

The Use of English Narratives in Promoting Banggai Coastal Culture Through Cultural Tourism

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Abstract

Tourism serves not only as an economic driver but also as a medium for preserving and transmitting cultural identity. In Banggai, Central Sulawesi, coastal traditions and rituals such as Molabot Tumpe and lobe fishing embody rich local wisdom with strong potential for cultural tourism. However, linguistic limitations and inconsistent English representation have hindered effective promotion at the global level. This study explores how English narratives are constructed and utilized to promote Banggai's coastal culture. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, involving semi-structured interviews with three key informants: a cultural expert, a tour guide, and a tourism practitioner, supported by document analysis of brochures, websites, social media content, and promotional videos. Data were analyzed thematically and through discourse analysis to examine diction, narrative style, and structure. The results identify five dominant forms of English narratives: comparison, descriptive-promotional, personal invitation, experiential-practical, and cultural awareness. These narratives effectively convey ceremonial, culinary, and social aspects of Banggai's culture but underrepresent expressive heritage such as songs, dances, and oral storytelling. The findings also reveal challenges in linguistic competence, cultural translation, and stakeholder collaboration. Overall, the study highlights that English narratives act as cultural mediators that enhance Banggai's visibility, authenticity, and sustainability in global tourism. By emphasizing narrative competence and intercultural collaboration, this research contributes to developing English-for-Tourism practices that support both cultural preservation and destination branding.

Keywords: English Narratives; Cultural Tourism; Banggai Coastal Culture

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become a strategic sector in Indonesia, serving not only as a driver of economic growth but also as a means of preserving cultural heritage. In 2024, the sector contributed 4.01% to national GDP, underscoring its significance for both policy and practice in the year ahead (Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs Republic of Indonesia, 2025). Within this landscape, Banggai in Central Sulawesi is notable for its distinctive coastal traditions, culinary practices, and cultural rituals. Despite this richness, the promotion of Banggai's cultural tourism remains constrained, as most available materials are produced in Indonesian or local languages, limiting their reach to international audiences (Akbar et al., 2020). Language plays a crucial role in overcoming this limitation. English, as a global lingua franca, provides broader access to international markets and serves as a medium through which local heritage can be communicated globally (Jumino et al., 2021). Previous studies in the Indonesian context have shown that targeted English for Tourism training enhances communication, confidence, and service quality among local communities (Prasetyo et al., 2023; Burhanuddin et al., 2021; Pratiwi et al., 2023). However, these studies primarily emphasize functional and transactional

communication, offering limited insights into how narrative strategies can shape cultural identity and tourist perceptions.

Narratives differ from transactional communication in that they construct meaning, embody cultural values, and transform local knowledge into experiences that resonate with international audiences (Beevor, 2021). As cultural mediators, narratives contribute not only to promotion but also to the preservation and reinterpretation of heritage (Sulistyanto et al., 2022). In recent years, scholars have increasingly highlighted the importance of storytelling in sustainable tourism development, arguing that well-crafted narratives help bridge the gap between local culture and global audiences (Luo et al., 2023; Cahyani et al., 2023). Nevertheless, much of the existing research has focused on well-known destinations such as Bali or Yogyakarta (Khater et al., 2025; Iban et al., 2024; Mahagangga et al., 2025; Rosalina et al., 2023), leaving less-documented regions like Banggai underrepresented in academic discourse.

This gap highlights the need to explore how English narratives can serve as a tool for promoting and preserving the cultural identity of Banggai's coastal communities. The novelty of this research lies in its contextual focus and integrative approach, examining English-language narratives not merely as linguistic tools but as cultural instruments that embody local values, promote sustainability, and enhance global visibility. Therefore, this study aims to describe the forms and characteristics of English narratives used in promoting Banggai coastal culture, identify the local cultural elements embedded within them, analyze their effectiveness in cultural tourism promotion, and propose recommendations for developing more representative and communicative cultural narratives.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the role of English narratives in promoting Banggai's coastal culture. As Creswell & Creswell (2018) explain, qualitative research aims to understand and interpret social phenomena within their natural settings, emphasizing participants' perspectives. Similarly, Denzin & Lincoln (2018) describe qualitative inquiry as a process that seeks to explore meaning, context, and human experiences rather than numerical data. The descriptive approach, according to Lambert & Lambert (2012), is particularly appropriate for presenting an accurate and comprehensive summary of events or situations as experienced by individuals. Three participants were purposely selected based on their direct involvement and expertise in cultural tourism: a cultural expert, a tour guide, and a tourism practitioner. Purposive sampling, as noted by Miles et al., (2014), enables researchers to intentionally choose participants who can provide rich and relevant information to address the research objectives. These participants offered insider perspectives on the use of English in representing and promoting Banggai's cultural identity through tourism.

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews and document analysis involving brochures, tourism websites, social media content, and promotional videos. The semi-structured interview format, as suggested by Brinkmann & Kvale (2020), provided flexibility for participants to elaborate their insights while maintaining focus on key research questions. Thematic analysis was applied following Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework to identify recurring narrative forms and cultural themes, followed by discourse analysis to examine diction, style, and narrative structure used in English promotional materials.

To enhance trustworthiness, triangulation was implemented across interviews and documents, ensuring data consistency and depth (Morgan, 2024). Member checking was also conducted with participants to validate interpretations and minimize researcher bias (Motulsky, 2021). In line with ethical research principles, informed consent was obtained, participant identities were anonymized, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. This

methodological design allowed for an in-depth exploration of how English narratives serve both linguistic and cultural functions in promoting Banggai’s coastal heritage, providing an academically grounded and contextually meaningful contribution to tourism and language studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis combined data from semi-structured interviews with three participants and document reviews of brochures, websites, social media posts, and promotional videos. This design captured both stakeholders' perspectives and textual evidence of how English narratives are constructed for cultural tourism promotion in Banggai. The triangulation of interview insights and document data provided a comprehensive picture of how language, culture, and tourism intersect in the region. Five main forms of English narratives were identified: comparison, descriptive-promotional, personal invitation, experiential-practical, and cultural awareness narratives. Comparison narratives positioned Banggai alongside well-known destinations, such as Bali or Raja Ampat, to establish relevance and global visibility. Descriptive-promotional narratives relied on vivid language, personification, and metaphors to evoke emotional responses and highlight natural beauty. Personal invitation narratives reflected an interpersonal tone, “Come and explore Banggai with me”, suggesting authenticity and hospitality. Experiential-practical narratives combined storytelling with practical information on routes, prices, and accommodations, making them useful for trip planning. Finally, cultural awareness narratives framed tourism as an act of respect toward local customs and ecology, aligning with sustainable tourism discourse.

Table 1. Forms of English Narratives in Banggai Tourism Promotion

Narrative Form	Example/Characteristic	Function for Promotion
Comparison	“Bali is famous, but Banggai is the hidden gem.”	Positions Banggai relative to the global icons
Descriptive-promotional	“The sea is clear, almost like glass.”	Highlights beauty with vivid imagery
Personal invitation	“Come and explore Banggai with me.”	Builds personal connection with visitors
Experiential-practical	Info on fees, rentals, and itineraries	Support tourist planning
Cultural awareness	Respect for nature and traditions	Promotes responsible tourism

In terms of content, the narratives highlighted major aspects of coastal life and local identity. Ceremonial practices such as *Molabot Tumpe*, a ritual marking community unity and sea blessing, were frequently mentioned, often serving as symbols of harmony between humans and nature. Fishing traditions like *lobe* were presented as examples of sustainable livelihood, while culinary heritage, including *onyop*, *sinole*, and *jepa*, was portrayed as both a cultural identity marker and a sensory attraction. Social values, such as *tabe'* (respecting elders), appeared occasionally, functioning as moral anchors for local interaction. However, expressive forms like songs, dances, and oral storytelling were rarely represented in English materials.

Table 2. Cultural Elements Represented in English Narratives

Cultural Category	Examples	Frequency in Narratives
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Ceremonial practices	<i>Molabot Tumpe</i>	Frequently represented
Local wisdom	<i>Lobe fishing</i>	Frequently represented
Culinary heritage	<i>Onyop, Sinole, Jepa</i>	Frequently represented
Social values	<i>Tabé'</i> (respect for elders)	Occasionally represented
Expressive culture	Songs, dances, oral traditions	Rarely represented

Analysis of interview data revealed several underlying themes. The tourism practitioner emphasized that English narratives strengthen Banggai’s online visibility by making local destinations easier to find in international search engines. The tour guide noted that narratives using personal tone and emotional appeal were more effective in building trust and curiosity among foreign tourists. Meanwhile, the cultural expert highlighted a tension between promoting culture and preserving authenticity, suggesting that simplified English descriptions often fail to capture the spiritual depth of local traditions.

Participants agreed that English narratives contribute significantly to shaping the global image of Banggai’s coastal culture. Yet, they also reported persistent challenges: limited English competence among local creators, difficulties translating culture-specific expressions, and lack of collaboration between tourism and cultural stakeholders. Some informants stressed the need for community-based training in “English for Cultural Storytelling,” enabling locals to articulate their heritage directly in global platforms.

Interestingly, the textual analysis revealed a pattern of hybridization, where English narratives incorporate Indonesian or local Banggai terms without translation (e.g., *Molabot Tumpe, tabé'*). This linguistic blending allows authenticity to remain intact while inviting cultural curiosity from non-Indonesian readers. It also reflects what Akkalyeva et al., (2021) describe as “symbolic bilingualism”, a communicative strategy to balance accessibility and cultural depth. Overall, the results demonstrate that English narratives in Banggai’s tourism materials perform multiple functions: marketing, identity construction, and cultural mediation. They are not mere tools of promotion but vehicles for cultural dialogue between local voices and international audiences. This interplay of local content and global language provides the foundation for the broader discussion that follows on the role of narrative in sustaining cultural identity within tourism discourse.

Discussion

The findings highlight that English narratives function as cultural mediators, shaping how Banggai’s coastal culture is perceived internationally. The use of comparison and descriptive narratives aligns with global tourism branding strategies (Sharma et al., 2024), yet their localization through cultural practices such as *Molabot Tumpe* shows how global forms are adapted to local contexts. The act of framing local wisdom in globally recognizable formats enables Banggai to assert cultural uniqueness while remaining intelligible to international audiences, a balance that defines successful cultural tourism communication (Kusumastuti et al., 2024). The prominence of personal invitation narratives suggests that authenticity and interpersonal connection are central to engaging foreign visitors, echoing studies on trust and cultural proximity in tourism promotion (Dionisio & Nisi, 2021). Meanwhile, cultural awareness narratives align with global movements toward sustainable and responsible tourism, signaling Banggai’s responsiveness to international trends. Such narratives emphasize not only aesthetic and recreational values but also ecological and communal ethics, reflecting what Paddison & Hall (2024) describe as a shift from “consumption tourism” toward “connection tourism.”

The underrepresentation of expressive heritage indicates a gap in how culture is narrated. As in other Indonesian contexts, this gap is linked to limited English competence and translation challenges (Jihad et al., 2023; Majaputri, 2023). This confirms that linguistic and institutional barriers shape both the range and depth of cultural representation. Many promotional texts rely heavily on literal translation from Indonesian to English, resulting in a loss of emotional nuance and symbolic meaning that is vital for communicating cultural depth (Riyono et al., 2024). The lack of narrative diversity, especially in oral storytelling and ritual explanation, demonstrates the need for more culturally embedded English-language promotion.

Beyond linguistic competence, the findings suggest that narrative construction itself, the way stories are structured, sequenced, and framed, plays a decisive role in shaping tourist perceptions. Through diction, tone, and framing, narratives can either exoticize or humanize local communities. This supports Creswell & Creswell's (2018) notion that meaning in qualitative interpretation is not discovered but *constructed* through the researcher's and participants' shared contexts. Thus, English narratives should not only aim to "translate" local culture but also *reframe* it in ways that respect indigenous worldviews while appealing to global sensibilities.

Furthermore, the study reveals that local voices remain underutilized in the production of English-language promotional materials. Most of the analyzed narratives were created by intermediaries, tour agencies, translators, or government-affiliated institutions, rather than by community members themselves. This reflects what R'boul (2022) terms a "representational imbalance," where cultural expression is mediated through external perspectives. Empowering local storytellers to articulate their own narratives in English could therefore democratize cultural representation and enhance authenticity.

From a pedagogical standpoint, these findings have significant implications for English for Tourism education. Incorporating narrative-based learning, where students and practitioners collaboratively create English promotional stories about their local heritage, could strengthen both language proficiency and cultural awareness. As Saffira (2021) emphasizes, narrative competence is an integral part of intercultural communication competence, bridging the gap between linguistic accuracy and cultural fluency. Developing this competence could help local guides and tourism practitioners convey Banggai's identity more vividly and persuasively to international visitors.

Finally, this study contributes to the broader discussion of how language, identity, and tourism intersect in peripheral regions. By shifting the analytical lens from English proficiency to narrative construction, it underscores the symbolic power of storytelling in shaping the cultural imagination of place. The research thus extends previous work on English Tourism (Saffira, 2021) by positioning narratives as essential tools for cultural sustainability and destination branding, particularly in emerging tourist destinations like Banggai. Future research could expand on this by engaging more local authors, integrating multimedia storytelling, and exploring cross-linguistic collaborations that enrich both authenticity and reach of cultural promotion.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that English narratives play a crucial role in mediating and shaping the global perception of Banggai's coastal culture. Rather than being absent, English narratives are present but uneven in their representational scope and linguistic depth. While ceremonial practices, culinary traditions, and social values are strongly articulated, expressive cultural forms, such as songs, dances, and oral storytelling, remain marginal. This imbalance reflects broader linguistic and institutional constraints, including limited English proficiency, challenges in translating culturally embedded concepts, and insufficient collaboration among

stakeholders in tourism and cultural sectors. Importantly, the study demonstrates that when English narratives are effectively constructed, they operate as more than promotional tools; they become mechanisms for cultural preservation, intercultural dialogue, and sustainable tourism branding. By incorporating local wisdom and traditional practices such as *Molabot Tumpe* and *lobe* fishing within accessible English narratives, Banggai's identity is communicated in ways that resonate with international audiences while maintaining local authenticity. This aligns with recent research emphasizing the narrative dimension of tourism discourse as a bridge between regional identity and global markets. From a methodological perspective, the use of thematic and discourse analysis has provided a nuanced understanding of how diction, structure, and framing influence the representation of culture in tourism promotion. The results highlight the significance of moving beyond language competence to narrative competence, that is, the ability to tell stories that are linguistically appropriate, culturally grounded, and contextually engaging. Practically, these findings suggest that local tourism stakeholders and English practitioners should collaborate to develop narrative training programs and translation workshops that focus on storytelling skills. Furthermore, integrating English narrative writing into community-based tourism projects could empower local actors to participate more actively in cultural promotion. Policy makers may also consider establishing partnerships between local governments, educational institutions, and cultural organizations to strengthen English-based digital promotion aligned with sustainable tourism principles.

In conclusion, enhancing the quality and diversity of English narratives is not only a matter of linguistic improvement but also a strategic approach to cultural diplomacy and heritage preservation. By fostering collaboration, narrative competence, and cultural sensitivity, Banggai's coastal culture can be more authentically and sustainably represented within the global tourism landscape.

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