Both families' social status or standing involved in the marriage is still considered necessary.
- 4) The traditional practice of the groom's parents choosing the bride has changed; now, the man looks for a woman to marry and informs his parents.

The study also discovered moral values.

(a) The beautiful morals recognized by the elder Meranaw have disappeared. This means that most Meranaw youth no longer possess the mentioned beautiful morals reflected in the analyzed songs. (b) It was also found that there are now recognized customs of gay and lesbian individuals in the modern Meranaw society.

In traditional Meranaw culture, being gay or lesbian is strictly forbidden due to teachings in Islam. However, the analysis revealed that there is a group of Meranaw youth who acknowledge the existence of gay and lesbian individuals in modern Meranaw society. The issue regarding gay and lesbian individuals is part of the moral values in Meranaw culture.

The analysis results and interviews with young Meranaw informants revealed several factors that contributed to the changes in the culture of Gen Z Meranaw youth.

These factors are as follows: (1) Influence of family, (2) Influence of social media, (3) Influence of existing language and culture in society, (4) Influence of education, (5) Influence of institutions in society, and (6) Influence of Islam.

The factors above directly impact the lifestyle of Meranaw youth today, influencing their perceptions and recognition as part of Filipino society. These are the causes of cultural changes among Meranaw youth.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the researcher from the study conducted, the following conclusions were drawn:

The authors of contemporary songs by the Meranaw used words and phrases in their respective songs that reflect and describe the new culture of Gen Z Meranaw youth in the City of Marawi. Three aspects of the culture of Meranaw youth are reflected in the analyzed contemporary songs: (1) Culture of Clothing, Orderliness, and Behavior, (2) Culture of Courtship and Marriage, and (3) Moral Values.

The new culture of Meranaw youth seen in the twenty-five (25) contemporary songs analyzed is due to factors that have contributed to the cultural changes among Meranaw youth in the present time. These factors include family, friends, education, social media, social institutions, and the language and culture existing in society.

The minds of Meranaw youth have become open regarding the happenings within the society to which they belong. Here, they freely express themselves with their perspectives on life. They confront any changes around them without fear, believing it is necessary to embrace changes to be part of the new face of youth worldwide. The contemporary songs reflect the new image of Gen Z Meranaw youth. Based on the authors' descriptions in their songs, Meranaw youth recognize a modern culture in the present time. The unique style of clothing is far removed from the traditional attire of the Meranaw. Meranaw women also exhibit a distinct way of grooming their faces through heavy makeup and the styling of their eyebrows, eyelashes, and hair whenever they leave the house. The new Meranaw youth also display unique behaviors

that significantly differ from the customs exhibited by traditional Meranaw. It appears that Meranaw youth are not different from other youth from different tribes or countries regarding courtship and marriage. Gen Z Meranaw youth now follow courtship practices observed online, seen on T.V. and in cinemas, and influenced by the courtship customs of other tribes or ethnic groups in the Philippines.

Even in marriage, parents no longer control whom their sons and daughters wish to partner with, as Meranaw men and women can now freely choose their spouses. Meranaw youth continue to explore and learn, leading to the acquisition of new knowledge. This influences their character and values in life. They are not afraid to change ingrained values if they feel that change is necessary. If they believe what they stand for is essential, they will fight for it, as evidenced by the emergence of gay and lesbian individuals in the new Meranaw society.

Based on the points above, Meranaw youth have come a long way in personal change, demonstrating that they can keep pace with any changes in the world. This is the image presented in the twenty-five (25) contemporary Meranaw songs analyzed. Therefore, the songs of the Meranaw serve as a tool for their identity as a group that continues to engage with the world and is open to any changes.

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