

Preservation of Svan Oral Epics in Ushguli: The Role of Community Elders

I. Title Page

- A. Title: *Preservation of Svan Oral Epics in Ushguli: The Role of Community Elders*
- B. Student name
- C. Course and instructor
- D. Date

II. Abstract

- A. Purpose: examine how Ushguli elders maintain and transmit Svan oral epics
- B. Central idea: preservation depends on living performance traditions and elder-led memory work
- C. Methods: interviews, recorded recitations, and participant observation in family settings
- D. Key insight: elder storytellers guide the rhythmic, linguistic, and thematic continuity of epics

III. Introduction

- A. Overview of Ushguli as a high-mountain community with strong Svan linguistic retention
- B. Role of oral epics in marking lineage, memory, and communal identity
- C. Thesis: elder performers remain the core custodians of Svan epics through trained recall, ritualized delivery, and controlled instruction
- D. Research purpose: document how elders sustain narrative accuracy and performance norms
- E. Scope: focus limited to Ushguli households with active storytellers

IV. Literature Review

- A. Summary of ethnographic work on Svan narrative arts and mountain oral heritage
- B. Research on memory-based epic traditions in small, highland language groups
- C. Analyses of how storytelling reinforces cultural continuity in isolated communities
- D. Identified gaps: limited documentation of household-level teaching practices in Ushguli

V. Methods Section

- A. Fieldwork design centered on long-form observation during winter storytelling gatherings
- B. Participant group: elder narrators aged 60+ with lineage-based epic knowledge
- C. Data collection: audio recordings of full epics, interviews on memory techniques, and notes on audience participation



- D. Research setting: multi-generational homes where epic recitation occurs during communal evenings
- E. Analytical method: narrative-structure analysis comparing motifs, phrasing, and performer-specific variations

VI. Results Section

- A. Structural features: consistent reliance on formulaic openings, repeated rhythmic patterns, and fixed heroic sequences
- B. Teaching behaviors: elders pause to explain archaic Svan phrases, correct younger reciters, and assign sections for practice
- C. Recurring themes: ancestral loyalty, mountain resilience, and moral codes embedded in heroic actions
- D. Performer variation: differences in pacing, melodic contour, and emphasis on certain legendary figures

VII. Discussion Section

- A. Interpretation: elder control over recitation ensures stability while allowing subtle innovation
- B. Link to thesis: findings reinforce the idea that elders function as the primary cultural anchors in epic preservation
- C. Preservation implications: community efforts benefit when elders record, annotate, and pass down specific performance rules
- D. Structural challenges: migration, seasonal tourism, and reduced Svan-language fluency limit youth participation
- E. Future directions: local workshops, school-based Svan-language programs, and digital archiving led by elders

VIII. Conclusion

- A. Restatement: elders preserve the integrity and continuity of Svan epics in Ushguli
- B. Summary: stable narrative forms, intentional teaching, and controlled performance spaces sustain the tradition
- C. Final point: long-term preservation depends on supporting elder knowledge and boosting youth involvement
- D. Recommendation: expanded documentation, collaborative archiving, and continued fieldwork

IX. References

- A. Full list of cited ethnographies, linguistic analyses, and narrative-studies sources



X. Appendices

- A. Interview prompts used with elder reciters
- B. Annotated excerpts showing key narrative formulas
- C. Research notes on acoustics, household settings, and performance timing

