

A STRUCTURAL, CONTENT, AND FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE KAZAKH FAIRY TALE TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

This article has been prepared as a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of fairy tales, one of the richest and most functional genres of Kazakh folk literature, within the axis of their structural characteristics, historical development processes, genre classifications, and their effects on the cognitive, cultural, and moral development of human beings. Kazakh fairy tales, by their origins, are multi-layered narratives that feed on the steppe culture with a long history, the nomadic life philosophy, and the common mythological heritage of the Turkic world, reproducing social value judgments on an intergenerational level. Within the scope of the research, the historical course of Kazakh fairy tale studies, which started with pioneering researchers such as Radloff, Altynsarin, and Potanin since the 19th century, has been examined, and it has been revealed how this process laid the groundwork for today's modern Kazakh folklore research. In the pedagogical discussion part, which forms the center of the study, the transformative power of fairy tales on cognitive development, the expansion of imagination capacity, abstract thinking skills, and psychological resilience in children has been addressed. Based on the argument that the fairy tale is the "main cradle of pedagogy," the fundamental role of the individual in the construction of the self, positioning oneself in the world, and acquiring national identity consciousness has been theoretically examined. Furthermore, the quality of the fairy tale as a living social phenomenon has been emphasized through the performance skills of the "Ertekshi" (narrator), who is the indispensable subject of the fairy tale storytelling tradition, their position in the context of gender roles, and the narrator-listener interaction. In the analysis, it has been revealed that Kazakh fairy tales are functional educational tools that develop children's interactive intelligence development with the environment, their ability to empathize with other people and beings, and their linguistic performance skills in contemporary educational processes, rather than being a folkloric data store belonging to the past. As a result of the evaluations made in the article, it has been concluded that in the post-independence process, fairy tales have a very important founding and protective function in terms of preserving the mother tongue and the formation and maintenance of national and cultural consciousness in Kazakhstan.

Keywords: Kazakh Fairy Tales, Ertekshi, Pedagogy, Cognitive Development, National Identity, Oral Culture, Folklore.

Introduction

Folk narratives are among the most deep-rooted cultural heritage sites through which a nation's collective memory, worldview, and ethical values have been filtered and transmitted

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over centuries. Among these narrative genres, fairy tales—with their unique structures where reality and imagination, the extraordinary and daily life intertwine—function as a form of "cultural DNA" that embodies the spiritual and intellectual genetics of societies. Within Kazakh folk literature, fairy tales have acquired a unique quality by drawing from the mobile structure of nomadic life, the mysterious nature of the steppe, and the common narrative tradition of the Turkic world.

Scientific studies conducted on Kazakh fairy tales have developed simultaneously with folklore studies in the world since the beginning of the XIXth century. These studies gained an institutional identity through the collection activities of pioneering figures such as Radloff, Altynsarin, and Potanin. This process, which was initially seen as mere text identification, has over time transformed into an interdisciplinary research field where the structural, functional, and pedagogical aspects of fairy tales are examined. Generic classifications of Kazakh fairy tales such as "Batirlik" (Heroism), "Kiyal-Gajayip" (Extraordinary/Magic), and "Hayvanat" (Animals) are reflections of the relationship the Kazakh society established with nature and with perceptions such as heroism and social justice.

The main objective of this article is to examine the role of Kazakh fairy tales in the construction of the individual and society. The main premise of the article is that fairy tale storytelling, as a tradition practiced in many periods of life from infancy to maturity, is the "main cradle of education" in terms of the system of values it offers. According to this argument, the effects of the fairy tale on the child's cognitive development, imagination capacity, construction of the self, and the process of making sense of the world are an undeniable fact. Especially in post-independence Kazakhstan, fairy tales have also undertaken the role of a historical and cultural bridge in the process of preserving the mother tongue and reconstructing the national identity. The "Ertekshi" (narrator), who is a central subject within the tradition of fairy tale narration, appears before us as an artist who transmits this heritage to new generations and reproduces thoughts and values in every performance with their performative talent. When we consider the fairy tale as a discourse, it is necessary to state that the storyteller instills very important values in the listeners in many respects, such as national values, perception of morality, forms of behavior, gender roles, etc.

In this article, an attempt has been made to reveal the importance of Kazakh fairy tales, which are also seen as a type of discourse and addressed in almost every aspect, especially in terms of education. For this to turn into a complete evaluation, it has become inevitable to include many features of Kazakh fairy tales in the research, from their structural characteristics to their contents, from historical collection and research initiatives to their definitions and types. The aim of the article is to reveal the historical depth of the Kazakh fairy tale tradition and to analyze the importance these narratives carry for child/individual development and cultural continuity in today's world from a scientific perspective. In this context, the functional power of the symbolic language contained in fairy tales in the construction of the sense of "self-worth" and in the individual's positioning of themselves in the world will be examined in detail.

General Characteristics of Kazakh Fairy Tales

The fairy tale represents the most developed and aesthetically purest form of oral prose within the folk narrative tradition. From ancient times to the present, as a product of the oral tradition (and today, written and visual production), the fairy tale can be seen as an artistic expression of collective memory in terms of both its form of performance and its content. The

fundamental goal of the fairy tale is to convey messages of value to the listener through symbols and signs and to evoke an aesthetic pleasure in them. In this context, the functional area of the fairy tale is quite broad. While it assumes an educational role in the individual's socialization process on one hand, it offers an artistic ground reflecting the people's understanding of beauty on the other. The generic characteristics of the fairy tale emerge directly from these two fundamental functions (didactic and aesthetic). The narrator's primary goal is to make the story as impressive, fluent, and interesting as possible. On this fictional plane, the fairy tale is not directed toward experiential reality. Therefore, the narrator does not attempt to prove that what they tell has a counterpart in the real world. This situation reinforces the fairy tale's quality of being a "conscious fiction" (Boratav, 2012).

The development of the fairy tale genre has a long history reaching back to the earliest periods of human history. The origins of Kazakh fairy tales are woven with ancient myths born in primitive social structures, hunting stories conveying the experiences of hunter-gatherer communities, and mysteries and legends belonging to initiation ceremonies. The traces of these archaic genres are evident in the formation phase of the fairy tale. In the course of time, some of these genres lost their original functions and were completely integrated into the fairy tale. The most prominent example of this transformation is the "myth" genre. The evolution of myth into fairy tale is a multi-stage process leading from sacredness toward secularization.

The myth is accepted as the "sacred history" and secret knowledge of the primitive society. In the archaic period, myths were not told in random places or to everyone, outside of a specific ritualistic context. In myth, the cosmos, heroes, totemic beings, earthly and heavenly life, and the benefits of this life for humanity were depicted in a fantastic language. For the audience of that period, these narratives were an unquestionable truth. However, with the changing of the social structure over time, the myth lost its mystery and attribution of sacredness and began to be questioned by the listeners. As the narrator included their own imagination and individual creativity in the text, the myth first turned into a simple story and ultimately into a fairy-tale form (Eliade, 2001). Characters such as the giant (shoyinkulak), the fairy girl, the cyclops (tepegöz), or the jalmiz kempir (witch) found in Kazakh fairy tales today are the genetic heirs of this ancient mythic world reaching the present day.

As expressed in the *Babalar Sözü* (2011) corpus, the origin of the fairy tale is based on the hunting legends of the first community. Legends, which were assumed to be based on reality, evolved first into stories and then into the fairy tale form through additions and changes made by narrators over generations (pp. 7-9). Traces of such "monumental" hunting legends still maintain their vitality in today's Kazakh fairy tales. However, these narratives have reached us not in their raw form but as folkloric texts having passed through an artistic filter.

Structurally, Kazakh fairy tales are texts where extraordinary qualities and exaggerated narration reach their peak. In these narratives, the arts of "magnification" and "minimization" are used in a way that challenges the listener's imagination. For example, the Simurgh bird being so massive that a single wing covers the sun, or horses such as "Tulpar" and "Shalkuyruk" reasoning and speaking like humans, are characteristic fantastic elements of Kazakh fairy tales.

The striking similarities seen between the heroic epics and fairy tales of the Turkic world are not accidental but the result of a socio-economic and cultural balance. Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Nogai, and Bashkir societies, shaped around a nomadic livestock economy under similar

geographical conditions, looked at the world through the same window. This common lifestyle laid the ground for the emergence of similar aesthetic tastes, excitements, and literary products. The manifestation of a common economic life also united the refined tastes of these peoples. Therefore, a Kazakh fairy tale and a Kyrgyz or Bashkir fairy tale are like twin brothers in terms of motif and structure.

Human collective consciousness and imagination are mostly guided by fears. Historically, the Kazakh people are a pastoral society, and the place of the wolf (böri) holds a central importance in this way of life. The wolf, the greatest threat to the livestock breeder, turned over time into a paradoxical respect born of this fear. In Kazakh fairy tales, the wolf symbol is constructed as a sacred friend of man, a personification of power and endurance. This symbolic relationship is a reflection of the deep and ancient bond Kazakhs established with nature.

Fairy tales are also treasures of "folk wisdom" containing the lifestyle, traditions, and historical memory of the steppe nomad. In these texts, the people's difficult struggle for life, the heroisms displayed against foreign invaders, and class contradictions are clearly seen. While the greed of the wealthy (bays) is ridiculed between the lines of the tales, the wisdom and spiritual generosity of the poor people are glorified. Ultimately, every fairy tale provides social consolation by ending with the absolute victory of justice and truth.

The fairy tale was born from a social need. As emphasized by Alptekin (2003), in periods when modern means of communication were not available, fairy tales served a fundamental function for the education and entertainment of children (balalar), especially during long winter nights. However, when descending to the origins of fairy tales, it is seen that they were fed by shamanic ceremonies (şölen, sığır, yuğ). The mythological narratives in these ceremonies, managed by kams and baksis, lost their sacredness over time and became fairy tales. The mythological traces in animal tales are directly related to the hunting culture of the Neolithic age in particular. Figures such as the seven-headed giant continue to live in fairy tales as symbolic reflections of man's struggle with the massive forces in nature (p. 23).

The Function of Kazakh Fairy Tales as Carriers of Material Culture: A Focus on Symbolic Jewelry

The Kazakh fairy tale tradition has kept alive not only the values and abstract concepts but also reflected the material culture of the Kazakh nation as in the case of the jewelry and other accessories, which can be linked to the preservation and dissemination of the practices as regards social and gender roles in the community. In the Kazakh tales, jewelry transcends aesthetic ornamentation, functioning as a multi-layered symbolic system that mirrors the cultural memory, worldview, and spiritual landscape of Turkic peoples. Items such as the ring (*saqina/yüzük*), bracelet (*bilezik*), necklace (*alqa*), and earrings (*sirğa*) serve as pivotal cultural signifiers. These objects are deeply intertwined with concepts of social status, destiny, divine protection, and sacredness, acting as "material anchors" for the oral narrative.

From a structural perspective, jewelry often emerges at critical turning points in the tale's morphology. Following Vladimir Propp's functional approach, jewelry frequently acts as a recognition or branding mark. The ring, in particular, serves as a structural tool for "recognition" (*tanıma*) and "remembrance." When a hero travels to distant lands or loses their identity, a ring or a specific bracelet becomes the ultimate proof of their true lineage or status. This physical object dissolves the narrative tension (the "knot") and facilitates the restoration

of the lost order. Consequently, jewelry is not merely a decorative element but a functional motor that drives the plot toward its resolution.

On a semantic level, jewelry is a reflection of the traditional Kazakh concept of “tağdyr” (destiny) and ancestral protection. In many narratives, a bracelet or necklace is bestowed upon the hero by a mother figure or an elderly sage (*ana* or *batyr*), transforming the object into a sacred heirloom (*amanat*). The bracelet often symbolizes the purity, loyalty, and family honor of female protagonists. The ring represents authority, power, and the cyclical nature of fate. Earrings and necklaces encapsulate notions of fertility, beauty, and spiritual safeguarding. In the Kazakh socio-cultural hierarchy, the material of the jewelry—typically gold or silver—immediately establishes the character’s social standing. A silver bracelet or a golden ring serves as a semiotic code for nobility (*han* or *bey*), allowing the listener to identify the character's socio-political weight within the first few lines of the narrative.

Functionally, jewelry also acts as a mediator between the human realm and the supernatural world. Kazakh fairy tales often endow these objects with magical properties; a ring may grant invisibility, or earrings may protect the wearer from malevolent spirits (*alvasti* or *jin*). This highlights an apotropeic function—the use of jewelry as a symbolic shield against the “evil eye” (*nazar*) and metaphysical dangers. Furthermore, jewelry plays a fundamental role in rites of passage, particularly in marriage-themed tales. The presentation of a ring or the ceremonial adorning of a bride represents the individual's transition to a new social status and the sanctification of a union. The preservation of these items throughout the hero's trials symbolizes the continuity of cultural values and the triumph of moral integrity.

Ultimately, jewelry in Kazakh fairy tales functions as a tangible carrier of collective memory. By weaving these material elements into the oral tradition, the Kazakh people have ensured the transmission of their aesthetic values, belief systems, and social hierarchies across generations. Far from being mere accessories, jewelry constitutes a foundational cultural code that facilitates “national identity construction” and preserves the linguistic and material heritage of the steppe within the timeless realm of the fairy tale.

Structure and Content of Kazakh Fairy Tales

Among Kazakh folk narratives, fairy tales are a special genre where the boundary between reality and fantasy becomes blurred, yet the narrator maintains a balance between these two worlds. Indeed, the characteristics of Kazakh folk tales consist of a mixture of real-life events and non-real stories. This ontological structure is the most fundamental criterion that distinguishes the fairy tale from historical narratives or the genre of memoirs. In the fairy tale, the narrator does not concern themselves with convincing the listener; on the contrary, thanks to the “nominal reality” established from the beginning of the narrative, the concepts of time and space become uncertain. This uncertainty allows the fairy tale to gain a universal quality and to be reinterpreted in every era.

The external structure of Kazakh fairy tales is built upon certain patterns based on the techniques of retention and transmission of oral culture in memory. It is possible to deepen these formal characteristics under the following headings:

“Fairy tales are long texts, although not as much as an epic or a folk story.” Unlike short narrative genres such as the *kissa* or anecdote, fairy tales possess a complex plot containing the stages of “exposition,” “rising action/knot,” and “resolution.” The length of Kazakh fairy

tales is directly proportional to the number of obstacles (tests) the hero encounters. This length may expand or contract according to the storyteller's skill and the interest of the audience; however, in any case, it covers a chain of events through which the hero will complete their process of initiation.

"Fairy tales are generally in prose. However, it is seen that verse pieces are added in some fairy tales, albeit few, depending on the narrator." This feature, referred to as a "prosimetric" structure in folklore, is used in Kazakh fairy tales to increase the aesthetic effect. Especially in sections where the hero enters a lyrical emotion, addresses someone, or offers a prayer/curse, the narrator switches from prose to poetic (verse) expression. These transitions keep the listener's attention alive and add a rhythmic richness to the narrative.

"At the beginning, middle, and end of fairy tales, there are cliché expressions that we call 'Formula,' 'Patterned expression,' or 'Nursery rhyme/Wheel.'" Formulaic structures form the skeleton of the fairy tale. In Kazakh fairy tales, initial formulas (for example; "Bar eken de jok eken aș eken de tok eken" - *Once there was and once there was not, some were hungry and some were full*) act as a threshold preparing the listener from the real world for the world of the fairy tale. Transitional formulas (for example; "Agası osı jolda kete tursın biz inisine keleik" - *Let the elder brother stay on this path while we come to the younger brother*) facilitate visualizing changes in space and person in the mind. Concluding formulas (for example; "Murat maksatına jetipti" - *They reached their goal*) signal that the narrative is complete and that cosmic balance has been re-established. Furthermore, numbers such as 3, 7, 9, 40 used in the tales are symbolic values expressing holiness and completeness in Turkic cosmology.

"The language of fairy tales is simple and they are written in a language that everyone can understand. They are anonymous and reflect the literary identity of the people." These narratives, which have filtered through the oral tradition, reflect the collective linguistic taste of the people. This language, far from a heavy terminology, carries the plainness and sincerity of the steppe. The quality of anonymity certifies that the fairy tale belongs not to a single person but to the entire Kazakh collective identity, which makes the narrative a carrier of the people's system of values.

"There are types within fairy tales. These types are the personification of the society's identity with symbolic meanings." Fairy tale heroes appear before us as "types" rather than the concept of "character" in modern literature. These types (for example; the cunning Aldar Köse, the wise elder, the evil giant) are archetypes representing certain social virtues or flaws. In this way, the fairy tale assumes the role of a social mirror by embodying abstract values.

The thematic depth of Kazakh fairy tales is blended with livestock culture, the struggle with nature, and religious acceptances:

"Fairy tales are full of extraordinary events" and "The heroes of fairy tales also possess extraordinary characteristics." In a folkloric context, this feature takes the fairy tale out of the monotony of daily life and carries it to a metaphysical plane. The hero's achievement of impossible tasks or actions exceeding the laws of nature (flying, shape-shifting, etc.) is a reflection of the search for "ideal power" in the people's imagination.

"The prayers and curses of fairy tale heroes can come true." This is based on the "magic of the word" in Turkic culture and the belief in absolute justice. The fact that the word coming out of

the hero's mouth finds a physical response reinforces the thought that the virtuous person is under a universal protection.

"Heroes generally achieve success thanks to their extraordinary helpers." In Kazakh fairy tales, animal helpers (Tulpar, the loyal dog, clever birds) are a manifestation of the symbiotic relationship the nomadic culture established with nature. An ant or a fish that the hero previously helped assisting them later treats the theme of "universal solidarity" and "that kindness will not go unrewarded" (Propp, 2011).

"The hero's refuge in Islamic values and seeking help in the events they experience shows that fairy tales were shaped by the influence of Islam." Kazakh fairy tales present a syncretic structure with the integration of value judgments brought by Islam upon ancient shamanic roots. As seen in Alptekin's (2003) example, the figure of the hero going to his father's grave to read the Quran or seeking help from Allah proves that the fairy tale has harmonized with the society's current belief system.

"In a fairy tale, the cultural and folkloric characteristics of the region where it is told are also encountered." Master fairy tale narrators (*ertestiler*) treat the text not as a static structure but as a living organism. While the narrator preserves the main skeleton of the fairy tale, they enrich the details with their own accumulation of knowledge and local motifs. This process of "creative reproduction" ensures that the fairy tale both remains traditional and maintains its currentness in every narration.

Classification and Typological Analysis of Kazakh Fairy Tales

The issue of classifying Kazakh fairy tales carries great importance both in terms of preserving the originality of the local narrative tradition and relating these narratives to international literature. While managing this process, Kazakh researchers have generally followed a path compatible with the "Aarne-Thompson (AT) System," developed by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, which is accepted as the standard worldwide today. This situation has made it easier to determine the place of Kazakh fairy tales in the universal fairy tale atlas.

The first classification proposed by Konıratbayev (1999) determines the functional and thematic boundaries of the genre as follows:

“Batırlık Erteğiler (Heroic Tales)”: This genre is the field where Kazakh steppe culture establishes the tightest bond with the epic tradition. Heroic tales generally take as their subject the journeys undertaken by *batırs* (brave warriors) for the sake of protecting the people, defending the homeland, or an impossible love. Its difference from the epic genre is that extraordinary elements and magic are more dominant in the plot. In addition to his physical strength, the hero realizes a social ideal with the help of his intelligence and his loyal horse.

“Kıyal-Ğacayıp Erteğiler (Extraordinary Tales)”: Known in international literature as "Magic Tales," this category is the genre where the element of fantasy is most intense. Invisibility cloaks, flying carpets, shape-shifting beings, and struggles against giants are at the center of these tales. Extraordinary tales take the listener outside of empirical reality and carry them to a metaphysical plane where desires and fears are symbolized.

“Hayvanatlar Jaylı Erteğiler (Animal Tales)”: These tales are the product of thousands of years of observation that the Kazakh people established with nature and wildlife. In this

genre, animals speak, think, and deceive like humans. In these narratives, which generally carry a didactic quality, the fox's cunning, the wolf's strength, and the rabbit's cowardice are treated as archetypes representing these traits. The origins of this genre reach back to primitive belief systems such as totemism and animism.

“Novellalık Erteğiler (Novella-style Tales)”: These are tales where extraordinary elements leave their place to mind games, coincidences, and realistic life experiences. In this genre, events are generally fed by situations that can be encountered in daily life. These narratives, also called "realistic tales," are the category that stands closest to the "novel" genre in terms of reflecting the social structure, family relationships, and class differences in a more direct language.

“Satıralık Erteğiler (Satirical Tales)”: This is the section where social defects, human flaws, and authority figures are criticized in a mocking language. Characters such as Aldar Köse, who defeats the upper classes with his wit, are the dominant elements of this genre. Satirical tales are an aesthetic resistance and a sanctuary of humor developed by the people against social pressures.

Konıratbayev, with a more holistic approach, has also divided the tales into three fundamental ontological planes:

“Mifologiyalık Erteğiler (Mythological Tales)”: These are symbolic stories of the cosmic order, the creation of the world, and how natural phenomena occur. They represent the transitional form between myth and fairy tale. In these narratives, phenomena such as the sun, moon, and thunder are narrated by being personified.

“Realistik Erteğiler (Realistic Tales)”: These are tales stripped of magic and sorcery, where themes such as social justice, poverty, reason, and cunning are mostly treated. These texts are the examples that reflect the daily life practices and understanding of morality of the Kazakh people in the purest way.

Regarding the universal and local quality of fairy tales, the following findings emphasized in the work *Babalar Sözü* (2011) provide a broad perspective to classification discussions:

“Stories are not limited to Kazakh fairy tales but also include fairy tales of other countries.” Fairy tales have a nomadic structure. The fact that Kazakhstan is located on the Silk Road route has caused Indian, Arabic, Persian, and Slavic fairy tales to seep into Kazakh oral culture and become "localized" there. This situation confirms the function of fairy tales in building intercultural bridges.

“Many of the Kazakh fairy tales are historically typological, some are historically genetic, and some are common to kindred countries that have spread to the Kazakh people through historical-cultural connections.” Here, the modes of dissemination of fairy tales are analyzed. While "genetic" similarities express coming from a common ancestral culture (Proto-Turkic), "typological" similarities symbolize the common imagination produced by people in different geographies in the face of similar events. "Cultural connection" describes the borrowings realized through migrations and neighborly relations.

“Among Kazakh fairy tales, stories that are national, international, and nomadic have lived together.” This expression reveals the "eclectic" (selective) structure of Kazakh fairy tales. A

fairy tale can both carry the national scent of the Kazakh steppe and possess the same skeleton as a European fairy tale thousands of kilometers away. This heterogeneous structure makes Kazakh fairy tales an inseparable part of world heritage.

Pedagogical Functions of Kazakh Fairy Tales

Among Kazakh folk narratives, the fairy tale is the most ancient educational model that plays a role in character building starting from an individual's early childhood. This process covers a multi-dimensional development stage rather than just a transfer of information.

"Cognitive Development and Imagination Capacity": Fairy tales are the first step in a child's mental world that allows them to go beyond concrete reality. The expression "Fairy tale is the main cradle of pedagogy" summarizes how the fairy tale constructs the child's mental schemas. The child, waiting with curiosity for the end of extraordinary stories, performs a cognitive exercise while establishing a cause-and-effect relationship between events. The complex plots and "extraordinary" elements in Kazakh fairy tales develop the child's ability to abstract and their creative imagination. In Piaget's "symbolic thought" (1951) stage, the fairy tale provides mental flexibility by enabling the child to construct the impossible. Einstein's following observation supports this situation: "If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales" (Zipes, 2012). The fantastic elements in Kazakh fairy tales provide cognitive flexibility by triggering the child's "creative thinking" and "problem-solving" skills.

"Moral Development, Construction of the Self, and Making Sense of the World": Abstract concepts such as goodness, evil, and justice in the child's world become concrete through the symbolic language of the fairy tale. There are some difficult situations encountered in life. Fairy tales guide us to get rid of these questions. This guidance is equivalent to "coping mechanisms" in psychology. Through fairy tales, the child learns the balance between cruelty and mercy in life. The child, who closes their eyes as if experiencing the scary events in the tale themselves, actually learns to face and manage the feeling of "fear" in a safe environment. This situation increases the child's psychological resilience. Bettelheim (1976) states that fairy tales put the turmoil in the child's subconscious in order and instill an existential hope in them. Kazakh fairy tales transform morality from being an abstract set of rules into a "living experience." In the context of Kohlberg's (1981) stages of moral development, fairy tales take the child from the "pre-conventional" level to "post-conventional" values such as justice and universal truth. The victory of justice at the end of the tale ensures the child's trust in the world order and determines their ethical compass.

"National Identity, Language, and Cultural Continuity": In post-independence Kazakhstan, fairy tales have gained strategic importance for the preservation of the mother tongue and "national identity construction." As emphasized by A. Baytursinov, "the forgotten words of the people are found in fairy tales" (1991, p. 15). This makes the fairy tale not just a narrative but a "language archive." The language of the fairy tale supports linguistic development in coordination with the child's motor skills (narrating, imitating, dramatizing). Furthermore, the traditions and customs of the ancestors prepare the ground for the child to become "the hero of their own life" through fairy tales. Storytelling is not just a passive act of listening in the Kazakh tradition; the child often experiences the narrative by accompanying it with imitations, gestures, and rhythmic nursery rhymes. The expression "Fairy tale directs the child to speak and imagine" (Baytursinov, 1991) points to a psycho-motor coordination beyond language development. While the nursery rhymes (formulas) in fairy tales develop the child's

articulation skills, the use of hand-arm movements and facial expressions suitable for the rhythm of the tale ensures that gross and fine motor skills work in coordination with oral performance.

"Social-Emotional Development and Understanding Others (Empathy)": Fairy tales help us reach our goals by teaching us to mold the rules and relationships in life to be just, well-mannered, clean, and friend-loving. This process supports the development of the child's "theory of mind" (Baron-Cohen, 1995); that is, the child gains the ability to understand the feelings and motivations of beings other than themselves (humans, animals, or nature). In Kazakh fairy tales, animals and natural forces (Tulpar, Wolf, Samruk) are not objects over which human establishes superiority, but "subjects" to which s/he is equal. This situation develops the child's ecological intelligence. The child grasps that nature is not just a resource but a "living system" that must be protected through fairy tales and integrates environmental awareness into their self. The child constructs their self-concept through identification with the fairy tale hero. This is a reference to Erikson's (1968) stage of "identity versus role confusion." The hero's success by emerging from impossibilities reinforces the perception of "self-efficacy" in the child. Through the fairy tale, the individual grasps the world not as a chaotic void, but as a field that can be made sense of and intervened in. This enables the individual to position themselves safely in the world.

"The Function of the Fairy Tale in the Technological Age": In a period when children's imaginations are restricted by the development of technology today, fairy tales offer a wide area for the child to tell about their own inner world. The fairy tale transforms the child, who is a passive screen viewer, into an active imaginer. This prepares an aesthetic and safe ground for the child's effort to position themselves in the world. Against the "ready-made" consumption model created by modern technology and screen addiction, fairy tales create mental resistance. Fairy tales offer a pedagogical antidote to today's attention deficit problem by providing the child with the skills of "setting aside time," "focusing," and "waiting for the result with patience."

In addition to the pedagogical functions of fairy tales for the listeners, there are also qualities that the fairy tale narrator must possess. These qualities also reveal the pedagogical attributes of the narrator, who is in the position of an "instructor." In Kazakh folklore, the fairy tale is not a static text but rather a "performance" case based on the dynamic interaction between the narrator (Ertekshi) and the listener. Telling a fairy tale is not just conveying a story; it is the art of transporting the listener into a fictional universe by combining voice, gesture, facial expression, and cultural accumulation.

In the Kazakh tradition, storytelling requires a special talent and responsibility. The primary task of the narrator is to keep the listener's sense of curiosity (suspense) alive and to reach the finale without disrupting the dramatic structure of the narrative.

"Storytellers are mostly women. Because it is mothers who spend more time and deal with children." From an anthropological perspective, the fairy tale is a part of the "hearthside" culture. The pedagogical responsibilities of mothers, such as putting children to sleep, consoling them, and entertaining them, have made the fairy tale a primary educational tool. Alptekin bases this situation on the fact that master narrators are generally called "masal anası" (tale mother) or "masal ninesi" (tale grandmother). While female narrators specialize more in extraordinary and animal tales, male narrators (storytellers) prefer genres where epic elements predominate and which approach folk stories (2003, p. 22). This situation reinforces

the dominant role of the fairy tale in domestic education and its function of establishing intergenerational bonds.

A master Ertekshi is not just a transmitter, but also a re-creator. "The narrator's memory and imaginary world must be vast." Storytelling, in the context of cognitive psychology, requires a seamless coordination between "working memory" and "long-term memory." While the narrator preserves the main skeleton and traditional words of the tale, they breathe life into the text with their own style, knowledge, and cultural vision. This means that every narration is actually a "rebirth," as Lord and Parry (1960) stated in the "oral composition" theory.

The narrative tradition fundamentally changes the way the child understands the world. Fairy tales told from the storyteller's own imagination in nature are lights spreading throughout all the secret corners of children's brains. This "light" metaphor points to the illuminating role of the fairy tale in cognitive development. The natural interest in animal tales, in particular, coincides with the child's tendency toward biophilia (love for nature). Fairy tales listened to together with peers in a classroom environment accelerate the child's socialization and school adjustment (adaptation) process. The transformation of the teacher figure into a narrator moves the bond the child establishes with authority onto a ground of love and trust. A fairy tale is a small seed. It is a cradle of imagination and it is necessary to keep memory for a lifetime. The fairy tale forms the core of the child's emotional evaluation ability. This "cradle" metaphor shows that the fairy tale is a sheltered area that surrounds the individual, gives confidence, and prepares them for life. The feeling of "self-esteem" formed through the fairy tale enables the child to realize their own creative potential and to reach the pleasure of thinking.

The narrative style of Kazakh fairy tales aims for the most economical and effective use of language. These features provide the fluency and permanence of the fairy tale:

"Fluency and Rhythm": "The narration flows without encountering any obstacles. Unnecessary word repetitions are not made." However, in order to create an aesthetic harmony, patterned expressions and nursery rhymes are included. This rhythmic structure prevents the listener's attention from being distracted.

"Purity and Clarity": "Sounds and words that disturb the flow of the voice and are difficult to say are not included. Sentences that are difficult to understand are not constructed." The fairy tale is the art of presenting even complex philosophical thoughts in the most transparent way.

"Plainness and Conciseness": "The narration is simple and unadorned. Feelings and thoughts are expressed with short and precise statements." This plainness ensures that the universal message of the fairy tale directly reaches listeners of all ages and all socio-cultural levels (Propp, 2011).

"Fairy tale heroes result in the highest peak of human happiness. Extraordinary fairy tales develop children's thinking and increase their language competencies. The main purpose of the fairy tale is to overcome unknown natural forces" (Kastay, 2017). In the Kazakh fairy tale tradition, the narrator is not just a transmitter of a story, but also the carrier of collective memory and an artist who reconstructs the text in every narration. In this context, the "Ertekshi" or "Ertegişi" is the fundamental subject providing the continuity of oral culture.

Since the fairy tale, by its nature, is based on a fictional ground, it allows a wide area for the narrator's creativity. "Since the intentional change of lived stories today is one of the original characteristics of the fairy tale, the storyteller also strives to tell the tale in an exaggerated way by ensuring that it is sufficiently impressive and attracts the attention of the audience" (Babalar Sözü, 2011). This exaggeration (hyperbole) is a conscious performance strategy used to keep the listener's interest awake and to increase the emotional dosage of what is told. By reshaping reality in an aesthetic form, the narrator invites the listener to a fairy-tale world where "suspension of disbelief" is practiced.

Storytelling is accepted as a "heritage" with deep roots in Kazakh culture. With Aslanoğlu's (1991) determination, "Storytellers are the part of ancient bardism (ozanlık) that continues in women... Bardism passes from father to son, storytelling passes from mother to daughter." This situation makes the fairy tale a genre belonging to the private sphere (domestic/hearthside) rather than the public sphere (squares/epics). The "ertekshi," which is the counterpart in Kazakhstan of the "masal anası" (fairy tale mother) concept in Turkey, is the strongest link of cultural transmission between generations (Alptekin, 2003, p. 23). The dominance of women in this role also explains why the pedagogical impact of the fairy tale is so high.

The spirit of the fairy tale is directly related to the narrator's temperament. The personality of the narrator permeates the fairy tale heroes: A "humorous" narrator equips the text with elements of comedy; an "epic" character narrator prioritizes battle and heroism scenes; a "wise" narrator ensures that moral maxims and deep philosophical advice pour from the hero's mouth. This situation proves that there is no "fixed text" in oral culture, and the narrator reproduces the text with their own worldview and talent in every performance (Lord, 1960).

As Altinkaynak (2015) stated, ertekshis do not want a passive audience during the narration. They draw the listener into the narrative with rhetorical questions such as "Is it not so; what would you do if you were there?" No answer is expected to these questions; the main goal is to ensure that the listener empathizes with the hero and to trigger their thinking about the events being told. Prayers of blessing and references to holy persons strengthen the spiritual atmosphere of the narrative.

The environment in which Kazakh fairy tales were born and spread is strictly tied to the economic and social structure of the steppe. Especially the descriptions of yayla (highland) life in the Aldarköse and Jirenshe tales show that these texts were produced among "horse breeders" and "shepherds," during silent waits at the head of the herd or by the fireside. The fact that famous writers and poets like Omar Shipin and Töleu Köbdikov were shepherds in their youth proves that this purest source of Kazakh literature is fed from the heart of the steppe.

Conclusion

This comprehensive study conducted on Kazakh fairy tales proves that these dynamic products of oral culture are not merely narratives intended for entertainment; on the contrary, they constitute a sophisticated system that preserves the thousands of years of cultural genetics of the Kazakh people. As fairy tales broke away from the sacred ground of mythology and integrated into the daily life of the people throughout the historical process, they wove the steppe life of Kazakhstan, the livestock culture, and the social hierarchy into

the fabric of the texts. In this respect, the fairy tale is both a mirror and a memory repository of the Kazakh spirit.

From a pedagogical and cognitive perspective, the impact of Kazakh fairy tales on the individual corresponds to a multi-dimensional development model. While the fictional universe of the fairy tale expands the child's imagination, it simultaneously grants an ability for abstraction that can transcend concrete reality. As emphasized in the research, the identification established with the fairy tale hero during the process of constructing self and identity reinforces the individual's sense of self-efficacy and offers them the opportunity to gain a safe place in the world. The empathy-oriented perception developed toward nature and animals is not only a set of moral teachings but also a holistic worldview that enables the individual to grow up as a sensible world citizen at peace with the ecosystem. Against the cultural erosion brought by the modern digital age, fairy tales serve as an unshakable fortress in the construction of national identity and the preservation of the mother tongue.

Analyses conducted on the narrative tradition and the "Ertekshi" figure show that the success of Kazakh fairy tales depends largely on their "performance" quality. While the dominant role of women (tale mothers and grandmothers) in this tradition reinforces the compassionate, educational, and protective nature of the fairy tale, its organic bond with the culture of shepherding and highlands (yayla) documents that these narratives were born from the very heart of life. The narrator's memory techniques, capacity for improvisation, and rhetorical questions that involve the listener in the process transform the fairy tale from a static text into a living social interaction. Each performance ensures the continuity of the tradition while simultaneously bringing a new breath to the tradition through the narrator's original creativity.

Ultimately, although the structural and content characteristics of Kazakh fairy tales show commonalities with universal fairy tale motifs, they present a unique structure with the local colors and moral values they contain. The victory of justice at the end of the tale, the rewarding of goodness, and the elimination of evil perform a vital function in terms of restoring the social conscience. This study confirms that Kazakh fairy tales should be seen as a "source text" in many fields from education to sociology, from language to psychology, and that the ancient wisdom they contain carries an invaluable value not only for Kazakhstan but also for the preservation of the global cultural heritage.

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