A Meta-Thematic Exploration of the Ethnolinguistic Nature of Kazakh Mythological Vocabulary

Nazeket Kaliyeva & Gulnar Mamayeva[1]
L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Republic of Kazakhstan

Bekkozha Zhylkybekuly
Sh. Ualikhanov Kokshetau University, Republic of Kazakhstan

Mainura Buribayeva
Korkyt ata Kyzylorda University, Republic of Kazakhstan

Zhakyp Beisenuly & Yedilbek Abdimomynov
M.H. Dulaty Taraz University, Republic of Kazakhstan

Abstract: This study analyzed how Kazakh mythological words are addressed in academic literature from an ethnolinguistic perspective, to determine the myths associated with national existence, and to reveal their cognitive and sociocultural functions through a meta-thematic synthesis. A qualitative research design utilizing meta-thematic analysis was employed. The population consisted of studies published in English addressing Kazakh mythological vocabulary from an ethnolinguistic perspective up to March 2025. The sample consisted of 30 full-text articles selected from the Web of Science and Scopus databases. Data collection was conducted using an Academic Publication Evaluation Form, and content analysis was employed to generate codes, subthemes, and themes. The analysis revealed five main thematic categories: Ethnolinguistic Reflections, Identity and Collective Memory, Symbolic Functions, Cognitive-Linguistic Features, and Discourse and Narrative Structures. Findings revealed that mythological vocabulary plays a central role in the construction of national identity, particularly through concepts rooted in shamanism, animism, and Tengrism. Elements such as the "Batyr" (warrior) archetype, animal totems, and ancestral references contributed to the construction of collective memory and symbolic resistance. Moreover, mythological terms were found to shape cognitive schemas and pedagogical functions, enriching metalinguistic awareness and cultural transmission. The study provides concrete implications for education, digital learning, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Despite limitations such as language restrictions and interpretive subjectivity, the research contributes an integrative framework to the fields of ethnolinguistics and cultural studies by mapping the cognitive and sociocultural dimensions of Kazakh mythological vocabulary.
Keywords: Mythological vocabulary, Kazakh, ethnolinguistic, national code.

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[1] Corresponding Author: an Associate Professor of the Department of Kazakh Linguistics, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan. E-Mail: gulnar.mamaeva@mail.ru

In multilingual post-Soviet contexts such as Kazakhstan, language functions not only as a symbolic system but also as a cultural battleground where identity, memory, and values are contested and preserved. Ethnolinguistics, as a field, explores how language encodes collective memory and worldviews through culturally embedded terms and concepts (Bekpenbetova et al., 2024; Underhill, 2012). Mythology, in this regard, is not merely a narrative tradition but a reservoir of culturally significant vocabulary that links the present with ancestral knowledge systems. Mythological words carry meanings rooted in spiritual cosmologies, social norms, and historical experience, serving as lexical vessels that transmit ethnonational consciousness across generations.

In the Kazakh context, mythological vocabulary emerges as a crucial semiotic layer that reflects the sociocultural synthesis of nomadic life, animistic belief systems, and oral epic traditions. This vocabulary appears in toponyms, idioms, and formulaic expressions, embedding myth into everyday speech and identity (Rysbergen et al., 2024). Studies have shown that these linguistic traces do not merely reflect the past but actively shape notions of belonging and collective resilience in contemporary Kazakh society (Sultan et al., 2024; Galiev, 2016). The ethnolinguistic study of such vocabulary thus moves beyond lexical analysis to address broader issues of cultural continuity, intergenerational transmission, and the symbolic resistance of minority identity within national and global discourses.

Despite the increasing research in the literature, the number of studies that address the subject with a holistic approach to the level of creating a meta-thematic synthesis is quite limited. This research will bring together ethnolinguistic analysis and cognitive linguistic modeling to create an original theoretical synthesis. In this context, the research aims to analyze how Kazakh mythological words are addressed in the literature from an ethnolinguistic perspective, to identify the myths associated with the nation's existence, and to reveal the cognitive and sociocultural functions of these myths through a thematic analysis of academic research.

Theoretical Frame

Ethnolinguistic Foundations of Mythological Vocabulary

The discipline of ethnolinguistics is the multidimensional study of the interaction of language with cultural context (Underhill, 2012). The roots of the discipline are based on the anthropological linguistic approaches of Boas, Sapir, and Whorf (Mathiot, 1979). In this context, the theory that cultural concepts are embodied in linguistic codes is put forward. Bartmiński's (2009a) understanding of the "linguistic worldview" suggests that how language users perceive reality is shaped through language. Similarly, Underhill (2012) states that cultural concepts and cognitive structures develop simultaneously. Wolf and Polzenhagen's (2009) cognitive sociolinguistic approach is a theory based on the cultural reflections of conceptual metaphors. Silva-Fuenzalida's early studies and theory, based on the effects of cultural codes on language use, brought a new perspective to ethnolinguistics (Silva-Fuenzalida, 1949). These theories reveal that language is not only a means of communication but also the carrier of cultural memory.

Ethnolinguistic studies explain how word meanings are carried with social values. Thus, the semantic potential of the linguistic unit contains traces of common cognitive patterns. The associative structures of words reflect the multi-layered structures of social memory (Chakravarthi & Poovaiah, 2023; Khoalenyane et al., 2025). Cultural schemas are coded in the grammatical and aesthetic dimensions of the language. In this process, cognitive schemas are reproduced as embedded in cultural practice. Therefore, the basic foundation of ethnolinguistics is the defense that language is processed in an inseparable integrity with culture.

The Function of Myth as a Linguistic and Cultural Construct

The concept of myth emerges as a result of a linguistic and cultural construction process (Lotman & Uspensky, 1978). Structuralist approaches argue that myths reproduce social ideologies through their lexical components as well as narrative patterns (Cook, 1977). Barthes's teachings on mythologies exemplify ideological coding in everyday texts (Leak, 1994). Dardel, on the other hand, addresses the philosophical dimension of myth, stating that symbolic reality is established through linguistic expression (Dardel, 2014). In this context, myth enables cultural memory to maintain continuity through social discourse. It is observed that linguistic symbols intersect with archetypal symbols, forming a complex web of mythological meanings. Recurring motifs in myth stories contribute to the cultural reflections of conceptual metaphors. Lexical choices indirectly encode social value hierarchies. Therefore, mythological vocabulary functions as a dynamic memory mechanism that updates culture-specific cognitive schemas. At the same time, myth produces discursive diversity by expanding the rhetorical and pragmatic dimensions of language. Social identity negotiations utilize this diversity as a form of symbolic capital. The use of mythological vocabulary in literary texts within the framework of intertextuality paves the way for generic transformations and innovations. In Kazakh culture, this process is seen clearly in the linguistic layers of folk narratives (Zharylgapov et al., 2023).

The linguistic aspects of mythological discourse produce multi-faceted conceptual maps in semiotic analyses. Turner's symbolic interaction theory explains that ritual dramatization is integrated with linguistic signs (Turner, 1975). Keesing's (1993) study of Kwaio culture reveals that abstract conceptual categories are enriched with mythical meaning. Womack (2005) emphasizes the capacity of symbols to produce multi-layered meaning. In this direction, the mythological lexicon is positioned at the center of cultural semantic fields. Semantic expansion and contraction movements of myth terms occur simultaneously with collective value transformations. According to semiotic paradigms, myth maintains cultural integrity through its circulation between texts. This circulation facilitates the transfer of normative knowledge located in the episteme dimension of language. Researchers have stated that mythological codes transform when being transferred between linguistic variants. This transformation supports the formation of hybrid identities in intercultural communication. The reproduction of mythical symbols in digital spaces adds a critical dimension to new media discourses (Boda et al., 2017; Saleh & Rahman, 2016). In this context, virtual learning environments provide the basis for the pedagogical interpretation of mythological content. The use of mythical patterns in educational processes develops cognitive flexibility and creative thinking (Fan & Yu, 2021). Thus, myth assumes the function of intercultural mediation in the context of language teaching.

Mythological Vocabulary and Worldview Formation

The linguistic worldview theory argues that words frame social reality (Bartmiński, 2009b; Lekamge et al., 2024). This theory suggests that a worldview is institutionalized in language through the use of concept maps. Based on the ethnolinguistic cognitive model, Głaz et al. (2013) showed that word clusters reflect global and local belief systems. According to this model, the combination of narrative and lexical structures collectively forms mental maps. Jackson et al. (2019) emphasized in their emotion semantics research that common cores across cultures form universal categories.

Nevertheless, culture-specific divergences create semantic deviations in word meanings. Geeraerts' (2009) lexical semantics theory examines the prototype-centered distribution of meaning. This distribution manifests itself in symbolic concentration, expressed in mythological terms. Mythological vocabulary organizes conceptual oppositions within the

framework of the sacred-profane dichotomy. The worldview simultaneously carries out spatial and temporal coding through linguistic categories. Thus, mythological texts become linguistic representations of historical continuity. The ethnolinguistic approach relates these representations to macro-level cognitive schemas and micro-level lexical preferences. Kolesnyk's (2021) concept of mythical multiverse proves that linguistic modeling plays a role in the construction of alternative realities. This view explains the conceptualizations of multiple layers of existence in Kazakh mythological narratives. In this context, the worldview is rooted in the semantic and pragmatic dimensions of the mythological lexicon.

The worldview-forming function of words is intertwined with the dynamics of memory and identity. Cultural identity gains sustainability through the value codes carried by mythological terms (Kulsarieva et al., 2018). Social rituals facilitate the production of collective meaning by activating the symbolic functions of language. Tleubergenov et al. (216) revealed the role of lexical components by determining the typological features of the Kazakh ethnic worldview. These data demonstrate that mythical symbols influence both cognitive categorization processes and the establishment of social norms. Worldview construction establishes a diachronic bridge between historical layers of linguistic codes. Diachronic approaches describe the functional continuity of mythological terms. Learned symbolic systems support intergenerational transmission mechanisms (Rysbergen et al., 2024). Performative practices in the oral tradition reinforce this transmission of knowledge. Thus, the mythological lexicon combines with experiential reality to produce social action motivations. Narrative and lexical interaction provide normative frameworks for cultural epistemology. Worldview formation mediates the transition between sensory immersion and cognitive internalization that occurs during ritual (Kolesnyk, 2021).

Mythological Vocabulary and Ethnolinguistic Structures in Kazakh Culture

The mythological vocabulary of Kazakh oral-written cultures reflects the social consciousness shaped by the environmental conditions of life throughout history. Ethnolinguistic studies systematically reveal the cultural codes of this vocabulary through conceptual maps (Bartmiński, 2009a). Historical philological studies have determined the continuity of archaic myth terms, a process that began with the Orkhon Inscriptions and extended to Kazakh epic texts (Meirambekova & Dautova, 2021). The "yer-su" cult coding of the Göktürk period provided semantic continuity with the expression "jer-su" in Kazakh folklore. The "Kök Tengri" motif in the common Turkic myth constitutes the founding ontological axis in Kazakh narratives. Enlightenment-era dictionary compilations show that terms such as "tengri," "baqy," and "ırıs" retained their conceptual core status. Shamanic terminology continues the linguistic continuity of ritual praxis through words such as "bakhsy," "kam," and "ot." Regional variants diversify ecological perception codes through the pairing "zher-ana" and "jer-su." Typological comparisons prove that Yakut and Altai myth terms form parallel semantic networks with Kazakh variants (Kulbayeva & Absadyk, 2019, Reyes, 2020).

Turkology literature emphasizes that even phonological variations of mythological terms serve the transfer of cultural meaning. Morphemes "kydyr," "kydyr-ata," and "qyzyr" in Kazakh dialects reproduce the myth of spring renewal in regional layers. Kanievna et al. (2024) stated that color codes, such as "uly," "kyzyl," and "aq," in toponymic data refer to cosmogonies. Comparative lexical analysis proves that the motif "er-to:stik" in Altai tales was updated in the form of "Er-Tөstik" in the Kazakh variant. Yusupova et al. (2014) stated that the pairing "yer-su" in Tatar vocabulary shows semantic proximity to Kazakh usage. Typological maps reveal that cult animal terms such as "bөrike" and "tulpar" have preserved their symbolic function from ancient Turkic layers to the present day. Research shows that the themes of holiness, nature-centeredness, and genealogy are intertwined in the semantic core of

mythological words. Thus, Kazakh mythical vocabulary is positioned as a linguistic indicator of cultural continuity within Turkology (Zharylgapov et al., 2023).

The ontological field details the status of being through sub-lexical units such as "tengri," "peri," and "abzar," and each sub-unit presents mythical identity indicators that shape the social ontology. The cosmogonic field constructs the cosmic architecture on the linguistic plane with the images of "bayterek," "samruk," and "kumai" representing the origin of the universe. The socio-ritual field produces a normative value system in the individual-society interaction by coding social practices with the terms "shanyraq," "bakhsy," and "korqyt." Geeraerts' lexical semantic approach relates the meaning cores of these fields to cultural scenarios, making visible the networks of meaning fed by conceptual metaphors (Geeraerts, 2009). Cognitive schema analyses reveal that the "road" metaphor structures life cycle narratives and reinforces the linguistic worldview through the principle of continuity inherent in this metaphor. Hodge's (2006) cognitive myth analysis elaborates the function of schemas in narrativizing abstract experiences and reveals the cognitive basis of narrative continuity. Thus, the Kazakh mythological lexicon preserves the conceptual universe within a holistic structure by integrating cognitive modeling with cultural semantics.

Cognitive, Symbolic, and Sociocultural Functions of Kazakh Myths

Kazakh myths organize how the human mind conceptualizes experience through schematic representations. These representations align with the principles of concept maps and metaphorical projections in Evans's (2012) cognitive linguistics approach. The "journey" scheme in myths models the life cycle with the principle of narrative continuity, characterized by a beginning, development, and return. The "sky-earth-underground" layered cosmos construct organizes hierarchical relations between categories through vertical coordinates. Hodge's (2006) cognitive myth analysis shows that this stratification plays a central role in the formation of mental prototypes. Kolesnyk's (2021) concept of the "mythical multiverse" explains the simultaneous construction of parallel sets of realities through linguistic signs. The "Bayterek" tree provides a cosmogonic connection on the vertical axis, embodying the transition between the upper and lower planes. The "Samruk" bird frames the cognitive goal archetype by carrying the celestial code of the search for knowledge. The "Tulpar" horse activates motivational schemes by presenting the metaphors of speed and transition together. Kazakh mythology produces mental maps that simplify complex realities. In this context, myths increase the power of experiential prediction by reducing the waste of cognitive resources.

In the contemporary environment, Kazakh myths establish new cognitive connections through digital narratives. In digital games, the characters of "Tulpar" integrate the speed scheme with the interactive experience, reinforcing memory retention. Boško's (2022) perception of mythological lexis emphasizes that visuality facilitates the decoding of symbolic meaning. Ryspayeva et al. (2024) state that concept word-network analyses quantitatively confirm the frequency of use of myth terms in online communities. The relevant literature shows that mythical texts form network-based cognitive models in the form of hypertext through digitalization. The hyperconnected structure reduces cognitive load by making concept nodes accessible in a very short time. Mental maps increase the potential for synesthetic metaphors by being strengthened with multisensory stimuli. Kazakh myths persist in the digital age by adapting their cognitive structuring models.

Problem

The sociocultural transformation in Kazakhstan is accompanied by a reorientation towards mythological sources that also support national identity (Galiev, 2016). In this context,

the mythological vocabulary serves as a cultural inventory that points to root values. Oral tradition, which serves as the carrier of cultural accumulation and the past, preserves its existence in the social memory of contemporary Kazakh society (Uskembaeva et al., 2016). However, these traditional elements are transforming the influence of the modernization process. Social memory creates a ground that accelerates the change in the meaning of mythological terms. Digital communication environments, in particular, enable the transfer of mythological concepts to new contexts, creating a tension between cultural sustainability and linguistic transformation (Boda et al., 2017).

In ethnolinguistic research, the majority of studies examining the linguistic dimension of mythological contents focus on the structural and thematic analysis of narratives. This approach reveals the narrative sequences and heroic motifs in detail contained within mythological texts (Yi & Hoston, 2020). However, the semantic layers and usage patterns of individual terms are neglected. This situation creates a significant gap in understanding how mythological vocabulary is shaped from an ethnolinguistic perspective. For instance, while Underhill (2012) emphasizes the cross-cultural similarities and differences of mythological narratives, the conceptual differences at the lexical level are not systematically addressed. Similarly, Bartmiński (2009b) focuses on the analysis of mental models and metaphorical structures in semantic worldview, but does not detail the usage frequencies of mythological terminology and its functions in discourse. This emphasis contributes to the enrichment of intertextual comparisons and macro-level thematic analyses; however, it leaves a gap at the micro level, specifically in the etymological origins of words, their semantic evolution, and their relationships within the conceptual network. In addition, term-based coding methods are rarely used in comparative studies of world mythologies; instead, typologies of narrative structures are given more prominence (Lotman & Uspensky, 1978). This preference limits the disclosure of the cultural code of mythological terms and makes it difficult to obtain in-depth information about the linguistic building blocks of the oral tradition.

Despite the increasing research in the literature, the number of studies that address the subject to a level that would create a meta-thematic synthesis with a holistic approach is quite limited. Rysbergen et al. (2024) highlighted this deficiency when they proposed meta-thematic coding methods to enhance the thematic coverage of ethnolinguistic data. Toshpo'latova (2024a) noted the absence of systematic coding strategies in ethnolinguistic studies in the Bukhara context. Similarly, Toshpo'latova (2024b) states that coding processes in ethnolinguistic studies are inconsistent. This situation makes it challenging to create a holistic map of thematic patterns in the literature.

In this context, the Kazakh mythological vocabulary is re-read in this research through a multi-layered analytical lens, thus integrating the findings in the field. The study will make the implicit symbolic functions of ethnolinguistic codes visible and reveal the dynamic interaction between the mental representations of mythological terms and their usage practices in the collective memory. This study examined how Kazakh mythological words are utilized in literature from an ethnolinguistic perspective and to reveal the cognitive-sociocultural functions of these words at a meta-thematic level. It demonstrates how language functions as a living cultural archive, revealing the cognitive schemes in the collective memory that the lexical projections of myths intersect with. As a result, linguistic data assume the role of both a carrier and a transformer of cultural meanings; this role reveals the need to produce an interdisciplinary synthesis from an ethnolinguistic perspective. The present research aims to address this need by mapping the ethnolinguistic nature of Kazakh mythological vocabulary from a meta-thematic perspective.

This research presents an original theoretical synthesis by combining ethnolinguistic analysis and cognitive linguistic modeling. The study provides theoretical generalizability by relating conceptual metaphor theory to mythological word data. The interdisciplinary approach compares traditional oral culture elements with examples of digital discourse. Thus, it reveals

how language-specific symbolic structures interact with universal cognitive processes. To make this interaction visible, this research uses a comprehensive and diverse dataset. These data are systematically coded with learning analytics techniques. The coding process is carried out following scientific validity and reliability criteria. The analytical results obtained map the conceptual fields to which mythological terms belong as thematic clusters. These maps have the potential to develop new hypotheses for theorists.

Research Aim and Questions

The primary objective of this study is to examine how Kazakh mythological words are utilized in the literature from an ethnolinguistic perspective. Additionally, to determine the myths associated with the nation's existence and to reveal the cognitive and sociocultural functions of these myths through a thematic analysis of academic research. The research codes are collected from the data through content analysis to produce thematic schemes. These schemes bridge the etymological roots, semantic networks, conceptual metaphors, and ritual uses of mythological words. Thus, the role of mythological vocabulary in the construction of national identity and collective memory in Kazakh culture is comprehensively explained. The research repositions the language-myth interaction within the framework of cognitive linguistics and cultural semiotics. This positioning integrates the findings in the literature into a holistic model. Thus, the study addresses the following research questions.

- How is mythological vocabulary treated in the academic literature from an ethnolinguistic perspective?
- In what contexts and meanings are mythological words described or interpreted?
- What cultural values, beliefs, or symbols do these mythological terms reflect?
- Which myths are associated with national identity and collective memory in the Kazakh context?
- How do mythological elements reflect cognitive models and sociocultural functions in the literature?
- What educational, symbolic, or identity-related functions do myths fulfill according to research findings?

Method

Research Model

This study employed a qualitative research method. A meta-thematic analysis of studies that addressed Kazakh mythological words from an ethnolinguistic perspective was applied. Meta-thematic analysis identifies themes or topics that examine the primary study data of qualitative studies. It analyzes the themes and draws conclusions from systematic reviews. This method provides results on the necessity, suitability, acceptability, and effectiveness of applications. In meta-thematic analysis, the themes and codes obtained as a result of the analyses conducted on the subject are re-evaluated, reinterpreted, and renamed from the researcher's perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2024). With meta-thematic analysis, the synthesis and exemplification of common and similar aspects of studies addressing different dimensions of the same subject qualitatively create a rich source for researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers who do not have access to these studies (Purssell & Gould, 2021).

Population and Sample of the Research

The study population comprises researchers who have dealt with Kazakh mythological words from an ethnolinguistic perspective and have published in English up to March 2025. Therefore, no year limitation was applied, and studies published up to March 2025 were included. The sample of the study consists of research articles published in the Web of Science and Scopus databases, presented as full-text documents.

Data Collection Techniques

Screening Strategy

1. The database search was conducted on April 30, 2025. Only the last publication date was determined in the date range
2. The databases were scanned with the keywords and terms such as; "*ethnolinguistic*" and "*Kazakh,*" "*mythology" and "Kazakh," "narrative" and "Kazakh," and finally "vocabulary" a*nd "*Kazakh culture*" and the studies determined as duplicates were included by reducing them to one.
3. As a result of the relevant literature search, *the research's imprint, type, database, journal in which it was published, publication year, method, research model, findings and results, and the subject variables discussed were determined following the purpose.* These data were extracted from the studies.
4. Each study was numbered using the *Academic Publication Evaluation Form*, and except for the specified ones, they were extracted from the studies for the reporting process, following APA 6 style bibliography writing. The form was prepared with expert input, aligning with the study's objectives. It includes the research profile, as well as the findings and results of the research. In particular, it encompasses topics such as context and meaning, cultural values, beliefs, and symbols, as well as national identity and collective memory. It also examines how myths reflect cognitive models and sociocultural functions, as well as their educational, symbolic, and identity-related functions.

Figure 1. PRISMA Diagram and The Studies Included
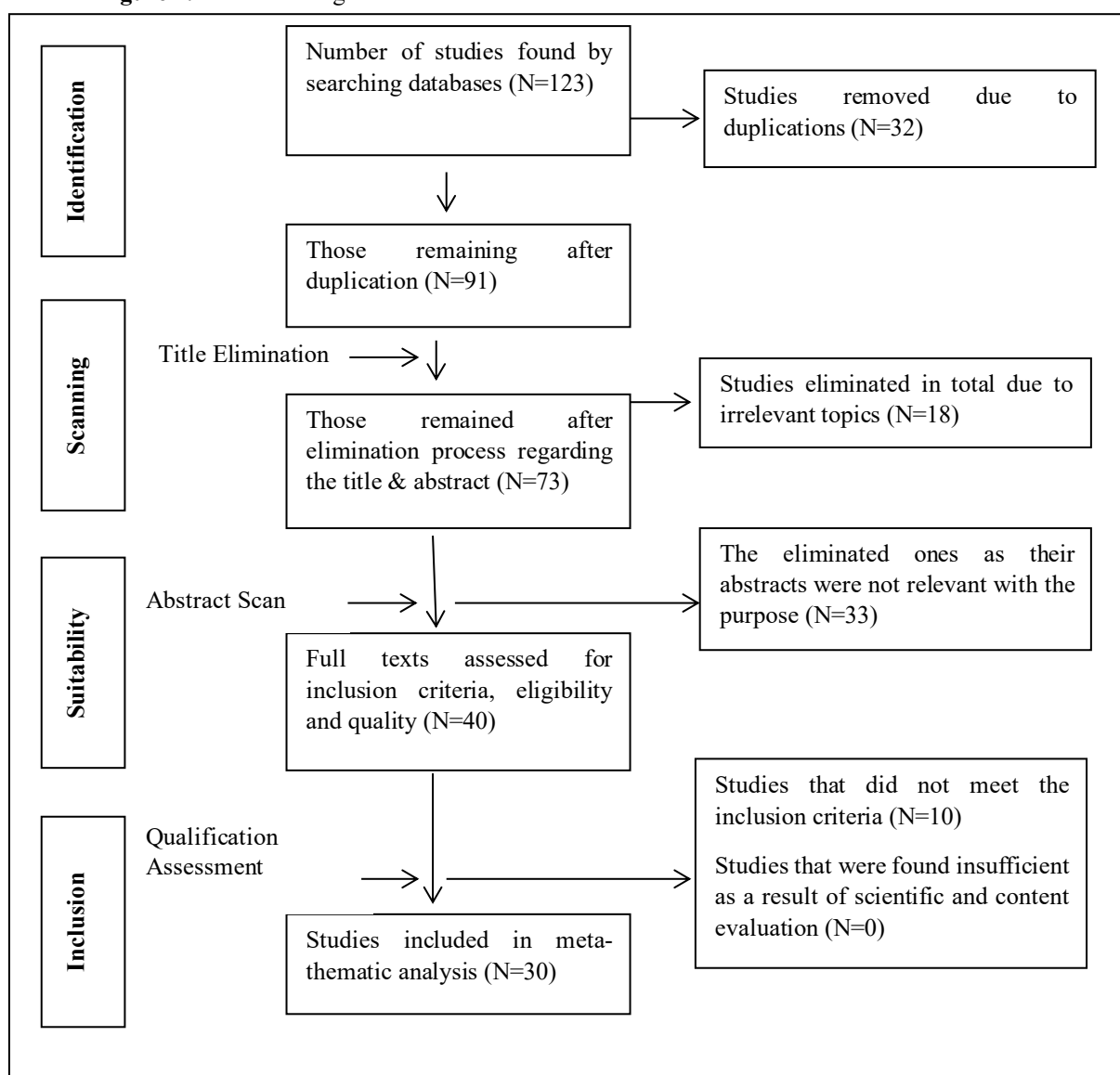
As shown in Figure 1, all studies were identified from relevant databases within the scope of the specified keywords to select those suitable for analysis. Of the studies whose full texts could be accessed, 123 studies were included in the study pool. Among these, 32 studies that were in the status of duplication or overlapping were excluded from the scope. The remaining 91 studies were examined in depth, and 18 of them were removed from the pool due to their irrelevant subject title. As a result of the title and abstract elimination, the remaining 73 studies underwent a detailed examination again, and 43 studies were excluded from the analysis because they did not fall within the scope of the abstract and purpose. The remaining 30 studies were transferred to the *Mendeley Program* for evaluation since they were suitable for the research purpose (Yi, 2020).

Data Analysis

The document analysis method was adopted for data analysis in this study. It involves examining various written materials such as journals, biographies, autobiographies, technical documents, field notes, diaries, official records, notices, reports, statistics, primary and secondary sources, historical events, chronologies, projects, plans, letters, photographs, books

and articles (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Such documents are considered important sources for gaining in-depth knowledge of the relevant field and are frequently used by researchers in qualitative research (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2000).

Document analysis in the research was carried out in two main stages:

1. *Data Collection and Organization*: The studies examined within the scope of the study were obtained from relevant databases and transferred to digital media in PDF format. *Mendeley Reference Manager* programs were used in the collection, classification, and presentation of the data. This process ensured that the data were systematically organized and made ready for analysis.

2. *Data Analysis and Evaluation:* The studies transferred to the digital environment were analyzed using the *Academic Publication Evaluation Form that* was developed within the scope of the research. The content analysis technique, a method compatible with qualitative research, was employed in the data analysis. It is a method that aims to systematically code qualitative data and analyze it into themes, patterns, and meaningful categories. This approach allows the researcher to define specific meaning units and interpret the cognitive and social structures behind these units (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The f values in the table indicate how many times a particular category or subtheme is repeated in that context. The findings presented in the studies were analyzed via content analysis to create themes, subthemes, and categories. For this purpose, after the coding process, themes, subthemes, and categories were compiled and listed to determine the relationships between the themes created for each study. By listing and comparing the prominent themes, an attempt was made to determine in which ways the studies were similar. The themes and subthemes created were presented and interpreted within tables.

Researcher Positionality

A team of researchers with deep academic and cultural ties to the Kazakh ethnolinguistic landscape conducted this study. The authors, all based at major universities in Kazakhstan, bring insider perspectives shaped by their professional immersion in cultural studies, philology, and linguistic heritage. Their positionalities as native speakers of Kazakh and long-standing contributors to the fields of language and cultural identity allow them to interpret mythological vocabulary not only as abstract linguistic data but also as living elements of cultural practice. These lived experiences have informed their methodological choices and thematic interpretations. Recognizing their embeddedness within the cultural and academic context of Kazakhstan, the authors have remained attentive to potential biases and have aimed to balance interpretive depth with scholarly rigor. Their collaborative and interdisciplinary approach seeks to represent Kazakh ethnolinguistic traditions both authentically and critically, aligning with ethical principles of cultural scholarship.

Validity and Reliability of the Research

Validity in qualitative research means that the researcher can reflect the phenomenon s/he is studying from an objective point of view. In this respect, the researcher's reporting of the data collection process, including how s/he reached the results and the obtained data, is among the basic criteria of validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yi, 2020).

In qualitative research, validity is addressed in two basic dimensions: internal and external validity. Internal validity refers to the researcher's ability to explain and reflect the phenomenon under consideration. Accordingly, the researcher must demonstrate a consistent approach in both data collection and data analysis and interpretation processes (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To ensure internal validity in this study, the findings section was supported by detailed definitions. To ensure consistency between the data, internal homogeneity and external

heterogeneity criteria were considered, and similarities and differences were clearly stated. External validity refers to the generalizability of research findings. The repeatability of the results obtained in similar contexts and conditions indicates that external validity has been achieved (Patton, 2022). In this context, the details of how the publications used in the study were obtained from the databases were explained. Comprehensive definitions were established to ensure comparability with data obtained from different databases.

Reliability requires that the research process and the data obtained be presented in a transparent, systematic, and detailed manner. This presentation allows the study to be evaluated by other researchers and to be repeatable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this context, the data analysis was conducted independently by two experts, and the formula developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used to determine the reliability level of the study.

Reliability = Consensus / (Consensus + Disagreement)

According to the reliability formula, the research's reliability was 75%. Reliability calculations above 70% indicate that the research is reliable. According to the results obtained, it can be said that the research is reliable.

Results

This section presents the findings in the context of the research questions.

Findings regarding the First Research Question

Table 1 presents the findings regarding the first research question, "How is mythological vocabulary treated in the academic literature from an ethnolinguistic perspective?"

Table 1. Findings Regarding the Analysis of Mythological Vocabulary in Academic Literature from an Ethnolinguistic Perspective

Theme	Subtheme	Category	Frequency (f)
1. Ethnolinguistic Reflections	Linguistic symbolism	Use of mythological words as cultural symbols	12
	Conceptual frameworks	Sacred associations with core concepts (e.g., "Mother," "Ancestor")	10
		Myth-based naming of natural entities (mountains, lakes, animals, etc.)	9
2. Identity and Collective Memory	National identity	Role of mythological vocabulary in ethnic/national identity formation	11
		Words symbolizing historical events or legendary figures	8
	Cultural memory	Integration of words into intergenerational myth transmission	10
3. Symbolic Functions	Cosmology and Nature	Myth terms related to cosmic elements (sky, stars, directions)	9
		Metaphoric words related to animals, plants, and nature	11
	Ritual contexts	Mythological terms used in traditional or spiritual rituals	7
4. Cognitive-Linguistic Features	Conceptualization	Cognitive schemas underlying mythological vocabulary	19
	Metaphors	Myth-based metaphors (e.g., "wolf" – freedom, "fire" – purification)	12
5. Discourse and Narrative Structures	Epic narratives	Function of mythological words in epics and oral literature	13
	Mythical characters	Vocabulary associated with legendary and heroic figures	10
	Oral tradition	Formulaic use and transmission of mythological terms in speech	12

As seen in Table 1, the examination of mythological vocabulary from an ethnolinguistic perspective in academic literature is gathered within the framework of five main themes. The first theme, *Ethnolinguistic Reflections,* demonstrates that mythological words are employed as cultural symbols, conveying profound meanings in social memory. For instance, words such as "kut" are associated with sacred power, while words such as "ata" symbolize both biological and cultural origins. In the meantime, basic concepts carrying sacred meanings are conceptualized within the framework of mythological thought. The myth-based naming of natural entities (such as mountains, lakes, and animals) is also addressed within this scope.

The second theme, *Identity and Social Memory*, highlights the role of mythological vocabulary in shaping national and ethnic identities. Mythological words contribute to how communities define themselves by symbolizing historical events and legendary figures. Additionally, these words serve as a vital tool in the transmission of myths from one generation to the next. Thus, cultural memory is kept alive.

The third theme, Symbolic Functions, reveals the relationship between mythological words and nature, cosmology, and rituals. While words related to cosmic elements, such as the sky, stars, and directions, carry mythological meaning, metaphorical words related to animals

and plants enhance the symbolic expression. In addition, words used in traditional and spiritual rituals serve a symbolic function in this context.

The fourth theme, *Cognitive-Linguistic Features*, examines the cognitive schemas and metaphors underlying mythological vocabulary. For instance, "wolf" represents freedom, and "fire" represents purification; such metaphors shape the way individuals think. This theme reveals that mythological words are not only related to linguistic but also to mental representations. The last theme, *Discourse and Narrative Structures*, focuses on the function of mythological words in epics and oral narrative traditions. While these words carry themes such as heroism and struggle in epic narratives, words identified with legendary characters take their place in the collective consciousness. Besides, mythological terms used in a stereotyped manner in oral tradition constitute the building blocks of narratives.

Findings Regarding the Second Research Question

Table 2 presents the findings regarding the second research question, "In what contexts and meanings are mythological words described or interpreted?"

Table 2. Contexts and Interpretative Meanings of Mythological Words in the Academic Literature

Theme	Subtheme	Category	f
1. Cultural-Religious Contexts	Myth Belief, and Rituals	Words used in sacred ceremonies and seasonal festivals	10
		Terms connected to shamanism, animism, and Tengriism	12
	Taboos	Mythic terms linked to prohibited actions or euphemisms	8
2. Environmental and Natural Imagery	Cosmic Vocabulary	Sky, moon, star, and underworld-related mythic terms	11
	Sacred Geography	Mountains, rivers, and trees with spiritual connotations	13
	Animal Symbolism	Mythic meanings of animals (e.g., wolf, eagle, deer)	14
	Elemental Forces	Words relating to fire, water, wind, and earth as mythic forces	9
	Seasons and Climate	Lexicon derived from seasonal cycles (e.g., winter as death)	6
3. Social Structures and Kinship	Heroic Lineages	Vocabulary surrounding ancestry, lineage, and divine descent	17
	Gendered Roles	Mythical representations of masculine/feminine archetypes	9
4. Psychological and Cognitive Dimensions	Archetypal Imagery	Myth terms expressing Jungian-type archetypes (e.g., shadow, hero)	8
		Use of mythological words to evoke fear, awe, or hope	6
	Dreams	Terms derived from altered states and visionary language	5
5. Literary and Artistic Functions	Epics	Occurrence of myth terms in oral and written epic traditions	13

Theme	Subtheme	Category	f
	Proverbs and Sayings	Embedding myth in idiomatic or proverbial expressions	9
	Visual Motifs	Descriptive use of myth words in ornamentation, textiles, and art	7

Table 2 presents the themes around which mythological words are used in academic literature, along with the cultural, symbolic, and aesthetic meanings that these words convey. In this context, the findings are categorized under five main themes. First, *cultural and religious contexts* come to the fore. In this connection, it is seen that mythological words are frequently used in sacred ceremonies and seasonal festivals. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that terms related to traditional belief systems, such as shamanism, animism, and Tengrism, are common; additionally, some mythological words hint at social taboos and indirect expressions.

Second, under the theme of *environmental and natural imagery*, there is a rich mythological vocabulary belonging to categories such as cosmic elements (sky, moon, stars, underworld), sacred geographical elements (mountain, river, tree), animal symbols (e.g. wolf, eagle, deer) and natural forces (fire, water, wind, earth). In addition, words associated with seasonal cycles (e.g., winter being identified with death) are also noteworthy.

As another theme, *mythological words* are associated with social structures and kinship systems. Mythological terms possess strong representational power, particularly in categories such as heroic lineages, divine ancestors, *and* gender roles.

Under the theme of *psychological and cognitive dimensions*, there are images corresponding to Jungian archetypes (such as shadows and heroes), expressions that evoke emotions like fear, admiration, or hope, and linguistic images formed through visions and dreams. Finally, the theme of literary and artistic functions shows that mythological words are frequently used in epics, folk tales, proverbs, and idioms. These words also appear as visual motifs in ornaments, textiles, and works of art.

Findings regarding the Third Research Question

Table 3 presents the findings regarding the third research question, "What cultural values, beliefs, or symbols do these mythological terms reflect?"

Table 3. Reflected Cultural Values, Beliefs, and Symbols in Mythological Terminology

Theme	Subtheme	Category	f
1. Spiritual and Religious Beliefs	Animism	Attribution of spirit to natural objects; animal and plant totems	11
	Ancestor Worship	Reverence for ancestral spirits, lineage-based myths	10
	Tengriism	Central role of the Tengri	12
		Reflection of rebirth, soul journey, and underworld concepts	8
2. Ethical and Moral Values	Heroic Ideals	Valorization of courage, loyalty, and sacrifice in mythic figures	13
	Hospitality and Generosity	Cultural emphasis on treating guests as sacred	10
	Fate	Belief in moral causality, divine justice, and destiny	9
	Respect for Wisdom and Elders	Mythical roles of sages and respected ancestors	7
3. Social and Communal Ideals	Kinship and Tribal Unity	Importance of bloodlines, clan memory, and collective identity	12
	Gender Archetypes	Symbolic roles of female (Earth Mother) and male (Sky Father) figures	8
4. Natural World and Cosmology	Sacred Nature	Deification of mountains, rivers, forests, and celestial bodies	13
	Agricultural-Fertility Cycle	Seasonal symbols tied to planting, harvest, and fertility rituals	10
	Symbolic Geography	Directions (East, West), spaces (steppe, forest) as encoded in myths	11

When the cultural values, beliefs, and symbols reflected in mythological terminology are examined in Table 3, the findings reveal how Kazakh society conveys its values and belief systems through mythological narratives. Animistic elements, such as attributing spirits to natural objects and assigning meaning to animal and plant totems, are frequently present. Mythological narratives based on respect for ancestors and lineage come to the fore. Within the framework of Tengrism belief, themes such as rebirth, the journey of the soul, and life after death find a place in mythological expressions, with the central role of the sky god 'Tengri.'

Ethical and moral values are also strongly reflected in mythology. While characteristics such as courage, loyalty, and sacrifice come to the forefront within the scope of heroic ideals, it is evident that values like hospitality, generosity, and respect for the elderly are considered sacred. Belief in fate also has an important place in mythical narratives. Concepts such as moral consequences, divine justice, and destiny are discussed. In ideals regarding social and everyday life, elements such as blood ties, tribal unity, and collective identity are emphasized. Symbolic social roles are reflected in mythology through the figures of women (Mother Earth) and men (Father Sky).

The results show that the natural world, including mountains, rivers, forests, and celestial bodies, is considered sacred in relation to cosmology; and that agriculture and the fertility cycle are also included in mythology, often represented by the seasonal symbols. In addition, it is evident that geographical elements, such as directions (east, west) and places (moorland, forest), are loaded with mythological meanings. Animal symbolism is noteworthy among mythological symbols and signs. The wolf represents freedom, the eagle represents

divine vision, and the deer represents purity. When color symbolism is examined, white represents purity, red signifies blood and life, and black symbolizes death and mystery. These findings show that *mythological terms* do not only have a narrative function. They also convey a symbolic structure that conveys cultural codes, values, and beliefs to subsequent generations.

Findings regarding the Fourth Research Question

Table 4 presents the findings regarding the fourth research question, "Which myths are associated with national identity and collective memory in the Kazakh context?"

Table 4. Myths Associated with National Identity and Collective Memory in the Kazakh Context

Theme	Subtheme	Category	f
1. Foundational Myths of Origin	Ancestral Lineage Myths	Stories of Alash, Korkyt Ata, and genealogical epics affirming Kazakh roots	13
	Tribal Union Myths	Myths depicting the unity of the three jüzes (Senior, Middle, Junior Hordes)	12
	Birth of the Nation	Creation stories linking the steppe with sacred beginnings	9
2. Heroic Epics and Legends	Batyr (Warrior) Legends	Heroic figures like Alpamys, Koblandy, and Er-Töstik as symbols of bravery	14
	Defense Against Invasion	Epics tied to resistance against foreign forces (e.g., Jungars, Chinese)	11
		Tales of national heroes who sacrificed for the land and people	10
3. Geocultural Symbolism	Sacred Landscapes	Mythical associations with rivers (Irtish), mountains (Altai), and steppes	12
	Homeland Imagery in Myths	Metaphoric representation of Kazakh territory as the motherland in folklore	10
	Migration and Return	Myths of nomadic journeys, exile, and eventual return to ancestral land	8
4. Myths of Unity and Survival	Unity Under Crisis	Narratives about unity during famine, war, or colonization	9
	Mythic Reconciliation Stories	Stories emphasizing forgiveness and intertribal peace	7
5. Cultural Continuity Myths	Oral Transmission Traditions	Legends passed down through aqyns, bards, and storytellers (zhyrau)	13
	Myths in National Days	Embedding of myths in rituals like Nauryz	11

According to Table 4, when the myths associated with national identity and social memory in Kazakh culture are examined, it becomes clear that they play a crucial role in the construction of *social belonging and cultural continuity*. Narratives about the origins of the Kazakhs emphasize the bond with ancestors and form the basis of national identity. Lineage narratives, based on figures such as Alash and Korkyt Ata, and tribal unity myths about the union of the three jüzes (Great, Middle, and Small), serve as a means of remembering the *collective past*. Narratives established between the moorland and a sacred beginning include mythical representations of the nation's birth. Heroic epics and legends are also important elements that strengthen national identity. Batyr (warrior) figures, such as Alpamysh, Koblandı,

and Er-Töstik, stand out as symbols of courage and bravery. Epics about the struggle against foreign powers, especially stories about the resistance against the Chinese and Junghars, reinforce the themes of freedom and defense of the homeland in the people's memory. Narratives of national heroes who died for their country and its people also hold an important place in this context.

Mythological narratives also attribute symbolic meanings to geographical elements. Natural elements, such as the Irtysh River, the Altai Mountains, and the moorlands, are depicted as sacred places. These places become part of the historical and cultural memory for the folks. In folkloric narratives about the *Kazakh homeland*, the metaphorical use of the image of *it* is prominent. Myths that deal with the themes of migration, exile, and return to the homeland emphasize the importance of both a physical and spiritual return. Myths based on social unity and survival depict the unity and resistance exhibited by people in times of famine, war, or colonization. Also, stories of reconciliation that emphasize peace between tribes are among the elements that strengthen social solidarity. In terms of cultural continuity, the fact that narratives are verbally transmitted by lamenters (zhyrau), bards (aqyn), and epic storytellers ensures that these myths are passed on from generation to generation. The revival of these myths through rituals on national days, such as Nevruz, keeps the myths alive in the collective memory. These findings demonstrate that Kazakh mythology not only preserves the past but also plays a crucial role in the establishment, preservation, *and transmission* of national identity.

Findings regarding the Fifth Research Question

Table 5 presents he findings regarding the fifth research question, "How do mythological elements reflect cognitive models and sociocultural functions in the literature?"

Table 5. Reflections of Mythological Elements on Cognitive Models and Sociocultural Functions in the Literature

Theme	Subtheme	Category	f
1. Cultural Socialization Tools	Education	Teaching ethics, bravery, and loyalty through hero myths and folk tales	13
	Social Construction	Cognitive roles attributed to men and women via mythic figures	10
		Justification of elder respect, clan authority, and leadership through divine ancestry myths	11
		Embedding negotiation, forgiveness, and peace in mythic tales	7
2. Collective Memory and Identity	Cultural Scripts	Shared behavioral expectations and traditions reinforced by mythic storytelling	12
		Use of myth to build a sense of historical continuity and belonging	11
	Trauma Encoding	Mythologizing historical suffering (famine, exile) into resilience narratives	10
		Myths as cognitive anchors for key national events and transitions	9
3. Transmission and Internalization	Repetition and Mnemonics	Cognitive embedding via oral formulas, rhyme, and repetition	12
		Performing myths through gesture, voice, and communal ritual	11

Theme	Subtheme	Category	f
	Intergenerational Continuity	Internalization through family-based oral transmission	10
	Myth as Schema for Belief Systems	Serving as foundational models for worldviews and ideologies	9

As presented in Table 5, when the reflections of mythological elements on cognitive models and sociocultural functions are examined, it becomes clear that these elements play fundamental roles in the processes of individual socialization, identity construction, *and value transfer*. Mythological narratives function as important tools of cultural socialization. It is understood that ethical values, courage, and loyalty are taught to individuals, especially through heroic stories and folk tales. Cognitive roles transferred through female and male figures contribute to the formation of gender perception. Mythology is also used as a determining element in the construction of *social structure*. Norms such as respect for the elderly, tribal authority, and legitimization of leadership are supported by sacred lineage narratives. Additionally, values such as reconciliation, forgiveness, and peace are instilled in *social memory* through the retelling of mythical stories.

In the context of social memory and identity formation, mythology plays a crucial role in reinforcing cultural scripts. Mythological narratives play a significant role in shaping historical continuity and fostering a sense of belonging in individuals. In addition, historical traumas (such as famine and exile) are transformed into narratives of resistance through the use of mythological language. These narratives serve to structure national traumas in the *collective memory*. Myths also serve as *cognitive supports* for significant events and transitional periods that impact society. It can be said that mythology is embedded in the memory through verbal repetitions and rhymes in the processes of transmission and internalization. The staging of myths through gestures, sounds, and collective rituals is also among the elements that strengthen this process. The oral transmission of mythological narratives from one generation to the next within the family ensures the continuity of these narratives.

Additionally, myths serve as fundamental cognitive schemas in the development of belief systems and worldviews. They shape the ways individuals make sense of their environments. These findings demonstrate that mythology is not only a cultural narrative tool but also reveals itself to be a multi-faceted system that serves the development of cognitive structures, the establishment of social norms, and the construction of a sense of identity.

Findings regarding the Sixth Research Question

Table 6 presents the findings regarding the sixth research question, "What educational, symbolic, or identity-related functions do myths fulfill according to research findings?"

Table 6. Educational, Symbolic, and Identity-Related Functions of Myths According to Research Findings

Theme	Subtheme	Category	f
1. Educational Functions	Moral Instruction	Myths used to teach values such as honesty, courage, respect, and justice	13
	Cultural Literacy	Myths as tools to transmit traditions, rituals, and worldview to younger generations	12
	Language Enrichment	Use of mythological vocabulary in developing metaphorical and idiomatic language skills	11
	Critical Thinking Development	Myths stimulate interpretation, symbolic reading, and moral reasoning	9
	Curriculum Integration	Myths teaching historical consciousness and collective memory	10
		Inclusion of myth in literature, history, and civic education in formal schooling	8
2. Symbolic Functions	Sacred Symbols and Beings	Myths that serve as emblems of unity (e.g., Alash, the Tree of Life, Korkyt's Kobyz)	14
		Use of animals (wolf, eagle), instruments, or mountains as culturally symbolic entities	12
	Ritual and Ceremony Contexts	Embedding myths into marriage, funeral, and seasonal rites	10
	Spatial Symbolism	Mythological mapping of space—homeland, mountains, sacred lakes	11
	Mythic Dichotomies	Symbolic contrasts (light–dark, east–west, chaos–order) that structure the worldview	9
3. Identity-Related Functions	Ethnolinguistic Identity	Myths reinforcing unique linguistic and ethnic self-perception	13
		Continuity of identity through storytelling across generations	12
	National Consciousness	Formation of a collective "Kazakh self" through mythic narratives	13
		Use of myth to reclaim indigenous identity and counter past assimilation	10
		Role of myths in maintaining Kazakh identity among diasporic communities	9

According to Table 6, the educational, symbolic, and identity-based functions of myths play central roles in both the *cognitive and social development* of individuals. From an educational perspective, it is evident that myths are used as a tool to teach fundamental moral values , such as honesty, courage, respect, and justice. In addition, myths serve to develop cultural literacy and play a functional role in transferring traditions, rituals, and worldview to younger generations. Mythological vocabulary supports the development of figurative and idiomatic language skills, thus contributing to linguistic richness.

Mythological narratives also contribute to the development of critical thinking. They encourage individuals to engage in symbolic readings, interpretations, and moral reasoning. When they are integrated into the curriculum, they provide historical awareness and collective memory, and deepen learning in disciplines such as literature, history, and citizenship education.

In terms of symbolic functions, myths undertake important tasks as *symbols of cultural unity*. Sacred symbols, such as the Alash figure, the Tree of Life, and Korkyt's kopuz, as well as animals like the wolf and the eagle, musical instruments, and elements like mountains, are included in myths as cultural representations, thereby strengthening social identity. In addition, the placement of myths in weddings, funerals, and seasonal ceremonies shows that cultural continuity is also ensured in a ritual context. Spatial symbolism is conveyed through the mapping of sacred mountains, lakes, and the homeland's geography with mythological narratives. Social memory is constructed through the sacredness of natural elements. Mythological dualities (light-darkness, east-west, chaos-order) are the basic symbolic structures that structure the perception of the universe and the worldview.

In terms of identity-related functions, myths play a crucial role in reinforcing ethno-linguistic identity and helping individuals develop a distinct perception of the community to which they belong. Identity continuity is ensured through intergenerational storytelling, which demonstrates that myths serve as a means of transmission that not only addresses the past but also the future. The "Kazakh self" is constructed through mythological narratives. These narratives serve as a means of reclaiming a native identity against assimilation processes. Besides, the unifying and identity-sustaining function of myths comes to the fore in preserving Kazakh identity among diaspora communities. In these aspects, myths serve multi-layered functions at both individual and social levels, encompassing their educational, symbolic, and identity-related dimensions.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study offers a meta-thematic synthesis of how Kazakh mythological vocabulary is treated in ethnolinguistic literature, with a particular focus on its cognitive, symbolic, and identity-related functions. Unlike prior studies that examine individual terms or narratives in isolation, this research integrates lexical, conceptual, and sociocultural analyses into a holistic framework. This approach is especially relevant in the context of post-Soviet identity formation, where mythological language operates as a medium of cultural continuity and symbolic resistance (Isaacs, 2018; Bekpenbetova et al., 2024). By mapping semantic networks and metaphoric structures, the study illustrates how mythological terms help construct a sense of national identity while also serving as tools for reclaiming indigenous epistemologies in the face of historical erasure.

Myth, Identity, and Cultural Transmission

The study's thematic analysis confirms that mythological vocabulary functions as a system of cultural symbolism, often tied to the production of ethnic identity and collective memory. These findings, when situated within the context of Kazakhstan's postcolonial language landscape, suggest that such terms do more than encode tradition—they actively participate in symbolic resistance to linguistic assimilation (Isaacs, 2018). The use of animistic or ancestral terms in daily discourse reflects ongoing efforts to assert ethnonational identity amid the dominance of global and Russian-language narratives. As Rysbergen et al. (2024) note, the resurgence of myth-based language in contemporary Kazakh literature and education underscores a broader effort to revitalize cultural continuity through linguistic forms.

From a cognitive-linguistic perspective, mythological vocabulary plays a significant role in shaping the mental schemas that influence how individuals and communities perceive reality. These terms do not function solely as cultural artifacts but as tools of conceptual organization that help encode abstract ideas such as transformation, hierarchy, and morality. For example, metaphors like "fire" representing purification or "wolf" symbolizing freedom extend beyond poetic usage to form part of a shared symbolic system. This supports

Bartmiński's (2009a) theory of the linguistic worldview, which posits that language reflects and perpetuates culturally specific ways of thinking. Similarly, Underhill (2012) argues that ethnolinguistic terms act as anchors for cognitive models rooted in collective experience. The current study supports this view by demonstrating how myth-based vocabulary contributes to diachronic mental mapping, constructing continuities between ancestral cosmologies and present-day cultural identities. In doing so, the data reveal not only how myths are preserved but how they are cognitively lived through linguistic practice.

A key dimension of mythological vocabulary lies in its role within oral tradition and intertextual narratives, especially in Kazakh epic culture. These terms often appear in formulaic structures—recurrent phrases, fixed metaphors, and naming conventions—that facilitate memorization and performance across generations. As Womack (2005) notes, such repetition is not merely stylistic but functions as a ritualized process of cultural reinforcement. The study's findings align with this view, showing how lexical items such as "bakhsy" or "shanyraq" act as cultural signifiers embedded within performance-based knowledge systems. Moreover, the intertextual recurrence of these terms in epics, folktales, and contemporary literature points to their semantic elasticity and cultural resilience (Marangoz & Ensar, 2025). This continuity is especially critical in maintaining ethnolinguistic identity in communities where oral heritage competes with formalized, state-regulated language education. As highlighted by Zharylgapov et al. (2023), the preservation of oral mythological vocabulary serves as a living archive of national consciousness, resisting cultural flattening in the era of globalization.

Cultural Values, Beliefs, and National Identity

The analysis of Kazakh mythological vocabulary demonstrates how social values and belief systems are linguistically encoded and perpetuated through mythic narratives. Animistic elements, such as the spiritual attribution to natural entities like mountains and animals, reveal culturally embedded meaning structures that persist beyond religious doctrine. These findings support earlier assertions by Uskembaeva et al. (2016) that such mythic symbols serve as ritual anchors in collective consciousness. The prominence of Tengri as a sky deity reflects a cosmological worldview in which ethics, fate, and divine justice are interconnected. Terms that evoke hospitality, sacrifice, and generosity likewise serve as moral indicators within the oral tradition. As Allamurodovna (2021) notes, mythological narratives are instrumental in encoding ethical ideals across generations. The semantic role of symbolic motifs—such as color codes and totemic animals—extends these value systems into contemporary discourses. These findings reinforce the argument that mythological vocabulary functions as a repository of normative cultural codes and ethical orientation.

Beyond encoding social values, mythological terms play a strategic role in shaping national identity discourses. Themes such as blood ties, tribal loyalty, and cosmological hierarchy are embedded in linguistic expressions that reinforce communal ideals. This confirms the symbolic power of language in the construction of imagined national communities (Anderson, 2006). The presence of mythological markers in national epics, education, and public discourse also reflects broader efforts of state-driven cultural nationalism, especially in the post-Soviet context where linguistic revivalism is politically motivated (Isaacs, 2018; Burkhanov & Sharipova, 2024). These terms not only carry ancestral memory but are often selectively emphasized to promote cohesive identity narratives aligned with state ideology. In this regard, mythological vocabulary participates in what Blommaert (2010) calls "language ideological debates," where language becomes a terrain for negotiating authenticity, modernity, and belonging. The study's findings thus contribute to broader discussions on how language policy, cultural globalization, and identity formation intersect in ethnolinguistic communities.

Cognitive Models and Sociocultural Functions

Mythological vocabulary reveals structured cognitive patterns that serve as foundational schemas in how communities conceptualize life, cosmology, and social roles. One salient schema—the "journey model" —functions as a metaphor for human development and cyclical life stages, aligning with Evans' (2012) conceptual map theory. Additionally, spatial stratifications such as the "sky-earth-underground" triad reflect mental prototypes rooted in cosmological hierarchies, as supported by Hodge's (2006) framework. These patterns are not merely abstract but have pedagogical value. In alignment with Fan and Yu's (2021) findings, the study reveals that incorporating mythological narratives into educational contexts enhances critical thinking and moral instruction. Furthermore, idiomatic and metaphorical expressions derived from myths contribute to language development and metalinguistic awareness. When integrated into curricula, these narratives foster historical consciousness and collective memory, underscoring the value of myth not just as a cultural relic but as an active pedagogical tool in the transmission of values and identity formation.

The symbolic power of mythological elements operates at both individual and collective levels, reinforcing social unity and cultural resilience. Symbols such as sacred animals, cosmological beings, or color codes contribute to what Turner (1975) describes as "ritual dramatization," where collective experience is enacted and reaffirmed through shared symbolism. These linguistic symbols do not merely illustrate tradition; they actively construct communal cohesion. In diaspora or multilingual settings, this function becomes even more critical. As Yusupova et al. (2014) argue, myth serves as a vehicle for identity preservation among displaced or minority communities. This study contributes to this discourse by highlighting how Kazakh mythological terms fortify ethnolinguistic identity through intergenerational transmission and ritualized language use. In the face of cultural globalization and linguistic homogenization, these mythic schemas offer symbolic resistance and serve as tools for asserting cultural specificity. Thus, the sociocultural and symbolic functions of myths intersect with broader debates in language ideology and cultural sustainability.

Nevertheless, while the current synthesis provides a comprehensive view of how mythological vocabulary encodes social values and national identity, it is equally important to acknowledge the contested nature of some of these interpretations. For instance, although Tengriism is widely cited as a cohesive spiritual foundation within Kazakh cosmology (Kulsarieva et al., 2018), several scholars argue that its modern conceptualization may be a reconstructed or even politicized symbol of post-Soviet nation-building (Isaacs, 2018; Zanadil, 2024). Similarly, metaphors such as the "wolf" or the "eagle," often perceived as culturally fixed, are subject to variation across tribes and historical contexts, raising questions about the semantic stability of symbolic codes (Geeraerts, 2009; Nukezhanova et al., 2024). The romanticization of oral transmission also demands caution; as Carmack (2014) suggests, oral myths were frequently reshaped by ideological or state-sponsored interventions, particularly during the Soviet era. These tensions point to the need for more critical and historically contextualized analyses that account for semantic fluidity, ideological appropriation, and the potential re-instrumentalization of mythological discourse. While these tensions remain unresolved, this study offers a framework for integrating such critical perspectives into future ethnolinguistic research on myth.

Implications

The present study makes a significant contribution to the literature with its holistic approach, which combines the disciplines of ethnolinguistics and cognitive linguistics. The findings supporting the theory that language and cultural concepts evolve simultaneously expand the studies based on Underhill's (2012) ethnolinguistic reflections. Similarly,

Bartmiński's (2009a) conceptual metaphor theory is enriched by the role of mythological words in shaping collective memory. Also, the effectiveness of the meta-thematic coding proposed by Rysbergen et al. (2024) was confirmed within the scope of the research. The results obtained demonstrate that the content analysis methodology is suitable for producing theme- and sub-theme-focused syntheses in cultural linguistics research. The comprehensive data collection process once again reveals the importance of systematic scanning strategies in academic research.

Additionally, the potential to demonstrate how cultural values and symbols are transmitted through linguistic codes via practical applications is remarkable. It is envisaged that the thematic maps of the research can provide a framework for cultural heritage-focused curriculum development studies. In this context, a theoretical basis is provided for developing myth-based teaching materials. At the same time, the study has revealed results that support the pedagogical interpretation of mythological content in digital learning environments. The data obtained can contribute to the integration of cultural semiotic approaches with educational technologies. It is also understood that mythological vocabulary can be used as a tool for developing metaphorical literacy in language teaching. Thus, the need for interdisciplinary synthesis in literary studies and terminology research is underlined.

The study also supports theoretical approaches that argue that language forms an inseparable whole with culture. In this direction, Geeraerts's (2009) semantic core theory is reinterpreted by demonstrating how cultural scripts evolve through the use of mythological terms. Also, the research exemplifies that cognitive ethnolinguistic models can be transformed into practical analysis processes. In this context, the results obtained show the applicability of Hodge's (2006) cognitive myth analysis model through the concept of the mythical multiverse. Similarly, Kolesnyk's (2021) approach strengthens the theoretical foundations of interactive systems created with linguistic signs. The research also contributes to contemporary interpretations of Lotman and Uspensky's (1978) culture-myth relationship by emphasizing the intertextual circulation function of myth within the framework of semiotic paradigms.

Additionally, it is understood that mythological content can play a guiding role in hypertext-based network structures within digital narrative environments. The research findings show that Womack's (2005) symbolic interaction theory can be applied to everyday language practices. These data indicate that the rhetorical and pragmatic dimensions of mythological words can be integrated into educational materials. In general, the theoretical contribution of the study lies in its blending of the foundations of ethnolinguistics with the models of cognitive linguistics. This synthesis presents an opportunity to evaluate the cultural archive nature of linguistic data through an interdisciplinary approach. Finally, the research reveals that linguistic codes serve as a bridge between cultural memory and identity theories, paving the way for new theoretical expansions by making the symbolic functions of ethnolinguistic codes visible. With all these aspects, the study provides a ground that encourages interdisciplinary interaction in both theoretical and applied fields.

This study only covers studies published in English, resulting in the exclusion of sources in Kazakh and Russian. Additionally, the database selection was limited to Web of Science and Scopus, thereby excluding publications from other indexes. Only studies with accessible full text were considered in the inclusion criteria, resulting in the exclusion of some important studies from the analysis. The interpretive nature of the meta-thematic analysis method increased the researcher's dependence on their perspective. Although two experts carried out the coding process, the influence of subjective decisions could not be eliminated. Since the study focused on qualitative meta-thematic analysis, it did not include quantitative data or statistical verification methods. This limited the generalizability of the results. Also, the study is limited to up-to-date examples of myth use in digital media and social networks. Considering the time period, which was limited to March 2025, some recently published articles could not

be included in the study due to their publication date. Terminology inconsistencies in the literature made the coding process difficult and led to some conceptual ambiguities. Finally, since the focus of the study was thematic synthesis, micro-scale linguistic examinations were limited.

An important limitation that must be explicitly acknowledged is the exclusion of sources published in Kazakh and Russian. Given that the majority of Kazakh ethnolinguistic research and oral tradition documentation is produced in these languages, their omission risks marginalizing culturally embedded insights and native epistemologies (Bekpenbetova et al., 2025). For example, regionally published studies, folklore anthologies, and oral history collections often contain semantic nuances that are lost in translation or remain absent from English-language discourse. This linguistic constraint not only limits the representativeness of the thematic synthesis but also perpetuates a Western-centric lens in analyzing local symbolic systems (Underhill, 2012). Future meta-analyses must adopt a multilingual strategy that integrates local-language publications to ensure cultural fidelity and thematic depth.

Redommendations

First, the unique approach of this study, which combines micro-level mythological term analyses in the literature with macro-level thematic synthesis, emphasizes the importance of methodological diversity in future studies. In this context, the inclusion of Kazakh and Russian sources, in addition to English, in the comprehensive scans will enhance the geographical and cultural inclusiveness of the study. Second, integrating various databases, such as Web of Science, Scopus, the MLA International Bibliography, Google Scholar, and local indexes, will enhance the diversity of samples and the depth of analysis. Third, to reduce the subjectivity arising from the interpretive nature of the meta-thematic analysis process, artificial intelligence-based text mining and frequency analysis should be used in conjunction. Fourth, in the coding process, incorporating triple evaluation mechanisms in addition to two expert evaluations can further increase the level of reliability and validity. Firth, future studies should include time series analyses of mythological terms on internet-based datasets and track the processes of cultural transformation temporally. In this way, the relationship between digital media analytics and culture-vocabulary transformations will also be supported quantitatively.

To reinforce the theoretical and practical contributions of the study, concrete steps should be taken in the fields of pedagogy and program design. For instance, students' cultural literacy and linguistic empathy can be strengthened by using ethnolinguistic modules that incorporate Kazakh mythological terms into language teaching programs. Cognitive schema formation processes can also be accelerated by integrating interactive myth maps, concept networks, and interactive scenarios into digital learning platforms. To measure the effectiveness of these tools in educational practices, short- and long-term learning outcomes can be compared using experimental designs and control groups. On the other hand, the importance of the ethnolinguistic perspective should be emphasized in teacher training seminars, and teachers' skills in mythological vocabulary analysis tools should be developed. Interdisciplinary content design can be supported through the integration of cultural heritage and cognitive metaphor theories in curriculum development processes. Finally, the creation of a digital folklore archive that allows for continuous updates of findings will enable the tracking of the evolution of mythological terms over time and pave the way for interdisciplinary collaborations.

Conclusion

This study conducted a meta-thematic analysis to explore how Kazakh mythological vocabulary functions as an ethnolinguistic medium of cultural expression, cognitive structuring, and identity construction. By synthesizing five dominant themes, the research demonstrated

how myth-based terms encode values, social norms, and cosmological models that are crucial to the preservation and transmission of Kazakh cultural identity. Unlike isolated lexical studies, this analysis bridges ethnolinguistic insights with cognitive frameworks, offering an interdisciplinary approach to understanding symbolic language systems. The findings underscore the crucial role of mythological vocabulary in preserving language vitality, informing curriculum design, and promoting intercultural understanding in both local and global contexts. As such, this study contributes not only to academic theory but also to practical strategies for language revitalization and heritage education. It establishes a foundation for future comparative and multilingual analyses that further contextualize the sociocultural functions of myth within a rapidly globalizing linguistic landscape.

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Notes on Contributors

Nazeket Kaliyeva, PhD, Doctoral Student of the Department of Kazakh Linguistics, L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan. Her current research interests include cultural studies, the social sciences, and the humanities. E-Mail: nazeket.kalieva.81@mail.ru

Bekkozha Zhylkybekuly, Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor of the Department of English language and teaching methods, Sh. Ualikhanov Kokshetau University, Kokshetau, Republic of Kazakhstan. His current research interests include cultural studies, the social sciences, and the humanities. E-Mail: bekhoja_astana@mail.ru

Mainura Buribayeva, Candidate of Philological Sciences, Vice-Rector for Research and International Relations, Korkyt ata Kyzylorda University, Kyzylorda, Republic of Kazakhstan. Her research interests include cultural studies, the humanities, and art. E-mail: mainura_b@mail.ru

Zhakyp Beisenuly, PhD, Acting Associate Professor of the Department of Kazakh Language and Literature, M.H. Dulaty Taraz University, Taraz, Republic of Kazakhstan. His current research interests include cultural studies, the social sciences, and the humanities. E-Mail: jakip005@mail.ru

Yedilbek Abdimomynov, PhD, Acting Associate Professor of the Department of Kazakh Language and Literature, M.H. Dulaty Taraz University, Taraz, Republic of Kazakhstan. His current research interests include cultural studies, the social sciences, and the humanities. E-Mail: edil889@mail.ru

Gulnar Mamayeva, Corresponding Author: Candidate of Philological Science, Associate Professor of the Department of Kazakh Linguistics, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan. Her current research interests include cultural studies, the social sciences, and the humanities. E-Mail: gulnar.mamaeva@mail.ru

ORCID

Nazeket Kaliyeva, https://orcid.org/0009-0009-4425-6693
Bekkozha Zhylkybekuly, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1225-8669
Mainura Buribayeva, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2739-0905

Zhakyp Beisenuly, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4999-2090
Yedilbek Abdimomynov, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9534-4281
Gulnar Mamayeva, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3405-6718