



Exploring the Linguistic and Conceptual Landscape: The Case of the Toponym ‘Saryarka’ in Kazakh Cultural Discourse

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Abstract In this article, it was determined that the worldview fragments of the ethnos code in mind are stored through non-linguistic information in the content of the concept and toponyms. From this point of view, in addition to the language usages in the works of Seydimbek, the cognitive toponyms themselves have their own characteristics, which are hidden from the history and culture of our people. It was mentioned that the model structure of the “field concept” in the Saryarka plain includes various associations and a set of indigenous knowledge. The richness of the Saryarka toponym reflects not only the physical attributes of the region but also the deep-seated cultural and spiritual connections of the Kazakh people to their environment. The main purpose of the study was to show concepts in the toponymic space of Seydimbek’s works in a set of various associations and background knowledge to the model structure of the concept of “Uly Dala” in the Saryarka plain.

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1. Introduction

Taking the toponym “Saryarka” as a conceptual structure, when it comes to the challenge of explaining the concept behind a word, the comprehensive concept of any word in the language is determined by the interplay of semantic and linguistic units. In the associative field of the semantic and linguistic units of a word, the elements of cognitive and pragmatic meanings are inherently represented in the content of the data. Consequently, we recognize a lexeme as a concept of names with its own lexicon, synonymy series, associative connection, and a wide semantic field (Aitkulova et al., 2023). In cognitivism, the main attention is paid to human cognition, exploring not only their visible actions but also their mental representations, internal views, models, and types of symbols serving as cognitive models in language. Human strategies underlying actions are also studied, that is, the cognitive world of a person, according to their behavior

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and activity (Aitkulova et al., 2023). Therefore, a person’s cognitive world is determined by his thinking and experience. The main indicator of a person’s behavior is his language. Language is a tool that shows the result of processing the received information and arranging it in the mind.

In order to conceptually model the toponym “Saryarka” as the object of our research and reveal its linguistic expression, objective analysis was carried out. Although the lifestyle of the Kazakh people is nomadic in the Great Steppe, their spiritual nature is sedentary. Kazakh cultural and spiritual settlement is intertwined with the surrounding ecosystem. From our point of view, in the content of concepts and toponyms in literary texts, fragments of the worldview and identity of the nation are preserved and encoded in the mind with the help of non-linguistic information. If we look at it from this point of view, apart from the methods of language use in the works of Seydimbek (2010), the toponyms here also reveal the past life and culture of Kazakh people. Knowing the history of Kazakh people in the past era, along with their cultural relations with neighboring countries and customs, is very important because all the names embody the history of the people, the cultural heritage, the indelible genealogy, and the vivid thoughts and imaginations of the people. These are all intertwined with the life of society, influencing the personality and actions of people, passed down from century to century and generation to generation. Intelligence and national behavior find complete expression in this comprehensive formulation (Januzak, 2007).

The main purpose of the study is to show concepts in the toponymic space of Seydimbek’s (2010) works by exploring a set of various associations and background knowledge related to the model structure of the concept “Uly Dala” (Great Steppe) in the Saryarka plain. The macrotoponym “Saryarka” in the research works of Seydimbek can be established with concrete evidence and empirical examples. Ultimately, this is not only necessary to establish a circle of thought but also to further recognize the field of thought with concrete examples. According to the diversity of toponymic units in the works of Seydimbek, the study of Kazakh toponyms from a polyparadigmatic point of view is a worthy endeavor. Polyparadigmatism, as a manifestation of dialectical relations of toponyms, culture, language, consciousness, ethnology, and semiotic systems, allows for the identification of various phenomena.

2. Theoretical Framework

Recognizing the concept of toponymy entails understanding its modeling, in addition to knowing the features of social units, the entire nation, and the mindset and worldview of the people (Mankeeva, 2014). These names mark the main concepts related to the mind and inner world of an individual and, at the same time, contain the meaning of those toponyms (Tileuberdiev, 2007). Determining the lexical meanings of the given toponyms contributes to the discovery of their connotative meaning. Saryarka is a vast place, akin to the concept of a comprehensive structure. On the geographical map of Kazakhstan, there is a hilly area in the middle. Like the wings of an eagle, this yellow line stretches for thousands of kilometers (Avakova et al., 2023). Since ancient times, Kazakh people have called Saryarka the huge ridge that starts from the Balkash-Alakol in the south and goes to the Siberian basin in the north. It starts from the Altai, Sauyr, and Tarbagatai mountain ranges in the east and stretches to the Torgai plain in the west. The Saryarka Plain occupies one-third of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This name, invented by the people, has a great geographical significance. The middle level of the vast territory of Kulashyn, located between the Urals on one side and the Altai on the other, is ridged and convex, gradually decreasing towards western Siberia in the north and the Balkash-Alakol basin in the south. This region covered 2,500 km of the vast territory of Kazakhstan in the past, but later it shrank to only 1,200 km (Januzak, 2007). Due to the dryness of the weather, the plants get sunburned and turn yellow in the second half of summer. This is Saryarka, the Uly Dala, which lies on the mother’s breast of two supercontinents, overlapping like Eurasia (Yergaliyeva et al., 2023).

The term “yellow” is not only literally associated with a specific type and color but also carries a connotation related to change, serving as a way of creating an image of people’s customs and symbolism. In order to analyze the onomatopoeic meaning of the word “yellow” from a scientific point of view, it was necessary to conceptually model the combination of “sary” and “arka” in the name “Saryarka”. In folk etymology, the meaning of the word “yellow” is considered to be associated with the dry and yellow color of the earth. Although this concept is well-established in the mind, its

application is too narrow. After the hot summer, the whole field turns yellow, but the word “yellow” is not applied to all. In the nominative sense of our language, Saryozek (Yellow core), Saryjylga (yellow ditch), the word “yellow” is used to show the yellowness of a single-colored object. In the fifteen-volume Dictionary of the Kazakh Literary Language (Kenesbaev, 2007), the toponymic concept of the word sary is given as follows:

when attached to complex names of landforms, it means wide, main, and clear;
 when attached to animals, livestock, and horses, it means big, durable, and strong;
 when attached to food names, it means powerful, strong, and important;
 when attached to the names of various household items, it means large, bulky, expensive, and valuable;
 when attached to the names of natural phenomena and other phenomena, it means long-lasting, monotonous, and continuous.

An additional word with similar connotations might also be added, such as ‘Sary hill’ or ‘Sarikumis’. From the data given above, Saryarka means a wide plain, a flat plain, or an endless ridge. By the same token, Sarzhailau, Sarydala, and Sarysu are not expressions of a yellowed field but names that convey the concept of a wide meadow, a wide valley field, or a wide channel river. Sary and arka form a series of inseparable semantic concepts within the imagery of the world and the traditional ethno-culture of the Kazakh people. Arka is the central part of Kazakhstan with a special nature associated with mild winters and warm summers influenced by continental arctic cold air masses from the north and northwest. It is not difficult to understand that the somatic character is clearly reflected in the nomination of the Saryarka toponym. Toponyms created from general somatic and physiological structures can be categorized as a type of metaphorization from a genetic point of view. If we attribute the process of metaphorization of an artifactual nature in toponymy to the type of secondary nomination, the nature of the metaphorization of toponymic phrases - appellatives and toponyms created from the somatic vocabulary- seems to be different (Sarsenbay et al., 2023).

From this point of view, the expressions at the level of geographical appellatives created from somatic names can be attributed to the type of genetic metaphor (Maslova, 2007). In directional modeling of toponymic concepts, not only the names specific to the small microtoponymic spaces are used, but very large geographical objects have also become subjects of naming (Iskakbekovna et al., 2023).

Seydimbek has a fund of cognitive information about national cultural life, economy, personality, psychology, and worldview within the Uly Dala system mentioned above. In order to uncover cultural information related to toponyms in the Kazakh language, the preceding names hidden in the depths of the Great Plain are of great significance (Aitkazy, 2011). The main goal of researching cognitive details is to build a model of knowledge about the universe and explain its linguistic aspects and worldviews. Accordingly, it is not difficult to understand that in Seydimbek’ (2010) ethnocultural perspective of the Kazakh world, people have mastered the culture and life experiences and deeply accumulated linguistic units about the national identity and the conceptual system (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979). It is easy to see that the connotative, associative field of the word Great Steppe by Seydimbek in the Kazakh language is rich and can be seen in the peripheral, associative layer (Kravchenko, 1996). The Dictionary of the Kazakh Literary Language traces the definitive thesaurus series of the semantic field of the steppe lexeme, which served as the basis for various nominations (Ulugbek, 2021).

Overall, it can be concluded that the name Saryarka means a wide and large land, a flat plateau, and a ridge with countless hills, whose vegetation on the surface turns yellow due to sunburn. This study employs a combination of descriptive, historical-comparative, and etymological analysis, in addition to modeling methods, to delve into the toponym “Saryarka” in the Great Steppe as the material of the research work.

3. Methodology

3.1. Materials

The main materials for the article are Seydimbek’s six-volume collection of works (2010), along with contributions from various scientists in the field of onomastics (e.g., Rysbergen, 2011), dictionaries (Kenesbaev, 2007), and the basics of linguistic and cultural analysis (Tileuberdiev, 2007).

3.2. Procedure

Data collection was carried out over three years, exploring the Saryarka region for place and water names. Throughout the data collection, the continuity of historical and cultural heritage from ancient times to the present day was necessarily taken into account. In the process of modernizing historical names, Seydimbek’s works gave access to a wealth of new data. According to the gathered data, 126 definitions were introduced, including the nature and lexical-semantic meanings of more than 70 toponymic names, marking a new avenue in scientific exploration.

4. Results

The following categories (Table 1) reflect the diverse aspects covered in the results section, ranging from linguistic and conceptual analysis of toponyms to the exploration of the natural and cultural features associated with Saryarka and its surroundings.

4.1. *The Saryarka Concept*

From the perspective presented by Seydimbek, it becomes evident that the somatic character is distinctly manifested and encoded in the naming of objects within the geographical space. Generally, toponyms formed from somatic and physiological terms, though not universally, can be categorized as a type of genetic metaphorization. For instance, terms such as “back”, “ridge”, “head”, “neck”, “rib”, “forehead”, etc., fall into this category. If we classify the process of metaphorization in Saryarka toponymy, as observed by Seydimbek, as a secondary nomination type, the metaphorization process of toponymic appellatives and toponyms derived from somatic vocabulary appears distinct.

In this context, expressions involving geographic appellatives derived from somatic names, such as Saryarka, can be linked to the category of genetic metaphor. We posit that the arrangement of human or animal body parts in orienting and defining natural objects in space reflects the cognitive concepts of individuals (Telia, 1996). Within these cognitive frameworks, the environment and its objects are metaphorically compared to human or animal body parts. Consequently, we conclude that the process of human understanding of the world, linguistic representation of the world, and specifically, the toponymic representation of the world, originates from the human self.

This understanding is reinforced by Seydimbek’s observation that many geographical terms in somatic names, initially recognized as secondary names through human knowledge, have long evolved into appellative terms due to the law of semasiology assimilation. Building upon these scholarly findings, the concepts of “west” or “north” align with “Arka”. Therefore, the original meaning of “Arka” corresponds to the contemporary notions of “west” or “north.” As Seydimbek (2010) asserts, the word “arka” serves as the foundation for the naming of regions such as Zhanaarka, Saryarka, and Arkalyk in this specific geographical area.

4.2. *The Mountain Concept*

Paying attention to the modeling of the Saryarka toponym from a conceptual point of view, we notice that its given semantic components are created on the basis of denotative and associative schemes. If the visual representation of the denotation aligns with the frames presented by the symbols, Seydimbek actively engages in constructing a structural model of the artistic concept of Saryarka. This model incorporates subjective, authorial, and emotive evaluative components through the utilization of artistic linguistic tools. Consequently, it becomes apparent that Seydimbek (2010) effectively captures the essence of folk culture and life experiences within his ethno-cultural perspective of the Kazakh world. Seydimbek’s contribution extends to the creation of a conceptual system concerning identity and national knowledge. His work involves assembling a substantial database of information related to other toponyms, serving as supporting linguistic units for the purpose of conceptual structuring. In essence, Seydimbek’s endeavors contribute significantly to the understanding and representation of cultural

identity and knowledge within the context of toponymic exploration. First of all, he pays attention to the arbitrary names of the fields.

The Shoktyk range is not a visible mountain, not a lake that can be seen through the armpit; rather, it is the convex surface of the vast land stretching across the horizon. This geographical concept can be imagined without going up to the sky - a testimony to the special sensitivity of understanding. (Seydimbek, 2010, p. 54)

The emotional-aesthetic realization within this artistic text is determined by the linguistic consciousness of Seydimbek. Hydronyms are, on the one hand, a virtual symbol and, on the other hand, a widely used syntagmatic series among the toponyms indicated by the Seydimbek in the linguistic system. In general, hydronyms, like other language symbols, from the period of their appearance in the later stages of the history and development of the ethnos, serve as information media. They can basically be found in the texts of Seydimbek (2010), who carefully studies Kazakh ethnic culture, folklore, and ethnography.

4.3. *The River Concept*

Linguistic-cultural analysis of the toponymic names in Seydimbek's scientific works shows that the cultural connotations that appear in the meanings of personal names, subtly preserved in an implicit form, are examined in connection with the symbolic manifestations rooted in the cultural and economic nature of the Kazakh ethnos and worldviews.

From the examples given above, we can see that Saryarka is a huge watershed, with rivers flowing from both sides of the hill. It seems that such a huge body cannot be called Arka. The image of the environment and the linguistic image of the world were realized on the basis of the artistic and aesthetic knowledge and vocabulary of Seydimbek. Through this, his skill in modeling proper names from a conceptual point of view is recognized. The writer tries to convey the national cognitive quality to the reader by using language methods. The nature of Saryarka is distinguished by its lush black forest, clear mirror lakes, blue meadows, dense yellow plains, and pine mountains. In particular, willows and cypresses, birches and poplars, and small rivers that end in a stream represent the beauty of Saryarka.

From the above text, it can be seen that Seydimbek has a lot of knowledge about the cultural, economic, and ethno-social structure of the living environment and the mental world of the people who lived there. There are many toponyms containing the word yellow in the system of geographic names of Central Kazakhstan. For example, Saryoba, Sarytau, Sarykol, Saryozen, Sarybulak Sarykaska, Sarykengir, Saryjon, Sarysay, Saryzhilan, Saryshagan, Sarytoganbay, Sarykum, Sarytumsyk, Sarygtau, etc. Yellow is used in Turkish toponyms in different ways. In South Kyrgyz toponymy, yellow is also recognized with the meanings of big, many, and wide (Rysbergen, 2011). The origin of the words sary and sar in the Kazakh geographic names is sometimes not from the root of the Iranian (Tajik) language but from the words sary (clear, openminded, and yellow), spacious, well-worn, and dense in the Turkic languages (Lakoff, 1999). Seydimbek (2010) makes the following point when explaining the etymology of the name Saryarka: "The word sary in geographical names may be a word with the meaning of 'broad', which retains its former geographical meaning" (Seydimbek, 2010, p. 57). That's why he says when we say the desert, does our mind perceive a wide field without ends that are connected to each other? (Rakymzhan et al., 2022).

4.4. *The Steppe Concept*

The vast steppe region, extending to infinity, not only absorbs the energy of those who dwell within its expanse but also captures their emotions. The ever-changing nature of the steppe contributes not only to the enrichment of knowledge but also to the deepening of emotional experiences. The expansive sky, bathed in bright light devoid of shadows, not only stimulates human imagination but also inspires the creation of diverse names, acknowledging the possibility of life in harmonious coexistence with nature.

The model structure of the "Field" concept in the Saryarka plain encompasses a myriad of associations and a reservoir of indigenous knowledge, as illustrated in Table 1. Within this conceptual framework,

names like Saryjazyk, Aydala, Bozzazyk, Zhosaly, Selengi, Karakum, Torgai, etc., form distinctive structures. Exploring the social aspect of the “field” concept opens avenues for additional etymological layers. Our objective is to model the toponymic concept, considering its connection to the vast steppes surrounding the Saryarka basin (region), the neighboring peoples, and their shared history.

In delving into the history of Saryarka, as delineated in Seydimbek’s works (2010), it becomes imperative to acknowledge the continuity of historical and cultural heritage spanning from ancient times to the present day.

Table 1

The Toponymic Macroconceptual Structures Identified in Seydimbek’s Works

Saryarka Concept	Steppe Concept	Mountain Concept	River Concept
Saryoba (Yellow plague)	Saryzhazyk	Aksengir	Olenti, Shederti,
Sarytau, Sarykol (Yellow Mountain, Yellow Lake)	Aidala	Aktau	Sileti, Karakengir
Saryozen, Sarybulak (Yellow River, Yellow spring)	Bozzhazyk	Kyzylzhal	Yesil, Nura,
Sarykaska, Sarykengir (Yellow eyebrow)	Zhosaly	Sarytau	Kulanotpes, Shar, Shagan,
Saryjon, Sarysay (Yellow creek)	Selenga	Kyzyltau	Aschysu, Tundik,
Saryzhilan, Saryshagan (Yellow snake)	Karakum	Aksoran	Koktal, Zharly,
Sarytoganbay, (Yellow lake)	Torgai	Akshatau	Bakanas, Bylkyldak,
Sarykum, Sarytumsyk (Yellow beak)		Kyzylarai	Moyynty, Sarysu, Sarykengir

5. Discussion

Concepts, which are the main language units of cognitive linguistics, are lexemes characterized by the cultural features of the language, which form a linguistic image of the world, giving a deeper message from the cultural knowledge of those people (Masruddin et al., 2023). Concept is a set of information that describes the mentality, traditions, and customs of a whole nation through cultural and spiritual units in the mind of a human being (Karasik & Sternin, 2005). Conceptual structures and types of toponyms in scientific works can be modeled from different angles. For example, by analyzing the scientific work, it is possible to determine the conceptual system of hydronyms, oronyms, and oikonyms from the toponym of Saryarka (Aitbaev et al., 2016). Among these, it is possible to analyze the data according to two different parametric properties until it is reduced to the concepts formed on the basis of toponymic names. First, the space itself has various physical parametric properties, and second, the material, the true geographical object, also has some parameters (Bekzatkyzy, 2019). For example, the concept of “mountain” has this property in terms of location, height, and length on the surface of the earth. The mentioned concept signs of the toponymic concept in the structure of the “water” concept are represented by many parametric components and frame structures in the concepts of a natural object (lake, river, and spring). It can be said that almost all of the mentioned cultural models and concepts are represented in the toponymic space of Seydimbek’s works. For example, the water concept forms a system of knowledge with cultural information related to the local hydronymic space. Empirical-visual concepts accumulated in the community mind of Saryarka about rivers, lakes, springs, and mental concepts formed by human perception and feeling are verbalized in the concept of “water” and “river”.

The structure of the concept of “water” is mainly systematized by the micro-concepts of “river” and “spring”. The generalized image of the water space in the Saryarka toponym can be justified using the concept of “river”. For example, Olendy, Shiderty, Sileti, Esil, Nura, Kulanotpes, Shar, Shagan, Achhysu, Night, Koktal, Zharly, Taldy, Terisagkan, Ayakoz, Tokrauun, Bakanas, Bylkyldak, Karatal, Karchagali, Zhamshi, Thinin, Moyint, Sarysu, Sarykengir, and Karakengir rivers can be created as a hydronymic concept with high ethno-cultural value. As the concept of “water” in Kazakh lore is a universal concept with great virtual significance, information with an ethnocultural load is verbalized

not only as a hydronym, but also through archetypal beliefs, mythological concepts, superstitions, and phraseological, regular expressions. Similar words include water head, water foot, telegei (telegei sea), etc. Some of these words are also used at the level of personal names and mythonyms. The low mountain regions of Kazakhstan include the Saryarka mountain, which covers most of Central Kazakhstan. It forms a vast region reaching the Torgai Plateau and the Turan Basin in the west, the Saur-Tarbagatai mountain systems in the east, Lake Balkash and Betpakdala in the south, and the West Siberian Plain in the north. "Mountain" is an orographic name for a relief that rises above the earth's surface. Various hyponymic series in the lexical-semantic field of tautec hyperonymic terms are made up of orographic terms of the people such as Kuz, Shik, Jal, Sengir, Jon, Jota, Kyr, Tebi, Shoki, Dong, Kasul, Asu, Beles, And Kirat. Various information is gathered here, along with the orthographic terms of the mentioned people.

The semantic content in the structure of the "mountain" concept is more extensive, as can be seen from its verbalization, representation, and modeling features (Dubrovskaya & Yuskaeva, 2022). In this connection, from the works of Seydimbek, we obtain information that is culturally modeled and encoded in some ethnic groups (Kononov, 1975). Names like Aksengir, Aktau, Kyzylzhal, Sarytau, Kyzyltau, Aksoran, Akshatau, Kyzylarai, etc., are verbalized in the text, and in semantic and conceptual content, a variety of extralinguistic, associative, evaluative information is collected. The rugged rocks in the Arka Mountains are layered with layers of orange sandstone. The meaning of these orographic names related to the concept of "mountain" of the universe is clear; they are defined in encyclopedias, and they are real symbols. In the works of Seydimbek (2010), one of the concepts representing the system of cognitive knowledge about the language community is the concept of "field" in the Saryarka valley. "Field" is an ethno-cultural and social concept. The whole life of the Kazakh people is rooted in the field. The surrounding material world, they deeply understood the secrets of nature's laws and knew well that the closer they were to nature, the more comfortable it was to live. That's why they didn't know the rest of the field, not only for the experience necessary for cattle grazing but also because they marked it with names that reflected the spiritual nature of the nation. In general human development, the field region has a special place (Adilova, 2015). The continuation of time and space to serious knowledge and the establishment of knowledge and understanding caused the formation of ethical norms (Ivashchenko, 2006).

The steppe region surrounded by infinity draws away not only the energy of the person who lived in its bosom but also the feelings; the changing nature of the steppe enriches not only the knowledge but also the feelings. The wide sky in the steppe and the bright light without shadows not only heighten the human imagination but also create different names, realizing that life can be created in harmony with nature. The model structure of the "field concept" in the Saryarka plain includes various associations and a set of indigenous knowledge. Saryjazyk, Aydala, Bozjazyk, Zhosaly, Selengi, Karakum, Torgai, etc., from this conceptual structure, rame structures take place. From the social nature of the concept of "field", we can consider other additional etymological layers. Our goal is to model the toponymic concept, considering it in connection with the vast steppes around the Saryarka basin (region), neighboring peoples, and their history. When describing the history of Saryarka based on the works of Seydimbek (2010), it is necessary to take into account the continuity of historical and cultural heritage from ancient times to the present day. The history of the land is the history of the country, and the history of the historical and cultural heritage of the land is inextricably linked. These cannot be separated from each other. Talking about one and not endangering the other would make the knowledge incomplete. Thus, the toponymic concepts "water", "mountain", and "field" in the macrotoponym of Saryarka belong to the type of landscape concept. In their frame structures, it is possible to make sure that other than the universality schemes, the cognitive concepts characteristic of the national mentality are structured through different frames. And the reason for our special consideration of the Saryarka toponym is that along with the topographical frames characteristic of the toponymic concept, the traditional culture, folklore, and ethnography of the Kazakh people, household features, and national worldview, ancient concepts, and fundamental value system are clearly reflected in it. From this point of view, in the ethnographic works of Seydimbek (2010), the complex concepts and knowledge characteristic of a particular linguistic community are reflected in the toponymic image of the Great Plain (Uly Dala) and are preserved in the ethnos. Sometimes, he expressed his thoughts through

figurative words and emphatic similes. In order to recognize the magic of the words and the artistic world of the researcher, we examine his creative language for the first time through a linguistic and cultural analysis that allows us to reveal new aspects of toponymic conceptualization in conceptology and cognitive linguistics.

In the future, there are plans to analyze and compare toponymic concepts from a linguistic and cultural point of view and identify new aspects of place-water names in the conceptology. A comparative study of toponyms in Kazakh linguistics will be undertaken with zoonyms and hydronyms in the onomastic systems of other countries. Overall, the studies on linguistic features, similarities, and differences of conceptual structures in Kazakh and Turkish languages are on the rise. The forthcoming scientific research will place a primary focus on onomastic names within the Kazakh and Turkish languages.

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