

Folk Beliefs, Patterns and Commonalities in the Personal Narratives on Typhoon Washi (*Sendong*)

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the patterns and commonalities as well as the folk elements in the personal narratives of some college students who are *Sendong* survivors from Iligan City. It employs the narratological approach which studies narratives' structural components to understand how repetitive elements, themes and patterns yield a set of universals that determine the makeup of a story (Pradl, 1984). Ten (10) written personal narratives of students who have had first-hand experiences of typhoon *Sendong* were selected based on the word count of at least 300 words. The various terms and phrases used to refer to the December 16, 2011 incident were identified and the presence of some folk elements was investigated. After that, the frequently employed common nouns and adjectives in the paragraphs discussing the events before, during, and after the flood were identified to determine the commonalities and patterns in these personal narratives.

Findings reveal that aside from the local term *Sendong* to refer to that December 16 incident, students also frequently employ terms like *typhoon*, *tragedy*, *catastrophe* and others. Most of these are accompanied with negative descriptive adjectives such as *tragic*, *unforgettable*, *horrible*, and *unexpected*. Out of the ten, four narratives contain folk elements, where three talk about animals and one about ominous sky suggesting upcoming calamities. More importantly, the topmost frequently used nouns include *water* (59 occurrences), *house/s* (55 occurrences), *time* (27 occurrences), *rain* (26 occurrences), and *father* (20 occurrences). In terms of the dominant descriptive adjectives, it is found out that *strong/er* is the most dominant (17 occurrences), then *high/er* (8 occurrences) and *heavy* as well as *safe/r* (7 occurrences, respectively). Overall, the common theme of the survivors' personal narratives on typhoon *Sendong* is the *strong/er water* or in short, the flood, which means that the stories in the narratives dominantly revolves around the discussion about the strong water they encountered during the typhoon.

Keywords: *folk beliefs*, *narratives*, Typhoon Washi

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INTRODUCTION

The World Risk Index of 2016 (World Risk Report 2016) reveals that the Philippines is in the third spot for having an extremely high disaster risk percentage of 26.70% when it comes to natural tragedies or disasters. This is also supported by the findings of Global Climate Risk Index of 2017 (Kreft, Eckstein, & Melchior, 2016) which identifies the Philippines as one of the top five countries mostly affected by extreme weather catastrophes in terms of not only fatalities but also economic losses. These findings can be attributed to the country's geographical location. The Philippines is positioned along the "typhoon belt" in the Pacific region near the Equator which makes it susceptible to tropical cyclones and storms. Aside from that, it is situated along the "Pacific Ring of Fire" region where many of Earth's volcanic eruptions and earthquakes occur. Thus, there is no denying that the Philippines is one of the global hotspots very vulnerable to tragic calamities.

It was past midnight of December 16, 2011 when the typhoon Sendong, with the international name Washi, made a landfall in Mindanao. The two badly affected areas were Cagayan de Oro City and Iligan City. People were informed about the typhoon but they just did not bother about it since experiencing heavy rains were normal for them. They did not think that it would bring a very painful and catastrophic experience to them.

Several studies have been conducted already about the typhoon Sendong after it happened. While most of these researches focused on sociological aspects (e.g. Yucada, et al., 2013; Bracamonte, et al., 2014; Escalante, et al., 2012; Ponce, et al., 2014; Labadisos, et al. (2014), others looked into its environmental (e.g., Franta, et al., 2016) and even management and economic impacts (e.g., Borja, et al., 2014). Thus, this paper uses the linguistic, specifically the narratological lens, in examining the Sendong tragedy as there is a dearth studies on typhoon Sendong in the language studies perspectives.

Particularly, this paper investigates the patterns and commonalities in the personal narratives of college students who are residents of Iligan City and who were able to experience the said typhoon. Furthermore, this paper answers the following questions:

1. What various words/phrases are used by the writers to refer to the December 16, 2011 incident?
2. What are the folk elements (folk beliefs, superstitions, others) present in the ten personal narratives?
3. What are the common nouns and descriptive adjectives found among the ten narratives
 - 3.1. before the flood
 - 3.2. during the flood

3.3. after the flood

4. What are the frequently used nouns and descriptive adjectives in each narrative and in general?

Narratology and Narratives: Brief Review on Theoretical Frameworks

According to Pradl (1984), narratology refers to the structuralist's study of narrative. The structuralist seeks to understand how recurrent elements, themes, and patterns yield a set of universals that determine the makeup of a story. The ultimate goal of such analysis is to move from a taxonomy of elements to an understanding of how these elements are arranged in actual narratives, fictitious and real. The intellectual tradition out of which narratology grew began with the linguistic work of Ferdinand de Saussure. He initiated "structuralism," the study of systems or structures as independent from meanings, and the field of Semiotics was born. Structuralism was further shaped by French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, who concluded that myths found in various cultures can be interpreted in terms of their repetitive structures. Particularly, these repetitive structures are then the focus of this study of personal narratives written by the students who experienced the flood caused by the typhoon Sendong.

Narratology, as defined in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, is the study of narrative structure. Since narratives do not speak for themselves or have unanalyzed merit, they require interpretation when used as data in social research. Thus, narratology focuses on finding out the commonalities and differences in narratives. Just like structuralism and semiotics, it is anchored on the notion of a common literary language or a universal pattern of codes that operates within the text of a work. Specifically in the sociolinguistics and other related fields, the concept of narrative is restricted, referring to brief, topically specific stories organized around characters, setting, and plot (eg. Labovian narratives in answer to a single interview question).

Furthermore, as pointed out by Laslett (in Riessman, 2000), analysis of personal narratives can illuminate "individual and collective action and meanings, as well as the social processes by which social life and human relationships are made and changed". Langellier (as cited in Riessman, 2005) adds that embedded in the lives of the ordinary, the marginalized, and the muted, personal narrative responds to the disintegration of master narratives as people make sense of experience, claim identities, and 'get a life' by telling and writing their stories. Furthermore, Daniel Bertaux (in Fortune et al., 2013), believes that every life story contains a large proportion of factual data which can be verified (e.g. with dates and places of biographical events). Locating himself in the "realist" research tradition, he argues that informants' stories collected from the same milieu can serve as documentary sources for investigating the world "out there." Although

acknowledging that informants do not “tell us the whole truth and nothing but the truth“, by collecting many stories from the same milieu, Bertaux claims to uncover “recurrent patterns concerning collective phenomena or share collective experience in a particular milieu” (p. 2).

This study is therefore deemed significant because readers, especially those who have just heard but are not familiar about the typhoon Sendong, would be given insights on what these Sendong victims had went through and how they view their experiences. This is made possible by knowing the patterns and commonalities in the ten personal narratives written by the victims themselves.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study employs a descriptive design. Ten (10) personal narratives of college students who have had first-hand experiences of typhoon Sendong were selected based on the word count of at least 300 words. This personal narrative was part of the final term requirement in English 1 (College English 1). The students were asked to write a narrative-descriptive composition about their Sendong experience using MSU-IIT’s Online Learning Environment or MOLE, a web-based portal where a teacher and the students can interact in their virtual classroom. More specifically, they were told to write specific paragraphs narrating/describing what happened *before*, *during*, and *after* the flood. Since not all students were from Iligan City and not all had experienced the incident, others were instructed to interview Sendong survivors and do the same procedures. The ten chosen personal narratives were all written by students who experienced the Sendong flood and who are residents of Iligan City.

Each of the narratives was then studied. Primarily, the different terms and phrases used to refer to the December 16, 2011 incident were identified. Then the presence of some folk elements such as folk beliefs and superstitions was investigated. After that, the common nouns and adjectives used in the paragraphs discussing the events before, during, and after the flood were identified. In addition, the frequency of the dominant nouns and descriptive adjectives were also noted. These were done to identify if there are commonalities and patterns in these personal narratives. After all the tabulations, interpretation and analysis were conducted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The succeeding paragraphs present the results of the study and their corresponding discussions and explanations. To avoid confusion, let us differentiate first the term “common” and “dominant.” In this study, the term “common” refers to a word (specifically a noun or a descriptive adjective) which is

present in all the 10 narratives, regardless of its frequency of occurrence in each particular narrative. On the other hand, the term “dominant” refers to a word which is frequently occurring in the narratives.

Terms Used to Refer to the December 11, 2011 Incident

Figure 1. Illustrates that the tragic calamity experienced by the writers of the ten (10) personal narratives during December 16, 2011 is generally referred to as Sendong, typhoon, tragedy, storm, event, catastrophe, flood, and memory. These are the nouns usually used by the students when they talk about that incident. In most cases, they accompany these terms with descriptive adjectives for more emphasis.

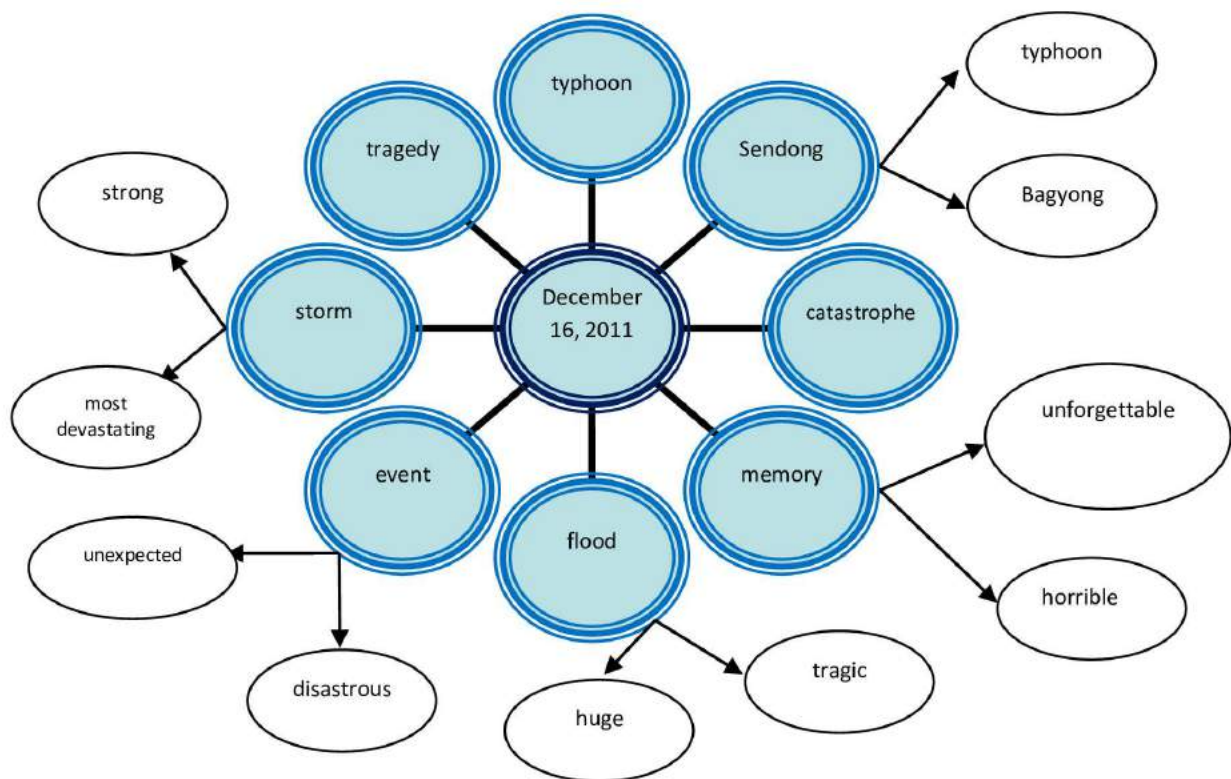


Figure 1. Terms Associated to the December 16, 2011 Incident

Based on Figure 1, one can say that though several terms are employed by the survivors to refer to that December 11 incident, most of them are words that denote negative meanings. This is reflective of what they experienced and how they felt and even feel until now despite the fact that the tragedy occurred more than a decade already.

Some Folk Elements in the Personal Narratives

Of the ten (10) personal narratives, only four (4) contain some folk elements. Three (3) of these are about beliefs that animals can predict disasters/calamities while the other one (1) is about the ominous sky. Below are excerpts from the three personal narratives illustrating folk beliefs about animals. These beliefs are italicized in the excerpts. (Note: PN means personal narrative, thus, PN4 means personal narrative number 4.)

“After dinner I saw that the rain started pouring again so as we always do we stayed alert and observe our surroundings. *Animals and insects are making noise so we started to feel that something bad will really happen that night.* Around 9 in the evening we could feel and hear the wind blowing together with the rain. The water from the “kanal” near my grandfather’s garden started to rise. *Rats climbed the trees nearby, birds hide inside their nest, frogs making noise, cows mooing and different animal noise can be heard.* (PN4)

“Afternoon that time when the parties are gone and time to home I was so happy and overwhelmed. When I got home I spotted *some animals that are noisy* and I don’t know why but someone told me that *if animals behave like that it’s a sign that something will happen and it is all about nature.*”(PN7)

“...around 3 am, my parents woke up early because my father will be going on a trip in Cagayan de Oro. *Our dog was so noisy* that my father gets annoyed. He went to our dog to check what is wrong...he saw the water rushing towards our house.” (PN5)

In these excerpts, the animals acted as if they knew something horrible was coming, a belief held by many people especially in the rural areas. The unusual behaviors of these animals are considered predictors of calamity and other events. For instance, during New Year’s Eve, we are always told by our parents to listen to the sound of animal that would come out when the clock strikes 12:00 midnight. If a cow moos, it means prosperity; if a rooster crows or

a hen clucks, it signifies famine for the whole year. In the students' specific experiences, the erratic behavior of the animals somehow foretold the catastrophic flood. As pointed out by a certain researcher named Liz Von Muggenthaler, animals can pick up the "infrasonic" sound pulses created by storms (and earthquakes) and get a head start on fleeing to safety. She adds that the animals learn to associate such signals with danger.

As mentioned, one personal narrative reveals the student's observation about the sky. He noticed that the sky looked so bizarre which implies that he felt something bad was coming. The use of the descriptive adjectives *strange* and *unusual* signifies that he thought that the darkness of the sky really meant something unpleasant would come.

"...it was the time at our Christmas party, I've been noticing something strange at the sky, it was dark and unusual..." (PN2)

The presence of these folk elements is somehow corroborated by the study of Yucada, et al. (2013). The researchers were able to gather 52 stories related to new and re-emerging myths during Sendong. Specifically, superstitious beliefs about Maria Cacao and *tambyiong* were dominant in the gathered stories.

These findings only reveal that even though Iligan City has become a highly urbanized city, some of its people still believe in these folk and superstitious elements, which are handed down from generations to generations. It is important to note that these narratives are written by college students, yet these elements are still evident.

Common and Dominant Terms in the Paragraphs Before the Flood

Based on Table 1., *rain* is the most common noun that appears in all the ten (10) personal narratives of the students. It is followed by the nouns *home* and *Christmas* (which appear in 8 out of 10 personal narratives), and then *night*, *party/ies* and *December* which occur seven (7) times respectively. These results are not surprising. It is to be noted that the rain even started on the 15th of December, a day prior to the big flood. And most of the people were celebrating Christmas parties especially during night time. The noun *home* is also evident because when the flood came, it was night time and everybody was in the homes/houses.

Table 1. Common Noun Words in the Ten PN's Before the Flood

Word	PN 1	PN 2	PN 3	PN 4	PN 5	PN 6	PN 7	PN 8	PN 9	PN 10	Frequency	Rank
rain	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	10	1 st
home	/	/			/	/	/	/	/	/	8	2 nd
Christmas	/	/	/	/	/		/	/		/	8	2 nd
night	/		/	/	/	/		/		/	7	3 rd
party/parties	/	/	/	/	/		/			/	7	3 rd
December	/			/	/	/		/	/	/	7	3 rd
house/s	/	/		/	/			/	/		6	4 th
sleep	/	/			/		/	/			5	5 th
typhoon	/			/				/	/	/	5	5 th

In all the paragraphs describing the students' experiences before the occurrence of the flood, the same findings are revealed. As depicted in Table 2., *rain* is the most dominant noun followed by *parties*, *time* and *home*. Interestingly, as shown in both Table 1 and Table 2, many of the students prefer to use the term *home* than *house*. The concept of home being more favored than house is probably due to the idea that when one says home, it is a place where a happy family lives together. Whereas when one says house, it just refers to the building and its structure. However, if we are going to combine the frequency of occurrence of the nouns *home* and *house*, it then becomes the most dominant noun which appears in the paragraphs which describe the events before the flood came.

Table 2. Dominant Noun Words in the Ten PN's Before the Flood

Noun Word	Frequency	Rank
rain	23	1 st
party/ies	13	2 nd
time	12	3 rd
home	12	3 rd
day	11	4 th
Christmas	10	5 th
Night	9	6 th
School	9	6 th
flood/s	9	6 th
December	8	7 th
typhoon	8	7 th

In terms of the adjectives, the more common terms that appear are *strong/er* and *heavy*. They are both present in five (5) out of ten (10) personal narratives, respectively, as shown in Table 3. Table 4 similarly reveals that the frequently used descriptive adjectives in the paragraphs describing the events before the flood are the terms *strong/er* and *heavy*. These findings can be attributed to the fact that these two adjectives are commonly used to describe the rain or the wind. It is important to note that prior to that big flood, there was a strong and heavy rain accompanied with wind. Below are some excerpts in the personal narratives showing the use of these adjectives:

“Around 10 pm, the rain grew *stronger* and *stronger*.”

“Because of the *heavy* rain, we immediately went home from church.”

“I noticed that the rain wasn’t too *heavy* but the wind was very *strong*.”

Table 3. Common Descriptive Adjective Words in the Ten PN’s Before the Flood

Word	PN 1	PN 2	PN 3	PN 4	PN 5	PN 6	PN 7	PN 8	PN 9	PN 10	Frequency	Rank
strong/er	/		/		/			/		/	5	1 st
heavy			/		/	/		/		/	5	1 st
normal	/				/						2	2 nd
unexpected	/								/		2	2 nd
dark		/			/						2	2 nd
small			/						/		2	2 nd
excited				/			/				2	2 nd
high					/		/				2	2 nd
happy							/		/		2	2 nd
rainy						/				/	2	2 nd
ready							/	/			2	2 nd
hard/er									/	/	2	2 nd

The use of the adjectives like *happy* and *normal* in the paragraphs can also be seen in the narrative because at that time, most of these students were celebrating Christmas parties and were receiving gifts. Aside from that, they just considered the rain normal the fact that they were used to having heavy rain with some wind before. In fact, the people were even informed about the typhoon through the news but they never bothered to worry about it.

Table 4. Dominant Descriptive Adjectives in the Ten PN's Before the Flood

Adjective	Frequency	Rank
strong/er	9	1 st
Heavy	6	2 nd
Happy	5	3 rd
Ready	4	4 th
Rainy	3	5 th

So generally, in the paragraphs that describe the events before the flood came, the most common noun *rain* which is present in all the 10 narratives is also the most frequently used noun. The same is true with the most common descriptive adjective *strong/er* which is likewise the most dominant adjective. Based on these recurring patterns, we can say that the common theme in the paragraphs describing/narrating the events before the flood came is about the *strong rain*.

Common and Dominant Terms in the Paragraphs During the Flood

The commonest term present in all the ten (10) personal narratives in the specific paragraphs describing what transpired when the flood came is the noun *water* (refer to Table 5). This is followed by the noun *house/s* (appearing in 9 out of 10 personal narratives) and *family* and *mom/mother* (present in 7 out of 10 personal narratives).

Table 5. Common Noun Words in the Ten PN's During the Flood

Word	PN 1	PN 2	PN 3	PN 4	PN 5	PN 6	PN 7	PN 8	PN 9	PN 10	Frequency	Rank
water	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	10	1 st
house/s	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	9	2 nd
family	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	7	3 rd
mother/mom	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	7	3 rd
flood	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	6	4 th
morning	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	6	4 th
father/s	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	6	4 th
neighbor/s/s/hood	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	6	4 th
God/s	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	5	5 th
minute/s	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	5	5 th
people	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	5	5 th
time	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	4	6 th
second/s	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	4	6 th
clock	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	4	6 th
level	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	4	6 th
things/stuffs	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	4	6 th
place	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	4	6 th
noise	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	4	6 th
sleep	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	4	6 th

In terms of the frequency of occurrence, the noun *water* is still evidently the most dominant noun, as reflected in Table 6, which occurs 42 times in the paragraphs describing what happened when the flood came. The term *house(s)/home* with a combined frequency of 33 times follow. Other dominant nouns include *mother/mom* occurring 19 times, and *father(s)* and *neighbor(s/s)/hood* occurring 14 times respectively.

The results are therefore similar, i.e., *water* is the commonest and the most frequently used noun in all the paragraphs discussing what happened to the students during the flood. It is very obvious since this was during the time that they were combating with the flood and the water was going inside their respective *homes/houses*. The noun *family* is also noticeable since during that time, most of them were with their family, particularly with their *mother/mom* and/or *father*. The frequent mentioning of the noun *neighbor* is also understandable since while they themselves were struggling to survive against the flood, they were also hearing their neighbors shouting for help. Some of the students even sought help or were saved by their neighbors. Below are excerpts in the personal narratives showing the use of these common and frequently used nouns:

“...yet the **water** rose up so fast for about an inch in a couple of seconds.”

“My **father** brought me and my sister on our aunt’s **house**.”

“What frightened [sic] me the most were the voices from the **neighborhood** shouting for help.”

“...**mom** shook us telling that the **water** already entered the **house**.”

“I have to be strong for my **family**.”

Table 6. Dominant Noun Words in the Ten PN’s During the Flood

Noun Word	Frequency	Rank
Water	42	1 st
house(s)/home	33	2 nd
mother/mom	19	3 rd
father(s)	14	4 th
neighbor(s/s)/hood	14	4 th
brother(s)	13	5 th
Time	10	6 th
Flood	9	7 th
Level	9	7 th
Sleep	9	7 th
Morning	7	8 th
Family	7	8 th

For the adjectives, the more common descriptive adjective is *high(er)* which is present in 4 out of 10 personal narratives. Other adjectives include *strong(er)* and *safe(r)*, each of which appears in 3 out of 10 personal narratives written by the students (refer to Table 7). Similarly, the more frequently used descriptive adjective is *high(er)* which occurs 6 times in the paragraph describing what took place when the flood came to the houses of the students.

Table 7. Common Descriptive Adjectives in the Ten PN's During the Flood

Word	PN 1	PN 2	PN 3	PN 4	PN 5	PN 6	PN 7	PN 8	PN 9	PN10	Frequency	Rank
high(er)	/	/			/	/					4	1 st
strong(er)	/	/						/			3	2 nd
saf(er)	/		/							/	3	2 nd

The frequent use of the adjective *high(er)* is expected since it was mostly used to describe the flood or the water level at that time. And because of this incident, the people were worried and tried to find for a *safer* place to survive from the flood. The following show samples of how these descriptive adjectives are used in the paragraphs:

“My father was planning to find a *safer* place in order for us to be *safe* but the water goes [sic] *higher* and *higher*.”

“...the water in the Tambacan river was so *high*.”

“...the three of us and I became worried because I overhear her saying her CS knit hurts.”

“...I stand myself as *stronger* as I can because I am the eldest in our family.”

Table 8. Dominant Descriptive Adjectives in the Ten PN's During the Flood

Adjective	Frequency	Rank
high(er)	6	1 st
strong(er)	5	2 nd
safe(r)	4	3 rd

In general, *water* is the commonest as well as the most dominant noun used while *high(er)* is the most common and dominant descriptive adjective used in the paragraphs during the flood. Thus, the common theme of these paragraphs is the *high(er) water* level caused by the flood during that time.

Common and Dominant Terms in the Paragraphs During the Flood

In the paragraphs where students were asked to narrate what happened after the flood, the most common nouns used are *life/lives* and *house/home*, which appear in 7 out of 10 personal narratives respectively. Please refer to Table 9 below. These are then followed by the nouns *water*, *place* and *morning* (appearing in 5 narratives, respectively) and the terms *family*, *mud*, *time*, and *tragedy* (appearing in 4 out of 10 narratives). The following are excerpts which contain some of these commonly used nouns:

“Our *house* was full of *mud* and all our things were soaked in *water* and dirty with *mud*.”

“I am so thankful that my *family* did not get hurt but many of my relatives lost their *lives* and some are still missing until now. “

“..it was 5 am in the *morning*, I went outside and I was shocked what happened...”

“...our *place* and even the nature were destroyed.”

Table 9. Common Noun Words in the Ten PN's After the Flood

Word	PN 1	PN 2	PN 3	PN 4	PN 5	PN 6	PN 7	PN 8	PN 9	PN 10	Frequency	Rank
life/lives	/	/		/	/	/	/		/		7	1 st
house(s)/home	/	/	/	/	/		/	/			7	1 st
water		/	/	/			/	/			5	2 nd
morning		/	/	/			/		/		5	2 nd
place(s)		/	/			/	/		/		5	2 nd
family	/	/					/			/	4	3 rd
time(s)			/	/			/		/		4	3 rd
mud		/	/	/				/			4	3 rd
tragedy				/	/	/	/				4	3 rd

Likewise, the most frequently used noun is *house/home* with a total of 23 occurrences. This is followed by *water* (15 times of occurrence) and *life/lives* (11 times of occurrence). The noun *house/home* is dominantly mentioned since the writers of the personal narratives observed many houses and homes destroyed by the flood. Some of them even lost their homes. The frequent use of the noun *life/lives* is due to the fact that just like many lost houses and properties, there were also many dead and even missing people who lost their lives because of the typhoon Sendong. In addition, the noun *water* is still present since the water did not subside immediately that even until morning of the next day, there were still places with streams and little bodies of water.

Worth mentioning also is the noun *mud* which appears 8 times in the paragraphs describing what happened after the flood. What remained after the strong current of water was the mud.

“...all I saw was the *mud* all over the place. We went to our house but we cannot enter because of the *mud* blocking the door. The depth of the *mud* was just on my knee level...”

“...our yard was muddy...there was also a snake crawling in the *mud*...the place was full of *mud*.”

Table 10. Dominant Noun Words in the Ten PN’s After the Flood

Noun Word	Frequency	Rank
house(s)/home	23	1 st
Water	15	2 nd
life/lives	11	3 rd
Mud	8	4 th
place(s)	7	5 th
mom/mother	6	6 th
time(s)	6	6 th
Tragedy	6	6 th

In the last portion of the personal narratives, the common adjectives present in 4 out of 10 personal narratives are the terms *missing/lost*, *thankful/glad* and *lucky/blessed*. The adjective *missing* or *lost* appears several times because the students just wrote down what they had observed after Sendong. These adjectives do not only describe the properties and things but also the lives of those people who are lost and missing due to the typhoon. Sample sentences having the adjectives *missing* and *lost* are as follows:

“...some are still *missing* until now.”

“There were so many casualties, many *missing* people.”

“Many of them was still *missing* until today.”

“Seeing people crying to find their *lost* someone...”

Table 11. Common Descriptive Adjectives in the Ten PN’s After the Flood

Word	P N 1	PN 2	PN 3	PN 4	PN 5	PN 6	PN 7	PN 8	PN 9	PN1 0	Frequ ency	Rank
missing/lost	/		/			/	/				4	1 st
thankful/glad	/	/			/				/		4	1 st
lucky/blessed			/				/		/	/	4	1 st
Strong		/	/		/						3	2 nd

Interestingly, based on Table 11, one can see that 3 of these terms (*thankful/glad*, *strong*, *lucky/blessed*) are positive terms indicating that they still feel blessed and thankful despite the tragic experience they went through. They are able to show how strong they are since they are able to survive that catastrophe physically and little by little, emotionally.

Table 12. Dominant Descriptive Adjectives in the Ten PN's After the Flood

Adjectives	Frequency	Rank
missing/lost	5	1 st
hard/difficult	5	1 st
lucky/blessed	4	2 nd
thankful/glad	4	2 nd

Of all these adjectives, the most frequently used are *missing/lost* and *hard/difficult* which occur 5 times respectively in the last paragraphs of the personal narratives. This is somewhat surprising since the adjective *hard/difficult* is not included in the common adjective found in the 10 narratives. However, in PN7, the adjective *difficult* is used 4 times in the last paragraph, indicating the emotional struggle experienced by the student. Below are the lines where this adjective is used in PN7:

“The city was so pained that day, people are finding foods to eat and it is so *difficult*.”

“Seeing for the first time counting dead is so *difficult*, babies, children, mother and father.”

“It was a *difficult* recovery that time...”

“It’s a deep recovery and *difficult* to move on but we did it.”

To sum it up, the term *house/home* which is the most commonly found noun in many of the narratives is also the most frequently used noun. Similarly, the most common adjective *missing/lost* is at the same time the most dominant adjective in this category. It is then safe to say that the common theme of these paragraphs discussing the events after the flood is the *missing/lost houses/homes*.

Dominant Terms in All Ten Personal Narratives

Findings reveal that the topmost nouns include *water* (59 occurrences), *house/s* (55 occurrences), *time* (27 occurrences), *rain* (26 occurrences), and *father* (20 occurrences). However, if the frequencies of the synonymous terms *house/s* and *home* are summed up, it would become the most used noun in all the paragraphs with 73 times of occurrence. Similarly, the same happens when the frequency of

occurrence of the terms *mother* and *mom* are added; it would yield to 29 occurrences, which is bigger than the frequency of the nouns like *time*, *rain* and *father*.

Undoubtedly, *water* is the most frequently used noun since this term has been mentioned in the paragraphs describing what happened during and after the flood. And since the tragedy was about typhoon and flood, it is expected to see more of this term in the personal narratives. In the same manner, the terms *house/s* and *home* are also very evident most especially because many houses were destroyed during that typhoon. These were observed or even experienced by the students and were reflected in their personal narratives. Besides, the flood occurred at around past midnight and most of them were already sleeping in their houses/homes.

In terms of the dominant descriptive adjectives, it is found out that *strong/er* is the most dominant with 17 times of occurrence. This is then followed by *high/er* (with 8 occurrences) and *heavy* as well as *safe/r* (with 7 occurrences, respectively). The frequent use of the adjective *strong/er* can be attributed to the fact that it is used to describe nouns like *water*, *wind*, *rain*, and *typhoon*. It is even used to describe one of the writers who, being the eldest, has to be strong in the family during that tragedy.

Franzosi (1998) is indeed right when he points out that narrative analysis of the text (or in this study, the written personal experiences of the Sendong survivors) helps to bring not only the linguistic characteristics or properties of the story, but also a great deal of sociology hidden behind the text. As a whole, the dominant and recurring words/terms employed by the Sendong survivors reveal that the common theme of the personal narratives about typhoon Sendong is the *strong/er water* or in short, the flood. This means that the stories in the narratives dominantly revolves around the discussions about the strong water the survivors encountered during the typhoon. And this is not only about their individual but also, more importantly, collective experience.

CONCLUSION

Language is indeed a powerful tool to express what a person feels and thinks towards a person, a thing, an idea or an event. This paper has shown that the students who were able to experience the flashfloods during typhoon Sendong share common feelings about it. This is evidently reflected in their use of language, particularly the use of nouns and descriptive adjectives. The common nouns like *rain*, *water*, and *house/home* as well as the frequently used descriptive adjectives *strong/er*, *high/er* and *missing/lost* all reveal what they have felt and how they feel about the incident. They reflect what these students went through in that horrible ordeal, not just individually but also collectively. Thus, the more common and

frequently used a term or a word is, the more it reveals about what we think and feel. The adage “A man’s language is an index of his thoughts” and, if I may add, feelings or emotions, is certainly true in these personal narratives.

Additionally, it is surprising that though these students are exposed to media and technology and are living near the city proper, still few of them know some folk beliefs and superstitions. This only means that we cannot really erase folk traditions because they have become part of us.

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