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## DISCOVERING THE UNIQUE FEATURES OF THE UMAJAMNÈN TRIBE TO RECOGNIZE THEIR TRIBAL IDENTITY

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### ABSTRACT

The Umajamnèn tribe is one of the tribal communities in far-flung areas in Cabanglasan, Bukidnon, which is less explored due to its geographical location and its similarity to the Umayamnon tribe. This study aims to discover the unique features of the Umajamnèn tribe through their cultural domains, particularly in the concept of rituals, semiotic artifacts, offerings, and movements to answer the long-held identity of the Umajamnèn. Using the qualitative ethnographic method, data was drawn through interviews of the datu, bae, and Binhi tè Paglaum scholars. Observation and documentation during the welcoming rituals were also employed to get the facts needed. Findings reveal that Umajamnèn rituals employed a variety of semiotic artifacts to bridge the spiritual and physical worlds. These artifacts are regarded as lugbak (offerings) such as sapi (money), agkud (traditional wine), timusog (bronze bracelet), and anything that they could offer (food or things that are valuable to them) together with inapugan, mānok, or pig. All of these are placed in uwagdèk, commonly known as an altar for the Dumagat people. Another finding, the Datu or Baylan, is considered accountable in leading to prayer to ask Mababaja, their God, to protect and guide them together with the attendees of the ritual. Through the blood of pigs or chickens, it cleanses and casts away the bad spirits to protect the people in the community. This research contributes to the broader discourse on Indigenous identity and cultural preservation to safeguard the heritage of the Umayamnon tribe. Recognizing their distinct identity can support initiatives for cultural sustainability and rightful acknowledgment by national institutions.

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**Keywords:** *Umajamnon, Cultural Domain, Cabanglasan-Bukidnon, Rituals, Timusog*

## INTRODUCTION

The study of culture has become increasingly significant due to the necessity of preserving societal heritage. Culture is a broad concept encompassing social structures, language, literature, arts, governance, religion, and economic systems, as well as customs such as attire, music preferences, and interpersonal interactions (Campea, 2024). In the Philippines, over 17 million indigenous people from 110 ethnolinguistic groups have maintained their cultural traditions, primarily in remote areas. Mindanao hosts the largest number of indigenous communities, collectively known as the Lumad, a Visayan term for "indigenous." While the Philippine government officially recognizes 18 Lumad ethnolinguistic groups, studies suggest there may be over 25, including the Subanen, Manobo, B'laan, T'boli, Mandaya, Mansaka, and others. Due to their geographical isolation, census data on these groups remains inconsistent.

Bukidnon province has seven recognized tribes. Before that, the lowlanders began to refer to the Indigenous peoples who settled in the mountains as "Bukidnon". Among themselves, however, they distinguished each band and tribe by using names related to their immediate residence or location. The provincial government of Bukidnon acknowledges seven separate tribes: Bukidnon, Higaonon, Manobo, Matigsalug, Talaandig, Tigwahanon, and Umajamnon. Nonetheless, this study focuses on the cultural linguistics of the Umajamnen tribe.

The Umajamnen people consider themselves the rightful inhabitants of Umajam, their place of origin. According to Ms. Jey-Ann Tilucan, daughter of Datu Mangarin Tilucan, the ethnic group does not identify as the Umayamnon Indigenous Cultural Community (ICC) due to distinct cultural characteristics. Historically, the Umajamnen inhabited a vast traditional domain along the Umajam River, now part of Agusan province. Their recognition as a distinct tribe gained prominence when Manuel Elizalde visited the community during the establishment

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of PANAMIN (Philippine Assistance on National Minorities). Before this, the tribe was dispersed, despite previous efforts to unify them in one settlement. Elizalde, a known associate of former President Ferdinand Marcos Sr., facilitated their introduction to the president, with some tribe members even visiting Malacañang Palace, identifying themselves as Umajamnon rather than Umayamnon. This inconsistency in nomenclature has led to confusion within the community regarding their true identity. Addressing this issue, the present study aims to clarify the distinction between "Umajamnen" and "Umayamnen" by examining their rituals, territorial domains, and linguistic characteristics.

The researchers firmly believe that a comprehensive examination of cultural history, shared experiences, and core values is the most effective approach to distinguishing the identities of the Umayamnen and Umajamnen tribes. This study does not seek to establish superiority between the two groups but rather to provide an accurate and just representation of the Umayamnen, who assert a distinct identity separate from the Umajamnen. Ultimately, the findings of this research will be invaluable to the Bukidnon tribal community and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) in assessing the legitimacy of the Umajamnen's cultural and ethnic distinction. Furthermore, this study may prompt the NCIP to formally recognize the Umajamnen as a distinct indigenous group, thereby preserving their heritage and affirming their rightful place within the broader indigenous landscape.

### Objectives of the Study

The goal of the study is to determine the distinctive features of the Umajamnen tribe as a conduit to recognize the tribal identity based on linguistic and cultural domains. It sought to answer the following questions in particular. (1) What are the semiotic artifacts found in Umajamnen rituals in terms of (1.1) What is the significance of the semiotic artifacts found in the altar? (1.2) What traditional attire is worn during the rituals, and what does it symbolize? (1.3) What offerings are presented in the rituals? (2) In what way are the Umajamnen rituals performed according to (2.1) What movements are involved in the rituals, and what is their cultural or spiritual significance?

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This study focused on determining the distinctive features of the Umajamnen tribes as a conduit re- re-establish identity based on linguistic and cultural domains.

## METHODS

The researchers utilized ethnographic research using a qualitative approach to gather information. According to Morris et.al. (1999). Ethnographic research serves many purposes. Primarily, it serves to analyze a culture for more-wide spread understanding of human behavior. Explains the language and culture of the Umajamnon tribe as well as their unique language, artifacts, and rituals that can be gathered in a particular area in Población Cabanglasan, Bukidnon.

The focus of this study is the Umajamnon tribe located in Bukidnon. Known for their rich cultural heritage and unique identity, the tribe presents valuable insights into indigenous traditions and language. The participants will be selected based on how well their experiences and knowledge align with the goals of the research. Their unique language and cultural practices offer an opportunity for a deeper understanding and appreciation of indigenous ways of life.

The study takes place in the Umajamnon community through direct observation and interviews. Researchers document the tribe's welcome ritual, with the assistance of an expert to analyze the chants and expressions used. Tools such as smartphones will be utilized for taking photos, audio recordings, and videos to capture real-time interactions and cultural artifacts. These recordings will be transcribed and analyzed to gain meaningful insights into the tribe's cultural expressions and language use.

To begin the research, formal letters of approval will be submitted to the college president, research director, and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). Additionally, the researchers will seek permission from the local tribal leader, or Datu, ensuring that the study is conducted with cultural sensitivity and proper guidance. The data gathered from this process, including photos, audio, and interview transcriptions, will help the

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researchers better understand and represent the Umajamnon community traditions and language.

The researchers aim to build respectful and meaningful relationships with the tribe, maintaining an open mind and allowing the community to guide the research process. All research activities will comply with the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997, which protects the rights and traditions of indigenous communities. Informed consent, respect for cultural practices, and collaborative engagement will be prioritized throughout the entire study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this recent study, we presented and analyzed the findings of our data gathered about the different artifacts, offerings, and unique linguistic features within the Umajamnen community. We collected data from various informants of the tribe to gather insights from them. Also, we use tabular to provide descriptions of the statement. Lastly, this indicates the pragmatics involved in the interpretation of the particular word.

### 1. The semiotic artifacts found in Umajamnen rituals.

The Umajamnen rituals used a variety of semiotic artifacts to connect the spiritual and physical world. On the other hand, nothing is known about the cultural significance of specific objects used in these rituals. This study will look into the cultural and spiritual importance of these artifacts as well as their role in the ceremonies.

#### 1.1 Altar

##### *Uwagdëk*

It is a sign that represents the Umajamnon people's spiritual beliefs, customs, and traditional wisdom. It serves as a central place for people to celebrate their heritage, connect with their ancestors, and gain guidance and strength. This table offering called kinuros, the one shaped like small figures of people, is to be placed in the uwagdëk. It is also okay to directly place the offerings in the kinuros, just add a small container for it that usually includes offerings of

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foods, plants, drinks, and symbolic artifacts that represent the natural elements and community connection to the land. The uwagdëk is important to rituals and ceremonies, serving as a connection between the physical and spiritual worlds. They express the Umajamnon traditional values and beliefs while also reflecting interaction between the living and their ancestors.

The rituals performed at the uwagdëk are strongly based on the tribe's cultural and spiritual beliefs, as well as include prayers, chants, and dances intended to communicate with the supernatural realm. Ceremonies are important in several aspects of their existence, including harvest celebration, healing rituals, and even having a visitor in their community, and they are called pangāpog. In the context of the Umajamnon tribe, pangāpog, the uwagdëk is where the tribe performs ceremonies to honor and invoke the presence of their deities and ancestral spirits, especially their God Magbabaja. This act of consecration and sacrifice is believed to ensure the blessings and protection of these spiritual entities. The altar, therefore, symbolizes God's presence or the presence of the divine, making it a central element in their rituals. The Umajamnon had 3 types of altars: bangkaso used during pangaliga, angkow used during haklaran, and kawtan. This altar is set in Uma (rice field). According to (Bower,1992), the term "altar" refers to a raised or high position (similar terms in Scripture include "table," "Lord's table," and "place of sacrifice"), a site of consecration and sacrifice where God meets man. It symbolizes God's presence.

#### *Timusog (bronze bracelet)*

The Timusog is a bronze bracelet worn by the Umajamnon people, an indigenous community from the Philippines. This bracelet has an important cultural meaning, representing acceptance and responsibilities within their group. The Timusog bracelet is generally created of bronze. This material is chosen for its durability and cultural value to the Umajamnon people. Bronze is frequently connected with strength and resilience, which are highly valued in their community.

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The Timusog is an important object for the Umajamnon tribe, particularly during significant occasions and rituals. These traditional objects serve as both a sign of cultural identity and a crucial component of the tribe's social and spiritual practices. The Umajamnon people, famed for their vibrant attire and used the Timusog to heighten the visual and symbolic effect of their ceremonial. Its usage emphasizes the tribe's rich heritage and the emphasis they place on preserving their cultural customs. Back then, if someone predicted an illness, they would employ Timusog to determine the person's illness because Timusog would tell them what the illness was, what the treatment was, and what bad spirits were bothering them. Not all elders can do this because they have distinct identification and guardians(abyan). As stated by Unabia (1996), in this connection, I am referring to the elders' guardians, as they were the ones who performed the same rite. Please accept responsibility for us. You were the experts in religious techniques, so please guide us today so that our prayers can be answered.

Timusog is are significant part of the Umayyad culture, symbolizing various ages. Bangles exist in a variety of materials, including glass, metal, and even lac, and their colors and designs frequently represent marital status, regional associations, or religious beliefs. (Sandag is melted agong bangles; however, it is rare now.) aspects of life and identity. According to craft marketing, bracelets are an important way for people in India to show their cultural and spiritual identities. The bangle is one of the most classic bracelet styles, worn by women of all presence of deities and ancestor spirits. During rituals, the burning of candles signals the start of the ritual, attracting beneficial energies and repelling negative forces. The flickering flame of the candle is thought to transport prayers and wishes to the spiritual realm, acting as a connection between the physical and the heavenly. The use of candles in these rituals emphasizes their significance in preserving spiritual balance and respecting the tribe's rich cultural legacy.

#### *Angkod and Intus*

Agkod fermented bingaa (cassava), black rice, kutong or agloy (adlay), white rice, and banana. It becomes "intus" when sugarcane juice is added, one to two weeks, or it depends

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on the owner when they want to consume it. Making "agkod" demands proper discipline and timing. As well as the making of tapoy. Tapoy is the agent in fermentation. A small portion of these tapoy is added to make agkod. Tapoy is made up of rice that is soaked overnight and ginger, and a pinch of old tapoy that serves as a fermentation multiplier. Agkod is eaten, while intus is used for drinking. It is drunk through the use of a bamboo straw called a usok.

Agkod and Intus are important offerings to the spirits and goddesses in the Umajamnon tribe rituals. It is frequently used in ceremonies in honor of ancestors, to seek blessings, and ensure the community's well-being. Angkod and Intus are usually divided among the participants as a sign of unity and communal harmony. This practice illustrates the tribe's strong connection to their spiritual beliefs and the significance of keeping a balance between the physical and spiritual realms.

In the Umajamnon tribe's rituals, angkud and intus are more than just an alcoholic beverage. It represents the tribe's rich traditions, historical continuity, and unique communal identity. During ceremonies, wine is not only consumed but also presented to deities and ancestors as a mark of respect and regard. This practice illustrates the tribe's deep spiritual connection to their heritage. As noted by Wytsma (2024), Wine is a very important drink that goes beyond its role as an alcoholic beverage; it is about tradition, history, and the character of a specific place.

#### *Kandila*

Candles or "kandila" are important in Umajamnon rituals because they help to create a sacred atmosphere and facilitate spiritual connections. Historically, the Umajamnon candle used in rites is made of beeswax (taro). The technique of this candle is to place the one in the bamboo to produce the beeswax. As per the Bee Zero Waste website, Beeswax candles have been utilized in spiritual ceremonies since ancient times. Beeswax candles were believed to be a sign of the sun by the ancient Egyptians, who utilized them in religious rites.

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These candles are frequently used to represent light, guidance, and the This practice is connected with other ritual components, including offerings of chicken, coin, and wine, utilized to invoke favors and convey appreciation. The use of candles, therefore, not only symbolizes the presence of the divine but also reinforces communal bonds and spiritual devotion within the tribe. The study by the web team points out that lighting a candle for an individual serves to both amplify your prayers and demonstrate solidarity with the person for whom the prayer is offered. The faithful often burn candles to thank God for answering their prayers.

#### *Inapugan*

Inapugan (a very important material in ritual, anytime we can offer a panawagtawag using inapugan. Kalisow is a certain palm of the palm family that is only found in the rainforest. (Mamaon is a substitute for kalisow.)

The betel nut, frequently coupled with additional components such as lime and betel leaves (a certain rattan fruit), is chewed for its encouraging properties and has social and ceremonial significance. This tradition is common among several indigenous groups in the Philippines, including the Umajamnon. (When chewed, they accompany the inapugan with lagut pounded Hilow (green tobacco) or dried tobacco finely sliced and placed in bamboo. Tres b is a substitute.)

They frequently chew betel nut, resulting in their teeth being filed to a uniform length, predominantly blackened. There are two main reasons for blackening teeth: medicinal purposes and decoration. The black dye used to darken the teeth symbolizes a key distinction of being human, as only humans know how to dye their teeth black. They believe that only monkeys have white teeth.

This practice, which entails chewing betel nuts combined with lime and betel leaves, is not only a stimulant but also an important component in numerous ceremonies and everyday interactions. The Umajamnon, like many other indigenous communities in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, have passed on this ritual for generations, demonstrating its enduring

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cultural significance. According to Legarda (2024), Betel chewing is a ritual or practice that extends back thousands of years, from South East Asia to the Pacific. Asian and Oceanic countries such as the Philippines, Palau, Guam, Papua New Guinea, China, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, India, Nepal, and many others have made betel chewing a popular cultural tradition.

#### 1.1.2 Attire

The Umajamnon tribes' attire is specifically crafted for the datu's(chieftains) and bae's (female leaders) of the tribe. As they are the leaders of their society, the colors and designs appropriate for their identity are revealed through dreams. Each part of the garment holds a hidden meaning and is considered sacred because it undergoes a ritual before it can be worn.

Traditionally, only royal blood from the Datu family can wear the Umajamnon attire, which includes the *Ginuntingan* and *Linangasan*. However, due to modernization, someone will use the attire to make their identity recognized. Previously, wearing the attire was prohibited because people believed that if you wore that attire, you would be respected. As the daughter of Datu said" Muana man gani, makakita ka ug Umajamnon kanang naa pay pag respeto ana, Nganong musuot man ko ana unsa ko halangdon". The Umajamnon believe that when someone wears this garment, they are accompanied by the spirit in all their endeavors. The colors and designs of the Umayyad's clothing are revealed to the Baylan (spiritual leader) through dreams. There are three dominant colors: blue (black), red, and white. The adornments used, often made of bamboo and beads, signify the wearer's life experiences.

The tribe still knows by heart the meaning of each part of their attire. The clothing of the Umajamnon tribe is intentionally made only for the datu and bae, or tribal elders. The datu in the Umajamnon community is chosen by the recognized elders of the tribes. As stated by Damaris (2024), the Igorots' traditional dress serves not only as a means of staying warm but

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also as a representation of their culture and identity. It allows individuals to show their pride in their heritage and connection to their ancestors.

#### 1.1.3 Offering

The Umajamnon tribe has a rich cultural heritage and ceremonies. Manok (chicken) plays an important role in their rituals. Chicken is often used as offerings to the spirits, an act established in their belief in the supernatural creatures influencing their life. Typically, these rituals are led by the Baylan (tribe spiritual leader). The manok is sacrificed and honor and appease the spirits, hoping for their favor or blessings on different aspects of life, such as abundant harvest, healing, and protection. This practice is an integral aspect of their spiritual and cultural identity, expressing their deep connection to their ancestral traditions and the natural world around them.

In the Umayyad rituals, the manok (chicken) is an important sacrificial offering. This tradition is strongly ingrained in the belief system, with the sacrifice of a chicken considered a way to interact with spirits and deities. The blood of a chicken is often used in rituals to invoke blessings, protection, and guidance from supernatural beings. The ritualistic use of manok is an important part of their cultural legacy, representing a connection between physical and spiritual realms.

It was shown that chicken sacrifice is more than just a tradition for the Umajamnon; it is an important part of their spiritual existence. The blood of the sacrificial animal is revered and used in a variety of rituals to invoke the spirits' presence and kindness. This ritual demonstrates the tribe's deep regard for the balance between humans and nature. As stated by (Moderno,2019), Lumad believe that sacrificing animals appeases spirits and protects humans from harm.

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#### *Sapi*

Coins (Sapi) serve as a symbol of importance in the Umajamnon tribe rituals, and they are frequently utilized as offerings to the spirits. As a kind of tribute, these coins are often put on altars or specific ritualistic settings. Offering coins(sapi) is said to bring good fortune and benefits from the supernatural realm. It represents the tribe's regard.

The traditional offer to the Umajamnon was regarded as equivalent to offering oneself, reflected in one's best attributes. Gold and white beads were once widely accessible due to their great value. People now use coins (sapi) instead; however, gold and white beads are still used when this offer is unavailable. Furthermore, beads could only be gained by royal blood or Datu descendants, but they are now open to anybody and can be used.

Coins(sapi) are used in traditional customs like weddings and harvest celebrations to signify prosperity and good fortune. Coins are used as charms or amulets to grant protection, luck, and fend off evil spirits, reflecting the tribe's deeply held beliefs and ideals. Coins found at ritual sites and in graves, manipulated coins, coins utilized in popular traditions, and coins used as charms are only a few examples of the coinage category's appeal for rituals ranging from religious to superstitious (Moneta, 2017).

2. The Umajamnon rituals are being performed according to movement.

#### *Maanok (chicken)*

When a Datu or Baylan performs a ritual, he is accountable for telling all individuals who attend regarding their sins, so the Datu or Baylan will obtain the blood of the chicken to cleanse the sins or diseases, so that the Datu does not become ill because the manok (chicken) symbolizes forgiveness. According to Lucija 2024, in various cultures, chickens are said to have magical powers such as the ability to ward off evil spirits or cure illnesses, and they are

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frequently associated with fertility and motherhood. A recent study by Graham (2021) suggests that birds are also thought to have a special connection with the Creator, and using their feathers allows us to form a deeper connection with the Spirit, the Creator, and ourselves. In the Umajamnen tribe ritual, before they kill the chicken, they hold the wings and then they raise it side by side because they believe that this movement will drive away the bad elements.

According to Unabia (1996, then, all of you, good patron spirits of our ancestors, come, partake of this preparation, and take the place of the bad spirits we have thrown out. Upon being offered up in the Umajamnon tribe rituals, the respect the spirits, recognizing the impact on the community's well-being. Manok (chicken) is then cooked into an exquisite dish known as "panimpulot". This activity not only has a spiritual purpose, but it also brings the community together to share food, strengthening social relationships and cultural traditions. The preparation and sharing of panimpulot demonstrate the tribe's dedication to their rituals and the significance of community activities in their cultural history. In "panimpulot," there are certain areas where the "Lubak or Halad" is placed for bad and good spirits.

#### *Offering (Lugbak)*

It is an object that is being offered in exchange for yourself, basically for safety. It is either a button, a string of beads, and the most common one is a coin. In the Umajamnen tribe, during rituals, everything must arrive on time. If someone is late or passes, it disrupts the ritual and causes a loss of solemnity. They must also offer and ask for forgiveness because the ritual is very important and sacred. According to the website of the Christian Theology Research Project Topics, arriving late to a service breaks the flow of the event and may distract those already present. It is fairly uncommon for latecomers to have difficulty communicating with the rest of the congregation.

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## CONCLUSION

This study aims to recognize the distinct identity of the Umajamnen tribe by exploring their linguistic and cultural domains. This study focuses on three objectives such as the artifacts found in rituals, ritual movement, and linguistic distinctive features, to determine that the Umajamnen tribe is distinct from the other cultures by supporting the social identity theory in making this research authentic. Despite this, the seven tribes live in various regions in Bukidnon province. The researchers in the Umajamnen tribe have discovered data based on narrative and observation from the Umajamnen people by analyzing mainstreams on their unique cultural traditions. In the first statement, study the artifacts that are unique to the Umajamnen tribe, serving as evidence of their distinct cultural practices, beliefs, and traditions. This analysis will help to recognize the Umayamnen tribe's unique identity and rich cultural heritage, and differentiate it from the other indigenous groups. These artifacts include crafts and traditional tribal dress. Analyzing these objects, the researchers can identify the characteristics that differentiate the Umajamnen tribe from the other tribes to make it easier to understand their practices, beliefs, and cultural identity. In addition, determining the Umayyad tribes' rituals and movement reveals the intricate social and spiritual structures that are part of their group. These rituals include how the Umajamnen valued and respected their goddesses in making ceremonies. Also, it is shown that they had a unique practice by conducting movements in performing their rituals, such as offering a chicken, symbolizing forgiveness to cleanse the sins or diseases, so that the Datu does not become ill before it kills. Then, some movements specify that they just respected their goddesses and believe that this movement will drive away the bad elements. Understanding these practices provides insights into how the Umajamnon tribe maintains its identity, emphasizing the significance of ritual in preserving their cultural legacy. The researchers finally conclude that, based on the data gathered, the Umajamnon tribe has a unique identity and specific terms that only the Umajamnon can understand and that would have been identified as Umajamnon rather than Umayamnon. Although they shared the same boundaries in the Pantaron Range and lived in

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the Umajam river, the researchers believe that the Umajamnon have unique cultures in terms of language and practices despite living in a common society.

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## RECOMMENDATION

The content of this paper can be used to support advocacy and policymaking efforts to legally acknowledge and conserve the Umayamunen tribes cultural and linguistic heritage. It recommends the establishment of accurate tribal distinctions and preservation through education and awareness campaigns. This study promotes better knowledge and respect for indigenous cultures. It states a fairly well-documented narrative that dispels misconceptions and fosters inclusiveness, setting the way for fair mutual relationships among indigenous and non-indigenous communities. It can serve as a strong basis for future ethnographic, linguistic, and cultural studies on indigenous identity and heritage. Future research may extend this work through the exploration of factors that may be influencing the survival of the Umajamnen language and culture in a world pressured by globalization.

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