

The Literary Function of The Tongue Twisters in The Literature of The Turkic Peoples' Common Motifs and Ethnocultural Codes

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Abstract²: Tongue twisters are among the most important features of oral cultural heritage and folk literature. These texts reproduce and reinforce social norms and values in an entertaining, memorable form. This study examines the literary functions, structural features, and thematic elements of tongue twisters in Turkish folk literature. It aims to reveal the reflections of common motifs, sound and rhythm elements, and geographical and cultural differences in these tongue twisters on the value system, worldview, and cultural memory of a society. This research adopted a systematic review, a qualitative research method. Within the scope of the analysis, relevant studies in Turkic and English published in Scopus, Web of Science, and TR Index databases between 2000 and 2025 were examined, and 27 studies were included in the research. The study revealed that tongue twisters, in the context of Turkic people, are folkloric products with multi-layered and deep functions, far beyond the generally accepted perception of language games. The findings of the reviewed studies strongly suggest that tongue twisters function as condensed cultural texts that reflect the cultural memory, worldviews, and value systems of the society to which they belong. In light of these findings, a systematic and comparative study of the motifs in tongue twisters with the motifs of other folkloric genres in the Turkic world may open new horizons on how cultural memory works. This study contributes to ethnic and cultural studies by

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demonstrating how tongue twisters function as carriers of cultural memory, social values, and ethnocultural identity among Turkic communities.

Keywords: Turkic Folk Literature, Tongue Twisters, Ethnocultural Codes, Oral Tradition, Cultural Values, Ethnic Identity

Oral culture is a process by which knowledge and values are transmitted from generation to generation. Tongue twisters serve as a tool as well as a product of this process. They constitute one of the important values of oral cultural heritage and folk literature (Foley, 1992). As works of folk literature, tongue twisters reflect the aesthetic understanding of their society and its relationship with language. Moreover, by pushing the boundaries of language, they simultaneously fulfill both an entertaining and educational role. In this respect, they are considered a performance-oriented "figure of speech" that demonstrates the aesthetic potential of language (Sherzer & Webster, 2015). Their cultural transmission functions largely explain why tongue twisters are a universal form of folklore. Recent studies of their linguistic and cultural characteristics reveal that tongue twisters possess complex functions beyond their superficial phonetic structures (Batirbayevich, 2025a). The relationship between language and worldview is clearly observed in the choices and structures of such texts (Balci & Sünbul, 2015; Veronika, 2025). From the perspective of ethnic and cultural studies, tongue twisters represent more than playful verbal artifacts; they serve as micro-texts through which cultural memory, social norms, moral values, and collective identity are transmitted across generations. Examining tongue twisters within this framework allows for a deeper understanding of how oral folk genres participate in the construction and preservation of ethnocultural identity in Turkic societies.

In the Turkic peoples, this identity appears under a wide variety of names, such as "cir," "takmak," "takmaza, " "ölen," "ırırm," "arbav," "beşik cırı," "beşik nağmesi," "acitma," "arzulama, " "besleme, " "sabiyy- beşik cırıla, " "ohşama," "ezidleme," "eylendirme," "layla," "im-tom, " "aydım," "yaremazan," and "carapazan" (Duymaz, 2005). These texts reproduce and reinforce social norms and values in an entertaining and memorable form. Therefore, even the most absurd expressions in tongue twisters serve as a reference to that society's value judgments or perception of the world. Cultural memory is unconsciously transmitted to new generations through these linguistic games (Agocuk & Ciftci, 2021). Thus, tongue twisters should be considered one of the ways a society expresses itself. While they are often listed among minor forms in the classification of Turkic folklore genres (Aday, 2023), they require a comprehensive and separate study due to the intense cultural codes they contain. Examining this genre within an ethnocultural context for the Turkic people will offer clues about how this tradition functions.

Problem Statement and Research Gaps

In the relevant literature, tongue twisters are generally examined from a linguistic or pedagogical perspective. Some studies, however, have focused on the stylistic characteristics of tongue twisters (Mamataliyeva, 2024) or their phonetic structure (Nikolić & Bakarić, 2016). There are also studies focusing on the age of the performer (Batirbayevich, 2025b) or the national character (Madiyarov, 2020). The humorous aspects of tongue twisters (Zubach, 2024) have generally been emphasized, but the ethnocultural codes underlying this humor have not been examined in sufficient depth. Even literature reviews on the linguistic and cultural characteristics of tongue twisters (Surmilova, 2024) indicate that this genre is generally evaluated for its limited content (Zubach, 2024) or its role as a means of entertainment.

While linguistic analyses explain "how" a text is structured, they often neglect "why" it is structured this way and the cultural codes this structure carries (Nikolić & Bakarić, 2016).

Pedagogical approaches, on the other hand, view tongue twisters as a "tool" (teaching material) rather than a "result" (literary text) and fail to adequately focus on their culturally coded context (Sarıbaş & Sarıbaş, 2025). This lack of focus leads to a failure to fully understand the aesthetic and cultural value of tongue twisters within the literature of Turkic people. This study subjected tongue twisters to a comprehensive analysis. The fundamental thesis of the current study is that tongue twisters are not merely a phonetic challenge but should also be examined as a literary genre.

The power of oral narratives (Foley, 1992) and the role of culture in narrative (Bazancir, 2023) are vital elements to consider when analyzing tongue twisters. This study offers a holistic perspective by examining the literary functions, structural features, motifs, and ethnocultural codes of tongue twisters. In the context of Turkic literature, motif analysis of tongue twisters is generally not as systematic as studies of fairy tales or epics. Although several studies and reviews have addressed tongue twisters from linguistic (e.g., phonetic and phonological structure), pedagogical (e.g., articulation training and language development), or stylistic perspectives, the existing literature remains fragmented across disciplinary boundaries. For instance, Surmilova (2024) primarily focuses on phonetic complexity, whereas Sarıbaş and Sarıbaş (2025) emphasize pedagogical applications, and Atay (2014) approaches tongue twisters mainly from a humor and irony perspective. However, no prior review study has systematically integrated these three dimensions—linguistic, pedagogical, and folkloric—within a single analytical framework. As a result, the holistic cultural, symbolic, and literary significance of tongue twisters has remained under-theorized in the literature. The present study directly addresses this gap by offering a synthetic and interdisciplinary systematic review.

Tongue Twisters and Their Literary Functions in Turkic People

Tongue twisters are primarily considered "arts of speech" and serve an aesthetic purpose. This aesthetic purpose is directly supported by the structural features of the text. The use of alliteration and rhyme, particularly in traditional Kakataibo songs, is a fundamental building block of tongue twisters (Prieto Mendoza, 2022). These sonorous harmonies not only provide rhythm to the text but also maintain the listener's or performer's attention (Sinecen, 2022). Studies on rhyme and alliteration in French and English (Hoof, 2009) demonstrate that these phonetic features have a universal aesthetic appeal. Studies on the use of alliteration in culture reveal that this feature is for entertainment purposes as well as enhancing the cultural transmission function by increasing the memorability of the text (Bekpenbetova et al., 2024; Inazarov, 2025).

Structural analysis of tongue twisters demonstrates that these texts are not simply random accumulations of sounds, but rather are designed with a conscious aesthetic concern. Elements such as binary structures, rhyme, and syllabic structure (Bazancir, 2025) constitute the formal characteristics of tongue twisters (Burke, 2022). The literary function of tongue twisters emerges from the dynamic harmony between this phonetic structure and the content. In terms of their social functions, tongue twisters are also seen as a tool for strengthening social bonds through collective performance (Bahromjonovna, 2025). Their educational function is to teach the phonetic boundaries of the language and improve diction (Özdamar, 2022). However, underlying all these functions is the aim to maximize the aesthetic potential of the language since the phonetic structure plays a primary role in encoding the cultural message (Prieto Mendoza, 2022).

The structural features of tongue twisters are primary elements that directly strengthen the literary functions of the text. An examination of formulaic language units in Turkic folk tales (Aktaş, 2024) shows that tongue twisters also possess a similar "pattern" structure (Zeyrek, 1993). These formulaic structures allow the text to be anchored in tradition and easily

remembered by the performer. Alliteration, assonance, and rhythm are not merely phonetic ornaments but also strategic tools that determine the dynamics of the text's performance. A semantic perspective on the reduplications in fairy tales (Yücel Çetin & Cin Şeker, 2022) demonstrates that such repetitive structures add semantic depth to the text. Sound repetition in tongue twisters serves a similar function. Analysis of these structural features explains why tongue twisters have such a complex phonetic structure (Nikolić & Bakarić, 2016). The use of sound symbolism and onomatopoeia is an important element that enhances the aesthetic value of tongue twisters, particularly in Punjabi folklore and children's songs (Khalil et al., 2025). Phonetic structure creates a "challenge" during performance, transforming the performance into a language contest or game. This is one of the primary literary functions of tongue twisters. This structure also enhances the comic or absurd impact of the text (Zubach, 2024). The rhythmic flow of tongue twisters creates a hypnotic effect on the listener, making the message or entertainment more effective. In this context, there is an inextricable relationship between structure and function.

Ethnocultural Codes and Values Embedded in Tongue Twisters

Deep ethnocultural codes inherent to a society often lurk beneath the absurd or humorous expressions contained in tongue twisters. Even if these texts seem meaningless at first glance, they contain important clues about social roles, critiques, or moral values (Edikhanov et al., 2022). For instance, indirect references to family relationships or authority figures in tongue twisters enable the humorous reproduction of social structure. The ethnocultural characteristics found in Karacay-Balkar paremical expressions (proverbs and idioms) indicate that tongue twisters also carry similar cultural codes (Akhmat, 2024). Like the rules of speech behavior in some Turkic proverbs, tongue twisters can indirectly convey certain moral values or social expectations (Turmuzi et al., 2018). The idea of "word" and "saying a word" reflected in Turkic proverbs (Sharafutdinova, 2025) reveals that tongue twisters are not just games and have a cultural basis in the way they play with "words." These codes are often hidden within the humorous structure of the text. The translation of cultural elements in Nasreddin Hodja jokes (Pangereyev, 2023) or the deep cultural meanings of the humor in Sephardic Djoha anecdotes (Agiş, 2023) are some stunning examples of this. In this respect, tongue twisters allow for the expression of social criticism or unacceptable situations in a "safe" space (under the guise of entertainment).

Common motifs frequently encountered in tongue twisters are deeply connected to society's geography, livelihoods, and daily life practices. These motifs are classified according to Stith Thompson's catalog of folk literature motifs (Özokutan Şik & Şik, 2023), in which animals, plants, natural elements, and exaggerated actions are particularly prominent. Animal metaphors, as in proverbs from the Turkic world, are also used extensively in tongue twisters (Aydoğan, 2023; Yıldırım, 2023; Doszhan & Yersultanova, 2023). This use of animal names enriches the text and also reflects the close and bidirectional relationship that society has with nature (Bahromjonovna, 2025). Similarly, paremiological units containing plant names (Hasanova, 2025) offer clues about the lifestyle of agricultural societies and the cultural value they attribute to plants.

Compared to epic motifs from the Turkic world, the motifs in tongue twisters can be said to be more "everyday" and "local" (Bayrak İşcanoğlu & Çelik, 2025). The agricultural and animal husbandry practices that are the livelihoods of the society directly nourish these motifs. For example, the inclusion of plants or animals specific to a region in tongue twisters reveals the strong connection the text has to the local culture. Exaggerated actions and absurd situations are among the fundamental motifs that reinforce the humorous and entertaining function of tongue twisters.

The selection of these motifs is not random. On the contrary, they are elements deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness and everyday life of society. Daily life is reproduced and given an aesthetic form through tongue twisters (Nargöz, 2024). Motifs common to Turkic people also manifest themselves in tongue twisters, making these texts part of the broader Turkic epic tradition (Tuyakbayev et al., 2023). In this context, tongue twisters can be defined as the smallest, most flexible, and most rapidly spreading units of cultural memory. These motifs encode the worldview and value system of the culture to which they belong. Passed down through generations, these texts, with the motifs they contain, become a part of that society's identity (Agocuk & Ciftci, 2021; Doszhan & Yersultanova, 2023).

Importance of Research

Tongue twisters can be used as important primary sources for understanding the worldview and value systems of Turkic communities. Gender roles, moral stances such as laziness and diligence, can be symbolically represented in the absurd world of tongue twisters (Akin, 2021). These codes prove that the text is not merely a phonetic structure but also a living social document. The relationship between language, culture, and folk thought possesses historical depth and cultural intensity (Kushkimbayeva et al., 2014). Tongue twisters, as "figures of speech" and "wordplay" (Sherzer & Webster, 2015), are literary products that showcase the aesthetic potential of language. The national codes of these texts clearly show that they cannot be considered independent of cultural context (Madiyarov, 2020). Even the absurd expressions in tongue twisters reflect a society's worldview regarding what is considered "normal" or "abnormal." Thus, tongue twisters provide a rich dataset for understanding a society's value system and social subconscious. Anthropological analysis of these codes demonstrates how culture is constructed and maintained through language. Sociologically, these texts can be used to comprehend how social norms and roles are internalized.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to systematically examine the literary functions, common motifs, and ethnocultural codes of tongue twisters in Turkic folk literature. The study aims to reveal the multi-layered functions of tongue twisters and contribute to the literature. Thus, it seeks to make the cultural and literary significance of tongue twisters visible at the academic level, both in terms of folklore and literature disciplines. In line with the aforementioned primary objective, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What literary, linguistic–phonetic, and socio–cultural functions are attributed to tongue twisters in the existing literature on Turkic folk tradition, and how are these functions systematically categorized?
2. What recurrent motifs and ethnocultural codes emerge in tongue twisters across the Turkic world, and how do these elements reflect collective memory, value systems, worldview, and social roles?
3. How do the structural features of tongue twisters (such as sound repetition, rhythm, rhyme, and compositional patterns) interact with thematic content (nature, geography, daily life, agriculture, and animal husbandry) to strengthen their cultural and literary functions?

Method

Research Model

The current study adopted a systematic review method, which is a qualitative research method. Systematic review is a model that ensures comprehensive and replicable research by synthesizing findings within the context of relevant research questions, applying predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria (Snyder, 2019). The research process follows a framework consisting of four basic stages: search (determination of search terms and databases), evaluation (quality assessment with predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria), synthesis (extraction and categorization of data), and analysis (describing the results and reaching a conclusion) (Mengist et al., 2020).

Search strategy

The population of the study included full-text studies available in the Web of Science (WoS), Scopus databases, and the TR index. The research sample comprised 27 studies conducted between 2000 and 2025, whose full texts are available in English and Turkic, and are also relevant to the purpose of the study.

Scanning Strategy and Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

The database search was carried out on 20.10.2025.

1. As a database scanning strategy, TS = ("tongue twister" OR "alliteration" OR "oral folklore" OR "folk literature" OR "oral literature" OR "child rhyme" OR "children's rhyme*" OR "tongue twisters*" OR "children's folklore" OR "oral rhyme*") AND ("Turkic" OR "Turkic peoples" OR "Turkic" OR "Azerbaijani" OR "Kazakh" OR "Kyrgyz" OR "Uzbek" OR "Turkmen" OR "Tatar" OR "Uyghur" OR "Bashkir" OR "Chuvash") AND ("motif" OR "symbol*" OR "theme*" OR "ethnocultural code*" OR "cultural code*" OR "tradition*" OR "ethnolinguistic*" OR "cultural heritage") Timespan: 2000–2025
2. The author, publication year, publication title, database, subject, keywords, and summary information were determined in accordance with the purpose, and these data were extracted.
3. In this context, each research was numbered using an Academic Publication Evaluation Form prepared in the research, and studies other than those specified were withdrawn from the research for the reporting process as a bibliography in APA 7 style.

To ensure conceptual clarity and methodological transparency, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied.

Inclusion criteria: Studies were included if they (a) explicitly examined tongue twisters or closely equivalent forms (e.g., counting-out rhymes or formulaic oral rhymes) within the context of Turkic languages or cultures, (b) addressed at least one of the following dimensions: literary function, motif structure, ethnocultural coding, symbolic meaning, or folkloric context, and (c) adopted analytical, interpretive, or comparative research approaches rather than purely experimental phonetic testing.

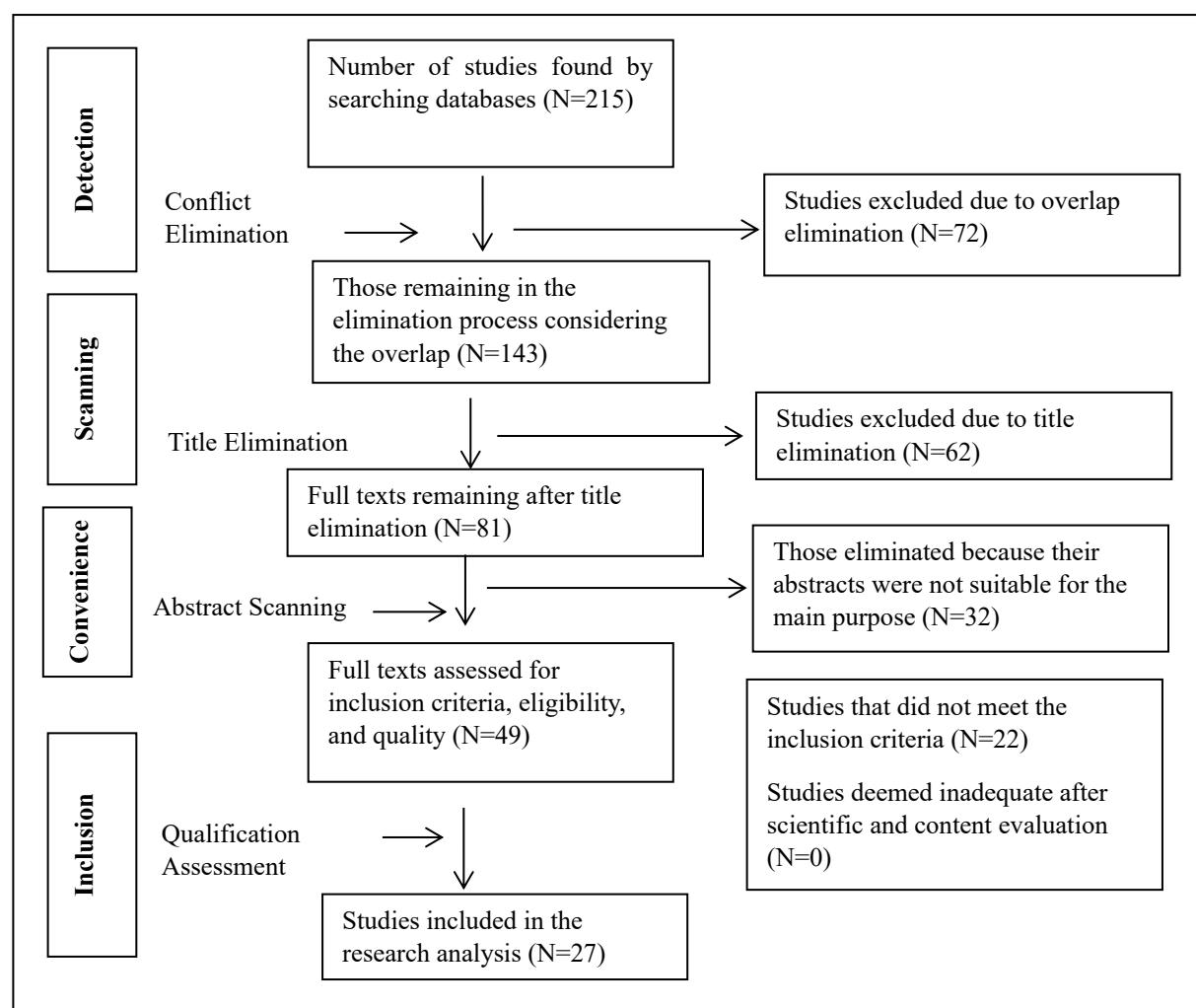
Exclusion criteria: Studies were excluded if they (a) addressed children's rhymes or oral games without any explicit conceptual or terminological link to tongue twisters, (b) focused exclusively on phonetic articulation, speech therapy, or pronunciation training without cultural,

literary, or symbolic analysis, or (c) treated tongue twisters merely as pedagogical classroom tools without any reference to folkloric tradition or cultural meaning.

Borderline cases were evaluated through joint discussion by the researchers and were included only when a clear interpretive connection to folkloric or ethnocultural analysis could be established.

As seen in the PRISMA diagram in Figure 1, all relevant databases were searched for keywords to identify suitable studies for analysis. Of the studies with accessible full text, 215 studies were included in the study pool, and from the studies examined, 72 studies that duplicated/overlapped the same studies in both the keywords and the databases were excluded. In the second stage, the remaining 143 studies were examined in depth, and 62 of them were removed from the pool due to irrelevant topics, 32 for not meeting the primary purpose, and 22 for not meeting the inclusion criteria. The remaining 27 studies were included in the study as they fulfilled its purpose.

Figure 1
Flowchart of Studies Included in the Analysis



Data Analysis

Content analysis techniques were used to analyze the study's data. Through systematic coding, meaningful units of analysis were identified and organized into themes and subthemes. The analysis was conducted as a qualitative thematic synthesis in which recurring patterns, conceptual clusters, and interpretive categories were identified and comparatively interpreted across the reviewed studies.

Validity and Reliability of the Research

Quality appraisal of the included studies was conducted before final inclusion. Each full-text article was evaluated using four predefined criteria: (1) clarity of research aim, (2) adequacy of methodological design, (3) transparency of data sources or textual corpus, and (4) relevance to folkloric, literary, or ethnocultural analysis. Each criterion was scored on a binary scale (0 = not sufficient, 1 = sufficient), yielding a maximum quality score of 4 for each study. Studies scoring below 2 were considered methodologically inadequate and were excluded from the review. All 27 studies met or exceeded this minimum threshold; therefore, no additional studies were excluded at this stage.

Validity in qualitative research is generally examined in two dimensions: internal validity and external validity. Internal validity focuses on the extent to which the research accurately and comprehensively presents the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, a researcher is expected to demonstrate consistency, systematicity, and a rigorous approach in the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes (Patton, 2014). To strengthen internal validity in the current study, the findings were supported by detailed descriptions. The obtained data were first presented objectively, followed by the interpretative analysis phase. Moreover, internal consistency (homogeneity) and external diversity (heterogeneity) criteria were taken into account to clearly identify similarities and differences among the data. External validity, on the other hand, relates to the reproducibility and generalizability of the results obtained in similar settings (Patton, 2014). To support external validity in this study, the process of obtaining the sources used from the databases was explained in detail, and the raw data were presented as supplementary data and described in a way that allows for comparison with different databases. This strengthened the reapplicability of the research.

Reliability, on the other hand, relates to the transparency, traceability, and repeatability of research. In other words, it refers to the extent to which the findings can be reproduced using the same methods (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In this context, the data analysis process was conducted by two independent experts, and the reliability formula developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was applied to assess the consistency of the results. The calculations yielded a reliability coefficient of 75%, demonstrating the reliability of the study. This level of agreement is considered acceptable and indicates substantial consistency in qualitative content analysis.

To ensure internal consistency and analytical reliability, the coding and thematic classification processes were conducted in multiple iterative cycles. First, all themes and subthemes were independently reviewed by the researcher at two different time points to check for intra-coder consistency. Second, an audit trail was created by systematically documenting all coding decisions, theme revisions, and category mergers throughout the analysis process. Third, peer debriefing was employed through consultation with two field experts in folklore and literary studies, who reviewed the thematic structure and provided critical feedback. Discrepancies were resolved through consensus. Finally, thick description was used in the presentation of findings to enhance transferability by allowing readers to evaluate the applicability of the results to other cultural contexts.

Findings

In relation to RQ1, Table 1 presents the main literary, linguistic, and socio-cultural functions attributed to tongue twisters in the reviewed studies.

Table 1
Literary Functions and Categories of Tongue Twisters

Theme	Subtheme	Category	Related Research
Linguistic and Phonetic Functions	Sound Repetition and Articulation	Phoneme Practice and Pronunciation Difficulty	Abalı (2018); Surmilova (2024); Batirbayevich (2025a); Madiyarov (2025); Kalaycı (2019)
		Macranic Structures and Nonsense Words	Abalı (2018); Kalaycı (2019); Atay (2014); Elnazarov (2025)
		Sound Discrimination and Language Development	Sarıbaş & Sarıbaş (2025); Güneş (2020); Lopar & Uğurlu (2024)
Linguistic and Phonetic Functions	Phonological Awareness	Word Games and Linguistic Humor	Abdullah (2025); Atay (2014); Surmilova (2024); Bariş & Ece (2015)
		Phonological Use in Child Education	Sarıbaş & Sarıbaş (2025); Güneş (2020)
		Linguistic Structures Among Turkic Languages	Elnazarov (2025); Abalı (2018); Gilazova (2024); Tokpayeva et al. (2024)
Social and Cultural Functions	Multilingualism and Intercultural Interaction	Comparative Linguistic Analysis	Tokpayeva et al. (2024); Surmilova (2024); Elnazarov (2025)
		The Relationship Between Ethnic Identity and Language	Gilazova (2024); Madiyarov (2020); Pangereyev et al. (2023)
		Game and Entertainment Function	Kaplan (2021); Özdamar (2022); Önal (2002); Sarıbaş & Sarıbaş (2025); Güneş (2020)
Social and Cultural Functions	Game and Entertainment Function	Social Interaction and Socialization	Kaplan (2021); Özdamar (2022); Lopar & Uğurlu (2024)
		Game Culture and Ritual	Önal (2002); Kaplan (2021); Ayaz (2020)
		Social Memory and Value Transfer	Bazancır (2025); Madiyarov (2020); Ayaz (2020); Tuyakbayev et al. (2023)
Literary and Aesthetic Functions	Humor and Criticism	Tradition and Modern Life	Ayaz (2020); Bazancır (2025)
		The Function of Irony and Sarcasm	Atay (2014); Abdullah (2025); Alay (2017); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014)
		Social Criticism and Satire	Atay (2014); Akin (2021)
Literary and Aesthetic Functions	Rhythmic and Rhyming Structure	Critique of Everyday Life	Atay (2014); Abdullah (2025); Alay (2017)
		Rhythm and Meter Features	Alay (2017); Güneş (2020); Kaplan (2021); Ayaz (2020)
		Rhyme Schemes	Alay (2017); Ayaz (2020); Batirbayevich (2025a)
Literary and Aesthetic Functions	Text Composition	Prosodic Elements	Güneş (2020); Surmilova (2024); Abalı (2018)
		Melodic Features	Ayaz (2020); Kaplan (2021)
		Structural Features and Text Types	Batirbayevich (2025a); Madiyarov (2025); Bazancır (2025)
		Narrative Techniques	Bazancır (2025); Alay (2017); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014)

Theme	Subtheme	Category	Related Research
Symbolic and Mythological Dimension		Performance Features	Batirbayevich (2025b); Bazancir (2025)
		Mythological Motifs	Sharafutdinova (2025); Gilazova (2024); Pangereyev et al. (2023); Bariş & Ece (2015)
		Symbolic Meanings	Akin (2021); Sharafutdinova (2025)

The findings indicate that tongue twisters are most frequently conceptualized as tools for phonetic training and articulation development, while their narrative, humorous, and didactic functions appear as secondary layers. This distribution suggests that the pedagogical dimension of tongue twisters has been more systematically examined than their broader symbolic and cultural roles. At the same time, several studies emphasize the multifunctional nature of tongue twisters, highlighting their simultaneous linguistic, educational, and folkloric functions.

As seen in Table 1, the literary functions of tongue twisters can be classified under three main themes. The Linguistic and Phonetic Functions theme focuses on the linguistic functions of tongue twisters, such as sound repetition, articulation difficulties, and the development of phonological awareness. Maccaronical structures and multilingualism are prominent under this theme. The Social and Cultural Functions theme addresses the use of tongue twisters as playful and entertaining functions, as carriers of social memory, and as tools of humor and criticism. The Literary and Aesthetic Functions theme examines rhythmic structure, rhyme schemes, and symbolic-mythological dimensions. The largest body of literature focuses on linguistic and phonetic functions and social functions.

To illustrate the linguistic and phonetic functions of tongue twisters, examples demonstrating various characteristics are presented below. In an example illustrating the difficulty of sound repetition and articulation, the frequent repetition of the sounds "ş (sh)" and "k" in the expressions "*Şu köşe yaz köşesi, şu köşe kış köşesi, Çarşı pazar karışmış, karış karış ölçülmüş*" provides articulation practice, while the word games "*köşe-köşesi*" and "*karış-karışmış*" strengthen phonological awareness. As an example of macaronic structure and nonsense words, the repetition of the exclamation "*bre*" and the frequent use of the word "*berber*" in the tongue twister "*Bir berber bir berbere, Bre berber, gel beraber...*" exemplifies macaronic structure and creates a humorous effect. In the example "*Ayağım kaydı, düştüm, Karanlıkta şaştım, Taş attım, taş taşıdı, ...*" which demonstrates rhythmic structure and playful function, internal rhyme, alliteration, and rhythmic pattern are used together to create a structure that facilitates memorization in children's games. The tongue twisters "*Gem vurdum gem yarıldı, At koştı nal kırıldı, Bu dünya böyle gider, kimi tutar...*" which serves as both social criticism and humor, humorously explores the themes of social inequality and fate using concrete images taken from everyday life.

In response to RQ2, Table 2 summarizes the major motif clusters identified in the tongue twisters of Turkic peoples.

Table 2
Common Motifs and Cultural Memory in Tongue Twisters

Theme	Subtheme	Category	Related Research
Nature and Geography Motifs	Geographical Differences	Regional Toponyms and Place Names	Pangereyev et al. (2023); Tuyakbayev et al. (2023); Özdamar (2022); Kalaycı (2019); Gilazova (2024)
		The Relationship Between Local Culture and Geography	Tuyakbayev et al. (2023); Özdamar (2022); Madiyarov (2020)
		Ethnic Geography and Cultural Identity	Pangereyev et al. (2023); Gilazova (2024); Elnazarov (2025)
	Natural Elements	Animal Motifs	Madiyarov (2020); Güneş (2020); Kaplan (2021); Özdamar (2022)
		Plants and Natural Elements	Madiyarov (2020); Sharafutdinova (2025); Pangereyev et al. (2023)
		Seasons and Climate	Güneş (2020); Madiyarov (2020)
	Color Symbolism	Ethnocultural Meaning of Color Toponyms	Pangereyev et al. (2023); Gilazova (2024); Sharafutdinova (2025); Tokpayeva et al. (2024)
		Cultural Color Perception	Pangereyev et al. (2023); Sharafutdinova (2025)
		Symbolic Use of Color	Gilazova (2024); Pangereyev et al. (2023)
Daily Life and Social Roles	Family and Kinship Relations	Family Structure and Roles	Madiyarov (2020); Güneş (2020); Lopar & Uğurlu (2024); Kaplan (2021)
		Intergenerational Communication	Ayaz (2020); Bazancır (2025); Güneş (2020)
	Profession and Livelihood	Animal Husbandry and Agricultural Culture	Madiyarov (2020); Özdamar (2022); Tuyakbayev et al. (2023); Pangereyev et al. (2023)
		Crafts and Handicrafts	Madiyarov (2020); Elnazarov (2025); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014)
		Trade and Economic Life	Madiyarov (2020); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014)
	Gender Roles	Men and Women Roles	Madiyarov (2020); Akin (2021); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014); Bariş & Ece (2015)
		Difference Between Child and Adult	Batirbayevich (2025b); Güneş (2020); Kaplan (2021)
	Daily Practices	Food Culture	Madiyarov (2020); Güneş (2020)
		Clothing and Adornment	Madiyarov (2020); Elnazarov (2025)
		Shelter and Living Spaces	Madiyarov (2020); Tuyakbayev et al. (2023)
Belief and Ritual Motifs	Religious and Mythological Beliefs	Mythological Beings and Heroes	Sharafutdinova (2025); Gilazova (2024); Tuyakbayev et al. (2023); Pangereyev et al. (2023)

Theme	Subtheme	Category	Related Research
Nature and Geography Motifs	Religious Practices and Worship	Religious Practices and Worship	Ayaz (2020); Akin (2021); Sharafutdinova (2025)
		Cosmological Worldview	Sharafutdinova (2025); Gilazova (2024)
Everyday Life and Social Roles	Curses and Good Wishes	Curse (Impudence) Tradition	Akin (2021); Ayaz (2020); Madiyarov (2020)
		Prayer and Good Wish Formulas	Ayaz (2020); Güneş (2020); Akin (2021)
Belief and Ritual Motifs	Transitional Rituals	Birth, Marriage, Death	Ayaz (2020); Sharafutdinova (2025); Madiyarov (2020)
		Seasonal and Periodic Rituals	Ayaz (2020); Sharafutdinova (2025)

The motif structure is dominated by animal figures, elements of daily labor, and natural phenomena, indicating that tongue twisters draw heavily on everyday rural experience and ecological surroundings. The recurrence of these motifs across different regions suggests a shared symbolic repertoire within the Turkic cultural sphere. Moreover, the prominence of action-oriented and movement-based motifs reflects the performative nature of tongue twisters as oral texts.

Table 2 presents the common motifs that appear in tongue twisters in Turkic folk literature and how these motifs reflect cultural memory under three main themes. The Nature and Geography Motifs theme encompasses geographical differences, natural elements, and color symbolism. This theme examines the ethnocultural meanings of regional toponyms, animal and plant motifs, and the use of color. The Everyday Life and Social Roles theme explores how tongue twisters reflect social life by addressing family structure, occupational groups, gender roles, and daily practices. The Belief and Ritual Motifs theme encompasses mythological beliefs, traditions of imprecation and prayer, and transitional rituals. Research findings reveal that tongue twisters are the carriers of collective memory and intensely embody cultural values, belief systems, and daily life practices passed down from generation to generation.

In the Anatolian tongue twister "*Tarhana tartar, Garnımı yirtar, Eşgili şovra Gel beni gurtar*," which reflects motifs from daily life and food culture, concretely reflects traditional Anatolian dishes like tarhana and soup culture, hunger-satiety states, and daily eating practices. The tongue twister "*Gizim gizim gizmana, Gizimi verim mazmana, Mazman dürzüsü gazansın, Gizim yesin uzansın*," which addresses family relations and social roles, illustrates the value placed on daughters, the institution of marriage, the son-in-law-mother-in-law relationship, and gender roles, while wishes for the child's well-being reflect cultural values. In the example "*Allahümme şakirin Karnı doydu fakirin Bir sofra daha getirin Yiyemezsem yüzüme tükirün*" which encompasses humor and daily life practices, religious elements, food culture, symbols of masculine identity, and humorous criticism come together to reveal a multidimensional view of social life. In the Kyrgyz tongue twisters example reflecting nature and hunting culture, "*Üç mergen kwwp jönödü. Üç mergen beş arkarga jetpey, Besh arkar üç mergenge jetkirbey, Besh münöttö besh toonu aship, Üç mergen üç münöttö üyünö keldi*" (Three hunters went far. Three hunters could not catch up with five mountain goats. Five mountain goats could not catch up with three hunters. They crossed five mountains in five minutes. Three hunters came home in three minutes. In the hunting tradition, wild animals such as mountain goats, mountainous geography, and traditional livelihoods embody the lifestyle of Central Asian Turkic communities and their relationship with nature.

With reference to RQ2, Table 3 presents the main ethnocultural codes encoded in tongue twisters across Turkic traditions.

Table 3
Ethnocultural Codes and Social Values

Theme	Subtheme	Category	Related Research
Value Systems and Worldview	Moral and Ethical Values	Social Norms and Moral Codes	Madiyarov (2020); Akin (2021); Ayaz (2020); Bazancir (2025); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014)
		Good-Bad Dichotomy	Akin (2021); Sharafutdinova (2025); Ayaz (2020)
		Social Sanction and Control	Akin (2021); Atay (2014); Madiyarov (2020)
	Collective Identity and Belonging	Ethnic Identity and Cultural Authenticity	Gilazova (2024); Elnazarov (2025); Pangereyev et al. (2023); Madiyarov (2020)
		Social Solidarity	Madiyarov (2020); Bazancir (2025); Ayaz (2020); Bariş & Ece (2015)
		Cultural Continuity	Bazancir (2025); Ayaz (2020); Tuyakbayev et al. (2023)
	Cosmological and Ontological Worldview	Understanding of the Universe and the World Model	Sharafutdinova (2025); Gilazova (2024); Akin (2021); Pangereyev et al. (2023)
		Human-Nature Relationship	Sharafutdinova (2025); Madiyarov (2020); Pangereyev et al. (2023)
		The Distinction Between the Sacred and the Profane	Sharafutdinova (2025); Ayaz (2020); Akin (2021)
Social Roles and Relationships	Age Groups and Generations	Perception of Time and Space	Sharafutdinova (2025); Tuyakbayev et al. (2023)
		Childhood and Socialization	Batirbayevich (2025b); Sarıbaş & Sarıbaş (2025); Güneş (2020); Kaplan (2021); Önal (2002)
		Old Age and Wisdom	Ayaz (2020); Bazancir (2025); Madiyarov (2020)
	Gender and Social Roles	Intergenerational Transfer	Bazancir (2025); Ayaz (2020); Güneş (2020)
		Women's Identity and Roles	Madiyarov (2020); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014); Akin (2021)
		Male Identity and Roles	Madiyarov (2020); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014); Bariş & Ece (2015)
	Social Relations	Gender Norms	Akin (2021); Madiyarov (2020)
		Social Status and Prestige	Madiyarov (2020); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014); Akin (2021); Atay (2014)
		Authority and Obedience	Akin (2021); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014); Madiyarov (2020)
	Social Acceptance	The Concept of the Other	Akin (2021); Atay (2014); Madiyarov (2020)

Theme	Subtheme	Category	Related Research
Language and Communication Codes	Language and Communication Codes	Social Exclusion Mechanisms	Atay (2014); Gilazova (2024);
		Pragmatic Language Use	Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014); Abdullah (2025); Abalı (2018); Surmilova (2024)
		Linguistic Taboo and Euphemism	Akin (2021); Abdullah (2025); Kalaycı (2019); Barış & Ece (2015)
		Culture of Speech and Silence	Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014); Atay (2014)
Cultural Codes and Symbols	Symbolic Systems	Number Symbolism	Sharafutdinova (2025); Gilazova (2024); Madiyarov (2020)
		Animal Symbolism	Sharafutdinova (2025); Gilazova (2024); Madiyarov (2020)
		Symbolism of Space and Direction	Pangereyev et al. (2023); Tuyakbayev et al. (2023); Sharafutdinova (2025)
	Ritual and Practice Codes	Performance and Execution Codes	Bazancır (2025); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014); Batirbayevich (2025b)
		Ritual Language and Formulas	Ayaz (2020); Akin (2021)

The dominant ethnocultural codes revolve around family roles, moral values, collective labor, and social hierarchy. This pattern demonstrates that tongue twisters function not only as playful verbal artifacts but also as implicit carriers of social norms and value transmission. At the same time, variations across studies indicate that the salience of specific codes may shift according to regional and historical contexts.

Table 3 systematically examines the insights offered by the ethnocultural codes embedded in tongue twisters into the value systems, worldviews, and social roles of Turkic communities under three main themes. The Value Systems and Worldview theme encompasses moral and ethical values, collective identity and belonging, and a cosmological worldview. This theme explores deep cultural codes such as social norms, the good-bad dichotomy, ethnic identity, and the understanding of the universe (Tan, 2020). The Social Roles and Relations theme examines age groups, gender roles, hierarchical structures, and mechanisms of social exclusion, demonstrating how tongue twisters reflect social order. The Cultural Codes and Symbols theme encompasses language and communication codes, symbolic systems, and ritual practices. The literature review reveals that tongue twisters are not merely entertainment tools but also powerful cultural texts through which social values, belief systems, and social order are transmitted. The majority of sources focus on value systems and social roles, highlighting their importance in shaping and maintaining social structure.

To embody ethnocultural codes in tongue twisters, the Kazakh tongue twister "*Orın berseň kirgende, Ülken kisi esikten Ülgili eken demey me, Üyrengeň góy besikten*" (If you give a seat to someone who enters the door, shouldn't they say, "I should take an example from the cradle"), reflects value systems and worldviews. Moral codes such as hospitality, respect for the elderly, and intergenerational education are heavily emphasized, emphasizing that respect for elders in Turkic communities is taught from infancy. The Kyrgyz tongue twisters "*Ishti jaz bashinan Bashtashibiz kerek. Jaz bashinan ishti bashtabasak, Al ishti taptakir tashtashibiz kerek*" (We must start work at the beginning of spring. If we don't start work at the beginning of spring, we must abandon that work from the ground up), clearly demonstrate the seasonal work patterns, labor ethics, and social responsibility values of agricultural society, emphasizing the importance of work discipline and timeliness. In the example of the Anatolian tongue

twisters, which includes cultural codes and symbols, "*Hidirellez hidirellez Ele gelmez ele girmez Kavun karpuz altun topuz Agalara çarık beglere sarık İp koptu ibrişim oldu*" the section rhythmically reflects the cultural symbols, social hierarchy, and entertainment rituals of the Anatolian people. These examples concretely demonstrate that tongue twisters are an effective tool in transmitting social values, work ethics, and cultural norms from generation to generation.

In relation to RQ3, Table 4 outlines the main structural and phonetic features identified in tongue twisters.

Table 4
The Relationship between Structural Features and Literary Function

Theme	Subtheme	Category	Related Research
Phonetic and Phonological Structures	Alliteration and Repetition	Consonant Repetition and Alliteration	Abalı (2018); Surmilova (2024); Batirbayevich (2025a); Madiyarov (2025); Kalaycı (2019)
		Vowel Harmony and Consonance	Abalı (2018); Surmilova (2024); Elnazarov (2025)
	Phoneme Combinations	Assonance and Other Sound Repetitions	Surmilova (2024); Abalı (2018); Batirbayevich (2025a)
		Difficult Sound Groups	Kalaycı (2019); Batirbayevich (2025a); Madiyarov (2025); Surmilova (2024)
	Macranic and Meaningless Structures	Sound Similarity Games	Abalı (2018); Kalaycı (2019); Abdullah (2025)
		The Function of Meaningless Words	Kalaycı (2019); Abalı (2018); Atay (2014); Surmilova (2024); Barış & Ece (2015)
Rhythm and Measure	Rhythmic Arrangements	Multilingual Structures	Abalı (2018); Elnazarov (2025); Tokpayeva et al. (2024)
		The Role of Stress and Accents	Güneş (2020); Alay (2017); Kaplan (2021); Batirbayevich (2025a)
		Syllable Patterns and Meter	Alay (2017); Güneş (2020); Ayaz (2020)
	Prosodic Features	Tempo and Speed Changes	Kaplan (2021); Batirbayevich (2025a); Surmilova (2024)
		Intonation	Güneş (2020); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014); Batirbayevich (2025b)
	Measurement and Pattern	Melodic Structure	Alay (2017); Ayaz (2020); Güneş (2020)
		Use of Syllabic Metre	Alay (2017); Ayaz (2020); Güneş (2020)
Rhyme	Rhyme Schemes	Quadrant and Dam Structures	Alay (2017); Kaplan (2021)
		Internal Rhyme and External Rhyme	Alay (2017); Ayaz (2020); Güneş (2020); Kaplan (2021)
		Rich Rhyme and Full Rhyme	Alay (2017); Ayaz (2020); Batirbayevich (2025a)
	Use of the repeated Word after rhyme (Redif)		Alay (2017); Ayaz (2020)

Theme	Subtheme	Category	Related Research
Rhyme and Alliteration	Rhyme Schemes	Regular Rhyme Patterns	Alay (2017); Güneş (2020); Kaplan (2021)
		Free Rhyme Use	Batirbayevich (2025a); Kaplan (2021)
The Semantic Contribution of Sound Harmony	The Relationship Between Rhyme and Meaning	Retention and Memorization	Alay (2017); Abdullah (2025); Surmilova (2024)
			Güneş (2020); Saribaş & Saribaş (2025); Ayaz (2020)
Text Structure & Composition	Sentence and Syntax	Parallel Structures	Batirbayevich (2025a); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014); Bazancır (2025)
		Inverted Sentences and Syntax Games	Abdullah (2025); Kalaycı (2019); Atay (2014)
		Repetition and Variation	Batirbayevich (2025a); Madiyarov (2025); Bazancır (2025)
	Text Length and Density	Short and Condensed Texts	Batirbayevich (2025a); Madiyarov (2025); Surmilova (2024)
		Long Narrative Rhymes	Bazancır (2025); Alay (2017)
	Composition Types	Periodic and Sequential Structures	Batirbayevich (2025a); Madiyarov (2025); Kaplan (2021); Bariş & Ece (2015)
		Cumulative Structures	Batirbayevich (2025a); Güneş (2020)

The findings show that alliteration, assonance, and rhythmic repetition constitute the core structural mechanisms that shape tongue twisters. These features not only increase phonetic difficulty but also enhance memorability and performative intensity. The strong emphasis on sound patterning confirms that structural form is inseparable from communicative and aesthetic function.

Table 4 examines how the structural features of tongue twisters strengthen their literary functions under four main themes in detail. The theme of Phonetic and Phonological Structures encompasses sound repetitions, alliteration, phoneme combinations, and macaronic structures, revealing the linguistic playful nature of tongue twisters. The theme of Rhythm and Measure analyzes the musical structure of tongue twisters by examining rhythmic arrangements, prosodic features, and meter patterns. The theme of Rhyme and Rhyme examines the semantic contribution of rhyme schemes and alliteration, demonstrating memorability and aesthetic value. The theme of Text Structure and Composition addresses sentence structures, text length, and compositional styles. Research findings reveal that the structural features of tongue twisters are not random. Rather, each element consciously or unconsciously supports its literary function. Sound repetition enhances memorability, rhythm and rhyme strengthen the playful nature, and compositional styles maximize narrative effectiveness.

In the tongue twister example illustrating phonetic and phonological structures, the intense repetition of consonants "d," "l," and "k" in the expressions "*Huuu dilik bidilik Saçlar başlar kıvırcık sen bu oyundan çıktı*" meaningless sound games like "dilik bidilik," and alliteration combine to maximize phonetic practice. In the example of "*Elim elim epelek, Elden çıkan topalak, Topalağın yarısı, Bit pirenin karısı*," which includes macaronic structure and meaningless words, word games based on sound similarity like "epelek" and "topalak," cumulative structure, and humorous connections present a composition rich in both

phonological and structural features. In the Kyrgyz tongue twister example, which reflects the characteristics of rhythm and meter, "*Tün kirdar, kün attar, Ay tolot, jıldız kaynar, Tok jürgön tok bolot, Emes jürgön boz bolot*" (The night is dark, the day is bright, The moon fills, the star falls, Those who walk full stay full, Those who walk hungry stay gray), the quatrain structure, regular syllable sequence, and parallel sentence structures create a rhythmic flow, facilitating memorization. In the tongue twister example, which demonstrates the rhyme and rhyme scheme, "*Leylek leylek lekirdek, Hani bana çekirdek, Çekirdeğin içi yok, Sarı kızın saçısı yok, Süleyman'ın suçu yok*" the rhymes "-ek" and "yok" create a regular rhyme scheme, while word repetition (stork) and parallel sentence structures strengthen the rhythmic flow, and illogical connections create a humorous effect. In the example "*Tarhana tartar, Garnımı yirtar, Eşgili şovra Gel beni gurtar,*" which demonstrates the functional use of rhythm and alliteration, the intense repetition of "t" and "r" sounds, the use of the repeated phrase "-tar," and short sentence structures create a fast tempo, increasing memorability and strengthening the play's character. In the Turkmen tongue twister example reflecting text structure and composition, "*Bir gelin geldi, iki gelin geldi, Üç gelin geldi, dört gelin geldi, Dört gelin bir bolup, Toy etdiler, şatlık etdiler*" (One bride came, two brides came, three brides came, four brides came, four brides became one, They had a wedding, they had a feast), narrative dynamism and performative effect are created through the use of cumulative structure and repetition-variation techniques. The tongue twister "*Avrat var zamuru zort, Avrat var çepeli mürt, Avrat var hazreti mülk*" brings together both structural order and semantic richness with its parallel structure, sound harmony, and repetition-variation technique, revealing the multi-layered functionality of tongue twisters.

Addressing RQ3, Table 5 presents the thematic representations of geography, nature, and daily life in tongue twisters.

Table 5
How the Themes Are Addressed in Literature

Theme	Subtheme	Category	Related Research
Geographic and Spatial Elements	Toponyms and Place Names	Cultural Meaning of Color Toponyms	Pangereyev et al. (2023); Gilazova (2024); Tuyakbayev et al. (2023); Elnazarov (2025)
		Local and Regional Place Names	Özdamar (2022); Kalaycı (2019); Tuyakbayev et al. (2023); Pangereyev et al. (2023)
		Legendary and Mythological Places	Tuyakbayev et al. (2023); Sharafutdinova (2025); Gilazova (2024)
	Regional Differences	Dialect and Accent Differences	Kalaycı (2019); Özdamar (2022); Elnazarov (2025); Madiyarov (2020)
		Cultural Diversity and Locality	Elnazarov (2025); Madiyarov (2020); Gilazova (2024)
	The Relationship Between Space and People	Geographic Isolation and Culture	Özdamar (2022); Tuyakbayev et al. (2023)
		Settlements and Lifestyle	Madiyarov (2020); Tuyakbayev et al. (2023); Özdamar (2022); Bariş & Ece (2015)
		Nomadism and Settlement	Madiyarov (2020); Elnazarov (2025); Pangereyev et al. (2023)
		Urban and Rural Distinction	Madiyarov (2020); Özdamar (2022)

Theme	Subtheme	Category	Related Research
Natural Elements and Environment	Flora and Fauna	Animal Types and Characteristics	Madiyarov (2020); Güneş (2020); Kaplan (2021); Özdamar (2022); Sharafutdinova (2025)
		Vegetation and Agricultural Products	Madiyarov (2020); Pangereyev et al. (2023); Sharafutdinova (2025)
		Natural Resources	Pangereyev et al. (2023); Tuyakbayev et al. (2023); Madiyarov (2020)
	Climate and Seasons	Seasonal Changes	Madiyarov (2020); Güneş (2020); Ayaz (2020)
		Climate and Cultural Practices	Madiyarov (2020); Sharafutdinova (2025); Ayaz (2020)
	Nature and Human Interaction	Harmony with Nature	Sharafutdinova (2025); Madiyarov (2020); Pangereyev et al. (2023)
		Environmental Awareness	Madiyarov (2020); Sharafutdinova (2025)
Daily Life and Livelihood	Agriculture and Livestock	Agricultural Activities	Madiyarov (2020); Özdamar (2022); Tuyakbayev et al. (2023); Pangereyev et al. (2023)
		Livestock Practices	Madiyarov (2020); Özdamar (2022); Tuyakbayev et al. (2023)
		Pasture and Rangeland Culture	Madiyarov (2020); Pangereyev et al. (2023); Elnazarov (2025)
	Home and Family Life	Household Tasks and Roles	Madiyarov (2020); Güneş (2020); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014); Lopar & Uğurlu (2024)
		Food Culture and Nutrition	Madiyarov (2020); Güneş (2020); Elnazarov (2025)
	Crafts and Professions	Tradition of Hospitality	Madiyarov (2020); Elnazarov (2025)
		Traditional Professions	Madiyarov (2020); Elnazarov (2025); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014)
		Arts and Crafts	Madiyarov (2020); Elnazarov (2025)
Social and Economic Structure	Social and Economic Structure	Trade and Market Culture	Madiyarov (2020); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014); Elnazarov (2025)
		Property and Wealth	Madiyarov (2020); Kushkimbayeva et al. (2014)

The thematic concentration on natural landscapes, agricultural practices, and animal husbandry reflects the close connection between tongue twisters and traditional modes of subsistence. These elements situate tongue twisters within a concrete ecological and socio-economic environment. However, urban life and modern occupational settings remain largely absent, indicating a strong rural anchoring of the genre in the reviewed literature.

Table 5 comprehensively examines how themes such as geographical differences, natural elements, daily life, animal husbandry, and agricultural culture are addressed in the literature within the context of tongue twisters under three main themes. The Geographical and Spatial Elements theme addresses toponyms, regional differences, and the relationship between place and people, demonstrating that tongue twisters reflect locality and geographical identity.

The Natural Elements and Environment theme encompasses flora and fauna, climate and seasons, and nature-human interaction, revealing the organic relationship Turkic communities have established with nature. The Daily Life and Livelihood theme examines agriculture and animal husbandry, home and family life, crafts and professions, and social and economic structures in detail. The literature review reveals that tongue twisters are not abstract cultural texts but rather concrete reflections of geography, the natural environment, and everyday practices. Animal husbandry and agricultural culture, regional toponyms, and traditional lifestyles are among the most frequently discussed topics. This shows that tongue twisters are the product of agricultural and animal husbandry societies with a deep-rooted history and that cultural memory is shaped by concrete life experiences.

In the Anatolian tongue twisters "*Bindim deve boynuna, Gittim Halep yoluna, Halep yolu Şam bazar, İçinde maymun gezer. Maymun beni korkuttu, Kulacığımı sarkitti. Ağ boncuk, kara boncuk, Halbur hulbur, Öp elini kaldır,*" the toponyms, caravan routes, and commercial life of historical trade centers like Aleppo and Damascus are concretized, while traditional transport animals like the camel are also included as a part of geographical and cultural identity. In the example "*Hopadan hapadan, Odun getir tepeden, At kapiya gürpeden, Annesi öpsün şarpadan,*" which addresses daily life and family relations, daily tasks such as collecting firewood, family displays of love and affection, and rural practices are intertwined, reflecting the warm texture of everyday life. Examples that combine animal husbandry and hospitality come from Central Asian Turkic communities. Reflecting the Karakalpak tradition of hospitality, the tongue twister "*Dástúrxan jayiw, Nandi ortaǵa qoyiw, Hám awiz tiyiw, Dástúr deydi. Sonıń ushın nan jeydi*" (Spread the table, Put the bread in the middle, And touch it to your mouth, he says, "Here you are." That's why he eats the bread) illustrates table manners and the custom of hosting guests. These examples concretely demonstrate the organic connection tongue twisters have with geography, daily practices, and livelihoods.

Discussion

This review makes three main contributions to the recent literature (2018–2024). First, it proposes a functional framework that conceptualizes tongue twisters as multifunctional cultural texts rather than as merely phonetic exercises. Second, it highlights the centrality of ethnocultural codes in the symbolic structure of tongue twisters. Third, it demonstrates how structural features such as rhythm, alliteration, and sound repetition function as mechanisms of cultural transmission.

The present study explores the literary functions, structural features, common motifs, and common ethnocultural codes of tongue twisters in Turkic literature through a systematic literature synthesis. The findings reveal that the functionality of tongue twisters falls into three main categories: linguistic-phonetic, social-cultural, and literary-aesthetic. Beyond simply practicing articulation, tongue twisters offer an aesthetic experience as an "art of speech" (Surmilova, 2024). This aesthetic dimension, combined with the linguistic game function, increases the memorability of the text, and social functions transform the tongue twisters from a mere text into a social representation. Cultural functions, in turn, enable the transmission of values and social memory through this performance (Agocuk & Ciftci, 2021; Turmuzi et al., 2018). These texts can serve as primary tools for social interaction, play, entertainment, celebration, social criticism, and the transfer of cultural values (Akin, 2021). This multifunctional nature of tongue twisters demonstrates their flexibility in social contexts and their durability throughout history. This shows the importance of tongue twisters within the oral cultural heritage (Mich, 2020). These findings are consistent with studies suggesting that humor carries cultural codes (Agiş, 2023; Bazancır, 2023; Öztürk Kasar & Yaman, 2019). Pedagogical

use, as seen in the literature, should be considered only one of these functions (Batirbayevich, 2025b).

The findings of the study reveal that the dominant motifs in Turkic world tongue twisters are strongly concentrated around nature, geography, and daily life practices. Animal and plant names, agriculture, and animal husbandry constitute the core of these motifs. This demonstrates that tongue twisters are based on a "realistic" foundation and reflect the material culture of the society. Even exaggerated actions and absurd situations are often constructed around these everyday motifs and serve as a parody of everyday life (Nargöz, 2024). The significance of this finding is that it concretely confirms that tongue twisters are powerful and flexible carriers of shared cultural memory (Agocuk & Ciftci, 2021). They function as micro-narratives reflecting the relationship of their society with the ecology, livelihoods, and social environment. These motifs keep the collective memory and shared experiences of the society alive and recode this memory as they are passed down from generation to generation. In this context, tongue twisters can be defined as the smallest, most flexible, and most rapidly spreading units of cultural memory.

The selection of motifs from everyday life proves that cultural memory lives on not only in grand myths or epics but also in short sentences. These findings regarding motifs show strong parallels with studies on animal metaphors and plant names in proverbs of the Turkic world (Aydoğan, 2023; Hasanova, 2025). The commonality of motifs points to common roots in epics and legends of the Turkic world (Bahromjonovna, 2025; Bayrak İşcanoğlu & Çelik, 2025; Tuyakbayev et al., 2023). Unlike mythological motifs in grand narratives, tongue twisters appear to concentrate on the "everyday" cultural memory, and this may serve a function different from epic and fairy tale motifs (Bayrakdarlar, 2022; Çolak & Bayrakdarlar, 2023; Özokutan Şik & Şik, 2023).

Another finding is that tongue twisters, despite their humorous and seemingly meaningless surface structure, harbor distinct ethnocultural codes (Zubach, 2024). The result reveal that these texts are loaded with moral values, social roles, social norms, and a holistic worldview (Veronika, 2025). Tongue twisters serve as an informal yet effective pedagogical tool that transmits these codes from generation to generation. The absurd structure of the text ensures that these codes are transmitted indirectly and entertainingly, rather than as direct advice (Agiş, 2023; Berray, 2019; Öztürk Kasar & Yaman, 2019; Strayhorn, 2023). These texts can also function as a safe space for social critique (Akin, 2021). The significance of this finding is that it elevates tongue twisters from their status as simple language games to the level of complex social documents. These texts indirectly convey topics such as rules of speech behavior, ethical dilemmas, and social hierarchy (Edikhanov et al., 2022). The identification of ethnocultural codes proves that the "national aspects" of tongue twisters have not only a linguistic but also an intellectual basis (Madiyarov, 2020). Analyses of the moral values in proverbs also support this conclusion (Boz, 2023; Gilazova, 2024). This educational function aligns with recent research conducted in Kazakhstan, which demonstrates that ethnocultural competencies and attitudes toward national values are strongly associated with the professional and general competencies of teacher candidates (Kazangapova et al., 2024).

One key finding of the systematic review is that structural features such as alliteration, rhythm, rhyme, and formulaic structures are not merely phonetic ornamentation. These features have been identified as strategic linguistic mechanisms that directly reinforce the literary and social functions of a text. Phonetic density and structural complexity demonstrate the "wordplay" nature and artistic aspect of a tongue twister (Sherzer & Webster, 2015). Rhythm and rhyme enhance the musicality of the text, facilitating its memorization, which directly supports the cultural transmission function of tongue twisters (Tokpayeva et al., 2024). Structural features also reinforce the text's comic or absurd impact (Zubach, 2024). These results suggest that tongue twisters are designed with a conscious aesthetic concern (Batirbayevich, 2025a). The finding that structure supports function is also consistent with

computational analyses of Croatian tongue twisters (Nikolić & Bakarić, 2016). The use of sound symbolism in Punjabi folklore and alliteration in Kakataibo songs also demonstrates that these structural features are a universal aesthetic preference in oral cultures (Khalil et al., 2025; Prieto Mendoza, 2022).

The findings regarding the final study question reveal that the literature places a strong emphasis on geographical, natural, and everyday life themes when analyzing tongue twisters. This finding emphasizes that tongue twisters should be considered not as abstract texts, but as texts directly related to the material culture and ecology of the society to which they belong. Geographical elements, local toponyms, place-space, and historical features are prominent in the reviewed studies. Similarly, everyday reflections such as animal husbandry, agriculture, food culture, and family life are also central to tongue twister analyses. In this context, tongue twisters demonstrate that they are primary sources for understanding a society's organic connection with nature, its environment, and its livelihoods. Through these themes, tongue twisters encode and convey a society's ecological knowledge and material cultural memory. The literature supports the notion that animal and plant motifs in tongue twisters are not only symbolic (Sharafutdinova, 2025) but also related to the concrete fauna and flora of a region. Even studies examining mythological elements (Gilazova, 2024) show that these elements are often integrated with local understandings of geography and nature. The central role of everyday life (family, food, work) in tongue twisters confirms that these texts are "living folklore."

Implications

The study's findings have important implications for the fields of folklore, linguistics, anthropology, and educational sciences. From the perspective of folklore, this synthesis demonstrates that tongue twisters, like epics or fairy tales, possess rich potential for cultural analysis (Özokutan Şik & Şik, 2023). From a linguistic perspective, the findings demonstrate that phonetic structures are not merely phonological phenomena but also play a key role in the construction and transmission of cultural meaning (Surmilova, 2024; Veronika, 2025). From an anthropological perspective, the ethnocultural codes in tongue twisters provide valuable data demonstrating how social norms, values, and worldviews are internalized and reproduced (Kenzhalin et al., 2025). From an educational perspective, tongue twisters should not be restricted to mechanical pronunciation drills. Instead, they can be used as culturally responsive pedagogical tools to foster cultural and ethnic awareness among children and youth. Through symbolic imagery, rhythm, humor, and culturally embedded content, they offer accessible entry points for introducing learners to traditional values, collective memory, and oral heritage. In this respect, tongue twisters hold significant potential for strengthening both linguistic competence and cultural literacy in formal and informal educational settings. The implications for educational sciences are the need to move beyond the traditional use of tongue twisters in children's games and language teaching (Batirbayevich, 2025). Indeed, these texts can be used as a tool not only to improve diction but also to develop cultural literacy and critical thinking (Akin, 2021). The inextricable link between language, culture, and thought is once again confirmed by the findings of this study.

Limitations and Recommendations

While this study aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis, it has several limitations. First, this research is a literature synthesis, and the findings are limited by the scope and quality of existing published research. Primary field compilations or the collection of new tongue twister texts were excluded from this study. Furthermore, the findings are predominantly based

on text-based analyses. The power of oral culture is, to some extent, based on performance, but the research could not examine the "performance" dimension—that is, critical elements such as gesture, facial expression, tone of voice, and performer-listener interaction—sufficiently, deeply, due to the nature of the method. The research was limited to publications from the last 25 years, including those available in Web of Science (WoS), Scopus, and TR index databases, and with full text available in both English and Turkic. However, the historical development of tongue twisters and their evolution over time was not the focus of this study. These limitations were considered in the interpretation of the findings and offer new opportunities for future research.

A performance-focused compilation of tongue twisters from various regions of the Turkic world appears to be a significant gap for future research. However, anthropological and sociological field studies could be conducted to more thoroughly examine the ethnocultural codes and worldview reflections within tongue twisters. A systematic and comparative analysis of the motifs in tongue twisters with those of other folkloric genres in the Turkic world could open new horizons regarding how cultural memory functions. In this context, cultural heritage policies should develop sustainable interventions to protect, archive, and actively preserve these important pieces of intangible heritage.

Contradictions, Regional Variations, and Research Gaps

Although the majority of the reviewed studies emphasize the normative and value-transmitting functions of tongue twisters, a smaller number of works point to their potential for playful subversion. In certain examples, tongue twisters do not reinforce social order but rather exaggerate, mock, or temporarily invert dominant social roles, particularly through absurd animal behavior, exaggerated authority figures, or illogical sequences. This suggests that tongue twisters may operate not only as tools of cultural continuity but also as spaces of symbolic flexibility where established norms can be playfully destabilized.

Regional variation constitutes another important dimension that remains under-theorized in the literature. While studies on Anatolian Turkic tongue twisters frequently foreground agricultural life, family relations, and moral didacticism, research conducted in Central Asian contexts places greater emphasis on nomadic life, animal husbandry, seasonal migration, and ecological adaptation. These differences indicate that the symbolic content of tongue twisters is not monolithic across the Turkic world but is shaped by region-specific economic structures, environmental conditions, and historical experience.

Despite the growing body of literature on tongue twisters in traditional folkloric settings, significant gaps remain. None of the reviewed studies systematically examines the transformation of tongue twisters in digital environments such as social media platforms, online video formats, or mobile applications. Likewise, the role of tongue twisters in diasporic Turkic communities and their potential hybridization in multilingual urban contexts remains virtually unexplored. Finally, urban–rural contrasts in performance practices and thematic orientation represent another area in urgent need of empirical investigation.

Conclusion

The present study has indicated that tongue twisters, in the context of Turkic people, are folkloric products with multi-layered and profound functions, far beyond the generally accepted perception of language games. The main contribution of the study is filling the gap created by discipline-specific (linguistic, pedagogical) approaches in this field by synthesizing the literary functions, structural features, motifs, and ethnocultural codes of tongue twisters within a holistic folkloric framework. This synthesis demonstrated that tongue twisters are condensed cultural texts that reflect the cultural memory, worldview, and value system of their societies.

The lasting implications for the field and practice underscore that these genres, like major narrative genres, deserve serious folkloric analysis. Tongue twisters are of critical importance as a sustainable tool that is both entertaining and effective in transmitting language and culture to new generations.

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