INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIETY, CULTURE & LANGUAGE

The Representation of Ethnocultural Names in the Linguistic Consciousness of Kazakh Youth

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Abstract This study investigates how ethnocultural concepts are reflected in the linguistic consciousness of Kazakh youth. Drawing upon the "language-nation-culture" paradigm, the research explores three culturally significant terms: *körimdik* (a gift given upon first encounter), *qūiryq-bauyr* (a ritual dish symbolizing kinship), and *qoşqar müiız* (a ram's horn motif denoting strength and prosperity). A free associative experiment involving 62 participants aged 17–35 was conducted to identify mental representations linked to these concepts. Participants responded with words, phrases, and sentences, revealing core associations such as "money" for *körimdik*, "in-laws" for *qūiryq-bauyr*, and "ornament" for *qoşqar müiız*. Analysis showed that while traditional meanings are largely retained, some associations have shifted or diminished, suggesting generational changes in cultural perception. Family influence emerged as the primary factor shaping responses. These findings illustrate the evolving nature of ethnocultural knowledge among youth and highlight the importance of language in preserving national identity.

Keywords: *Language, Ethnocultural lexicon, Free associative experiment, Stimulus word, Response word*

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Received: March 2025
Revised: May 2025
Accepted: May 2025
Published: June 2025

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1. Introduction

Language and nation are acknowledged as an inseparable and unified entity, as language not only functions as a means of communication but also as a core component of national identity. This national identity is inherently shaped by culture, which is preserved and transmitted through language. Therefore, the fundamental characteristics and distinctive features of ethnocultural units within a language, such as lexemes, fixed expressions, and proverbs, serve as reflections of both national consciousness and cultural heritage. These features have been extensively analyzed through the methodologies of both internal and external linguistics. Pishghadam (2013) coined the term "cultuling," which suggests that culture is embedded within language. Researchers are encouraged to identify cultural memes within a

https://doi.org/10.22034/ijscl.2025.2056961.3990

language, which are passed down across generations. These cultural elements can be observed in proverbs, idioms, literature, and other forms of expression (Pishghadam, Ebrahimi, & Derakhshan, 2020; Pishghadam, Ebrahimi, & Naji Meidani, 2020).

With the advancement of the anthropocentric paradigm, Kazakh linguistics has witnessed extensive research within the conceptual frameworks of the "language-nation-culture" and "language-nation-cognition" triads. These scholarly investigations have demonstrated that language functions as a repository of a nation's historical legacy, a reflection of its present reality, and a crucial instrument for shaping its future trajectory. Talgatqyzy et al. (2024) note that ethno-marked linguistic units in the Kazakh language are crucial for constructing ethno-cultural knowledge. Their study underscores that these units are essential for comprehending the Kazakh ethnic worldview, which is intricately embedded within the language. Furthermore, this linguistic framework not only encapsulates cultural values but also facilitates the identity formation of young Kazakhs as they navigate an evolving sociocultural landscape. Scholars have examined the semantic properties, grammatical features, conceptual domains, functional stylistic variation, and the expressive and figurative functions of ethnocultural markers from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. However, the ways in which these linguistic markers are cognitively associated by speakers of the Kazakh language, specifically how Kazakh speakers perceive and connect these linguistic signs with particular images, representations, and designations, have not been the primary focus of scholarly inquiry. In the context of globalization, where Kazakh youth engage in education and information exchange across diverse cultural and linguistic environments, their "linguistic consciousness within the world of the mother tongue" (Kaidar, 2013, p. 36) remains an underexplored area of research. Mankeeva (2014) highlights that, within the context of societal awareness and emerging research paradigms, recognizing the national language as a key instrument for reinforcing national identity requires a revised approach to linguistic studies. She emphasizes the importance of analyzing the essence and characteristics of the national language alongside the spiritual, psychological, social, and other attributes of its native speakers.

Thus, the examination of linguistic consciousness representations within Kazakh linguistics constitutes a novel and pertinent research area, as it facilitates the identification of information embedded in ethnocultural consciousness. The increasing scholarly interest in the study of ethnocultural consciousness can be attributed, in part, to the growing interaction and integration of cultures and languages in the context of globalization. Therefore, the present study seeks to investigate the reflection of ethnocultural concepts, namely *körimdik* (a traditional gift given upon seeing someone or something for the first time), *qūiryq-bauyr* (a ritual meal made from liver and tail fat symbolizing unity and kinship), and *qoşqar müiız* (a decorative ram's horn motif symbolizing strength and prosperity), in the linguistic consciousness of Kazakh youth through the use of a free associative experiment. They were chosen for their deep symbolic value and frequent presence in traditional Kazakh culture. Each represents a distinct domain of cultural experience: social customs (körimdik), ritual kinship practices (qūiryq-bauyr), and visual-symbolic heritage (qoşqar müiız). By including examples from different cultural spheres (verbal, ritual, and visual), the study aims to explore the broader spectrum of how traditional ethnocultural knowledge is retained or reinterpreted in the linguistic consciousness of modern Kazakh youth. These terms were also selected based on their recurrent use in oral tradition and their appearance in everyday cultural discourse, making them meaningful units for associative testing.

2. Theoretical Framework

In global linguistics, various aspects of the relationship between language, culture, and cognition have been explored by numerous scholars. Studies have focused on language, culture, and cognition (e.g., Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1956; Wierzbicka, 1997), thinking and speech (e.g., Leontiev, 1993; Vygotsky, 1982), language and thought (e.g., Potebnya, 2025), language and consciousness (e.g., Boldyrev, 2018; Luriya, 1998), language and knowledge (e.g., Kubryakova, 2004), as well as the connection between linguistic consciousness, mental imagery, and their linguistic representations (e.g., Tarasov, 1988, 2000; Ufimtseva, 2011, 2020; Ushakova, 2006).

Searle (2010), who studied the relationship between consciousness and language, argues that consciousness can be considered a part of the organism, similar to digestion or other bodily functions.

However, he highlights that "it possesses a unique characteristic not found in other biological phenomena" – its "subjectivity" (Searle, 2010, p. 12). Searle explains this by emphasizing the individual nature of human consciousness, stating that no one can experience another person's pain, thoughts, or other sensations in exactly the same way (Searle, 2010). This perspective can also be linked to the variety of responses obtained during the associative experiment. In her analysis of language and culture, Wierzbicka (1997) underscores the inherently ethnocentric nature of linguistic systems, emphasizing that lexical items are inextricably linked to culturally specific ways of life and patterns of thought. She contends that the vocabulary of a given language reflects both the tangible and intangible dimensions of a society. This is evident in culturally embedded food terminology, such as *bigos* (a traditional Polish hunter's stew), *barszcz* (beet soup), and *powidła* (plum jam) in Polish, *marmalade* in English, and *sake* (Japanese rice wine) in Japanese – lexical items that lack direct equivalents in other languages. Such examples, according to Wierzbicka (1997), are not incidental; rather, they reveal how linguistic expression mirrors the material culture and lived experiences of distinct communities.

The linguistic units proposed as stimulus words in the associative experiment are also terms that do not exist in English or other languages, reflecting Kazakh traditions and way of life. The responses obtained serve as markers that reveal the national code and describe the national, linguistic image of the world. Within the framework of the Moscow School of Psycholinguistics, Ufimtseva (2020) introduces the concept of the associative-verbal network as a theoretical model for examining the linguistic worldview embedded in the everyday consciousness of speakers from a specific linguistic and cultural background. This model facilitates the analysis of both the structural and semantic dimensions of the linguistic image of the world while also accounting for the sociocultural factors that shape it. In the context of Russian language and culture, these factors may include regional variation as well as exposure to foreign cultural environments.

Ethnocultural consciousness is an invariant image of the culturally conditioned world associated with national culture and national psychological characteristics. Ethnolinguistic consciousness is not identical to the linguistic image of the world, as it encompasses not only recognized, structured and verbalized knowledge but also elements of the unconscious. Culturally conditioned consciousness integrates knowledge about the rules of communicative behavior and the world of cultural objects (Privalova, 2006). To identify the ethnocultural consciousness representations of Kazakh youth, ethnic units such as *körımdık*, *qūiryq-bauyr*, and *qoşqar müiız* were used as stimulus words. According to Zhanpeisov (1989), the ethnocultural lexicon of the Kazakh people serves as a rich source of information about the history of the ethnic group, as well as the material and spiritual culture of the people, functioning as the primary carrier of ethnic characteristics. Ethno-lexicon serves as a reflection of traditional everyday culture, colloquial language, and common consciousness (Zhanpeisov, 1989). This is because these idioethnic units serve as markers of objects, phenomena, and traditions that people have encountered and used in their daily lives. The terms *körımdık*, *qūiryq-bauyr*, and *qoşqar müiız* are also idioethnic units with clear meanings, commonly used in everyday life.

Aitmykhasheva (2007) introduces the term *idioethnics*, derived from the Greek roots *idio* ('individual', 'distinctive') and *ethnos* ('tribe', 'nation'), to denote the concept of national identity as it is encoded in language. She defines *idioethnic semantics* as the domain of meaning that reflects national-cultural identity, ethnic uniqueness, and the underlying essence of an ethnic community. Many idioethnic units have fallen out of contemporary linguistic use and have become part of the category of archaic terms. Kazakh language users, particularly younger generations, may not fully understand the meanings of such obsolete terms. This is a natural process driven by continuous political, social, historical, and everyday life changes. Using archaic terms as stimulus words directly influences the results of an associative experiment, as words with unclear meanings are unlikely to elicit any responses. Therefore, in this study, we selected linguistic units that are commonly used in modern everyday life and communication and whose meanings are well understood.

The psychological dimensions of naming practices further illuminate the complexities of identity formation among Kazakh youth. Cila et al. (2021) explore how bicultural naming choices reflect both identity and pragmatic concerns. This aligns with the experiences of Kazakh youth, who may choose names that resonate with their cultural heritage while also appealing to broader societal norms. The

interplay between personal identity and societal expectations is a critical factor in how names are perceived and utilized within the Kazakh context. Thus, one's upbringing, exposure to foreign cultures, and other sociocultural factors inevitably influence the content of mental representations in linguistic consciousness. The factors affecting the linguistic consciousness of Kazakh youth will be identified through the analysis of survey responses collected during the free associative experiment. In this process, special attention will be given to the pragmatic potential of the selected stimulus words, as these words serve as culturally significant triggers that shape and reflect the linguistic image of the world among young respondents.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The study involved Kazakh youth aged 17 to 35, a generation born during the years of independence, who have acquired multiple languages and grown up in a multicultural, multiethnic environment. This age range was specifically defined in the survey, meaning that some degree of age restriction was applied, as the research aimed to uncover the ethnic-cognitive characteristics in the linguistic consciousness of Kazakh youth. The total number of participants in the experiment was 62, with 87.1% female and 12.9% male. In terms of age distribution, 54.8% were aged 17-21, 30.6% were aged 22-29, and 14.5% were aged 30-35. Among them, 51.6% were highschool students, 11.3% were master's students, 4.8% were doctoral students, 29% were employees, and 3.2% were mothers on maternity leave. Participants' fields of study varied, with 67.7% specializing in humanities, 16.1% in technical fields, 6.5% in social sciences, 6.5% in medicine, and 4.8% in natural sciences.

The survey results indicated that 85.5% of participants currently live in urban areas, while 14.5% reside in rural areas. However, in terms of long-term residency, 56.6% have lived in cities for an extended period, whereas 43.5% have lived in rural areas. This suggests that more than half of the respondents have spent a significant part of their lives in urban settings. All participants identified as ethnic Kazakhs and citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Among them, two individuals reported having migrated to Kazakhstan in 2006 and 2011. External linguistic factors such as ethnicity and upbringing environment directly influenced respondents' associations in the experiment.

Among the participants, 96.8% attended Kazakh-language schools, while 3.2% attended Russian-language schools. Before starting school, 11.3% spoke Russian, whereas 88.7% spoke Kazakh. In higher education, 80.6% studied or are currently studying in Kazakh, 16.1% in English, 1% in Russian, and 1% in both Kazakh and Russian. Regarding everyday communication, 74.2% primarily use Kazakh, 21% use Russian, and 4.8% use both Kazakh and Russian. In response to the question "How well do you know your mother tongue?", 91.9% of participants stated that they can speak, read, and write fluently, while 3.2% mentioned that they can speak and read fluently but cannot write. Additionally, 4.8% reported that they understand the language but struggle to express their thoughts, 3.2% indicated that they understand but need a dictionary for translation, and 1.6% stated that they understand but cannot express their thoughts. As seen from the percentage distribution, the majority of respondents spoke Kazakh before school, studied in Kazakh at school and university, used Kazakh in communication, and were fluent in speaking, reading, and writing. Compared to those who used English or Russian, the dominant group in the survey had formed their worldview through the Kazakh language. This is because language serves as a medium for storing, transmitting information, and facilitating communication. Barinova et al. (2010) stated that an individual's linguistic consciousness is shaped by communication experience, noting that it is impossible to acquire a language without interaction. They emphasized that linguistic consciousness has a dialogic nature and is closely connected to culture. From an ethnocultural perspective, they described linguistic consciousness as a polylogue of subcultures.

3.2. Instrument

The associative experiment is one of the methods that helps bring forth words embedded in deep consciousness. In psycholinguistics, several types of associative experiments are used, including free, directed, and chained associations (Goroshko, 2005; Gorelov & Sedov, 2001). The free associative experiment has been widely used in linguistic research, particularly in cognitive, linguocultural,

ethnolinguistic, and psycholinguistic studies. According to scholars, the free associative experiment is characterized by its simplicity and effectiveness. As a result, various types of responses are recorded, the associative meaning of a word is determined, the frequency of similar associations is analyzed, and a person's mental lexicon is identified.

The responses obtained from a free associative experiment are influenced by two factors. The first is linguistic, referring to the inherent characteristics of the stimulus word presented. The second is pragmatic, relating to the individual personality of the participant. Goroshko (2005) also identifies the experiment's procedure as another factor influencing the responses. In a free associative experiment, there is no need for dialogue with the researcher or for participants to engage in cognitive reasoning, as they respond spontaneously to the first image or concept that comes to mind.

In the course of the free associative experiment, participants are expected to share their understanding and associations with particular words or notions, either in written or oral form. We name them stimulus words. Participants are free to respond with either a single word or complete sentences. In the current free associative experiment (in a written form), the lexemes *körımdık*, *qūiryq-bauyr*, and *qoşqar müiız*, used as stimulus words, activated the concepts and understandings accumulated in the minds of the survey participants. These words served as triggers, prompting intuitive responses in the form of words, phrases, sentences, or even short texts. During the association process, the linguistic consciousness of native speakers reflected established stereotypes, value systems, and culturally significant elements inherent in the Kazakh cultural environment. As a result, the linguistic representations of ethnocultural consciousness among Kazakh youth were revealed for each stimulus word.

3.3. Procedure

The ethnocultural lexicon examined in this study represents units that reflect the nation's life, everyday practices, cognition, as well as spiritual and material culture. To identify the underlying characteristics, actions, and various mental images associated with these words, a free associative experiment was conducted. It was carried out online in August 2024 using Google Forms. The researchers did not directly participate in the process but acted as an external observer. Participants were not restricted in terms of time or space when recording their responses. Each respondent freely wrote down the images and representations from their linguistic consciousness and expressed their opinions and perspectives. The survey results were processed using R-Studio and Microsoft Excel. Lexicographic materials were utilized to interpret the meanings of linguistic units. They were "Dictionary of the Kazakh Literary Language" (Malmaqov et al., 2011), "Encyclopedia of the traditional system of etnographical categories, conceptions and designations of Kazakhs" (Alimbai, 2011), "Encyclopedic Dictionary of Kazakh Traditional Culture" (Quraluly, 1997), "Kazakhstan National encyclopedia" (Ayaghan, 2004), and the huge online Kazakh dictionaries paltform called Sozdikqor Portal (2025). Additionally, to identify and explain the characteristics of units within the associative field, the study employed descriptive, synthesis, systematization, classification, componential, and quantitative analysis methods. Descriptive analysis was used to summarize participants' responses, capturing the range and nature of associations provided for each stimulus word. For example, in response to the word *körımdık*, many participants mentioned *gift, present, money, joy, tradition, new,* indicating its associative connection to happy moments and celebration. Synthesis involved grouping similar responses to identify recurring semantic or cultural patterns, such as the frequent mention of familial roles, spiritual beliefs, or ritual actions. Systematization helped organize the associative units according to thematic or functional categories, like emotional reactions, material objects, or actions. Classification allowed for dividing the responses into broader types: cultural-specific, emotionally charged, or neutral associations. For instance, *qūiryq-bauyr* elicited culturally specific associations like *qūda(lar) (In-laws)*, *dish served to in-laws*, and *first meal shared* and *special song of matchmakers*. Componential analysis was applied to explore the semantic structure of certain associative responses by breaking them down into key components. For example, the response *respect through food* (in relation to *qūiryq-bauyr*) was analyzed into components such as social ritual, symbol of union, and hospitality. Quantitative analysis was used to calculate the frequency of repeated associations and identify dominant semantic fields. For example, 51.6% of responses identified family as the primary factor influencing their associations with the word *qoşqar müiız*.

4. Results

To illustrate the national-cultural and socio-linguistic profile of the participants in the associative experiment, we present the following data. This information is essential for understanding the linguistic worldview in the consciousness of Kazakh youth.

Körımdık – is one of the traditional customs that has remained in use among the people to this day. In the "Dictionary of the Kazakh Literary Language" (Malmaqov et al., 2011), *körımdık* is defined as: "a gift given to the hosts or their close relatives by guests or friends upon the first sight of a newborn, a newlywed, etc." (p. 400). In the "Encyclopedia of the traditional system of etnographical categories, conceptions and designations of Kazakhs" (Alimbai, 2011), it is explained as: "a gift given as a symbol of sharing in a joyful occasion" (p. 197). In traditional Kazakh society, *körımdık* is given in relation to each joyful event (Sozdikqor Portal, 2025). In Kazakh literary language, there are many examples that reveal the meaning of the word *körımdık*: *Kelıñder betın aşamyn, Körımdık sūrap alamyn (Come, I will unveil the face, I will ask for körımdık)* (Ä. Täjıbaev. Saryarqa). *Jäne bır buma aqşany: «Menen de körımdık!» dep İbragim «atqosşy» da ūstatty (Handing over a bundle of money: 'Here is körımdık from me as well" said Ibrahim, the horse attendant)* (Sozdikqor Portal, 2025). *Körımdık qyp men osyğan, Kök aspandy bergım keldı (As körımdık for this, I wanted to give the blue sky)* (Sozdikqor Portal, 2025).

During the associative experiment, a total of 21 responses were recorded for the stimulus word *körımdık*. Among them, the word *aqşa* (money) appeared 24 times, along with five sentence responses that can be considered within the same semantic field: *Monetary or other gifts given by Kazakh people for joyful occasions (1); Giving money to a newborn (new) (1); Money given by relatives if a child achieves success or buys something new (1); Giving money for seeing something (1); Money given when purchasing a new item (1)* (The respondents' style has been preserved without modification). Thus, for the 29 respondents, the stimulus word körımdık was strongly associated with *aqşa* (money).

The word *syilyq* (gift) appeared 5 times, and 4 respondents provided associations related to a gift given during a congratulatory event: *A gift given during a congratulatory occasion (1); Giving a gift as a congratulation (1); A gift given for a joyful occasion (1); A type of gift given for a newborn or a newlywed bride (1)*. Since the main logical emphasis in these sentences was on the word *syilyq*, we associated the responses of 9 participants with the *syilyq* reaction.

The word *sıy* (present) appeared in the responses of 4 participants, given in sentence form: *A present given for a joyful occasion (1); A present given for something new (1); A present given for a newborn or good news (1); A small present given or requested when seeing a bride or something for the first time (1).*

Other responses obtained from the experiment included *Joy* (3); *Object* (2); *Tradition* (2); *New* (2); *Something given when seeing something new for the first time (1); Celebration* (1); *Goodness* (1); *Congratulation* (1); *Good news (Süiınşı)* (1); *News* (1); *Proposal* (1); *Custom (Käde)* (1); *Wisdom* (1); *Giving körımdık* (1); *A gift or reward given for good news (Süiınşı)* (1); *One of the traditional gifts (käde) given when announcing good news (süiınşı)*(1); *Moments from my childhood when I bought new clothes, wore them at home, and 'modeled' them for my family* (1); *Sharing good news* (1). Thus, the central linguistic unit in the associative-verbal field of *körımdık* is the word *aqşa* (money). This is a natural and real-life-based response, as the tradition of giving money remains prevalent in everyday life during events such as "Betashar" (bride welcoming ceremony), the birth of a child, receiving a high school diploma, graduating from university, or purchasing new items. This custom has been deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of the Kazakh people, preserved from ancestors to the present day.

Essentially, *körımdık* is given to living beings, while *baiğazy* refers to a gift or offering for inanimate new items. According to the "Encyclopedic Dictionary of Kazakh Traditional Culture" (Quraluly, 1997), "baighazy" is defined as "a ritual or custom of giving a gift for new clothes or items" (Sozdikqor Portal, 2025); In the "Encyclopedia of the traditional system of etnographical categories conceptions and designations of Kazakhs" *baiğazy* is described as "a monetary or material gift given for new clothes

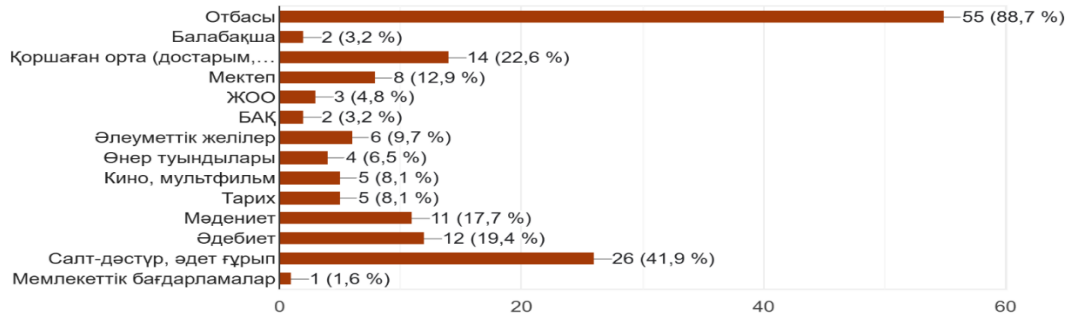
or items belonging to children or young people (e.g., a whip, sled, saddle), similar to *körımdık*" (Alimbai, 2011, p, 112).

The responses indicate that Kazakh youth do not clearly differentiate between the concepts of *körımdık* and *baiğazy*, perceiving them as synonymous terms. This is evident from the associative responses to the stimulus word *körımdık*, which included references to both living and inanimate objects, reflecting a broader cultural notion of sharing joy. Participants consistently associated körımdık with *aqşa* and *syilyq* (money and gifts), linking it to a newlywed bride, a newborn child, new items, and positive events. Additionally, in the responses of three participants, *körımdık* was represented as a gift given for *süiınşı* (good news). However, it is important to note the differences between these customs. The ethnolinguistic meaning of *süiınşı* is defined as "a gift or offering given to the bearer of joyful news" (Sozdikqor Portal, 2025). A. Kaidar explains the concept of this traditional gift as follows: "Süiınşı is a tradition of announcing significant joyful events in a person's life (e.g., the birth of a son, a child returning safely from war, a spouse returning from a journey, the end of a war), followed by receiving a customary gift (süiınşı) from close ones. The person who announces the good news by saying Süiınşı!' is entitled to receive a gift, either in cash or in kind, depending on the generosity and wealth of the giver." (Sozdikqor Portal, 2025). This definition reveals the ethnolinguistic nature of süiınşı as a gift-giving tradition associated with good news. Among Kazakh youth, the customs of *körımdık*, *baiğazy*, and *süiınşı* are closely linked in ethnocultural consciousness, as all three involve giving money or gifts for a joyful occasion. To conclude, the core of the associative-verbal field of körimdik is the word *aqşa* (money), as 47% of the participants in the experiment provided this response.

As shown in Figure 1, the factors shaping the representations and images associated with the stimulus word *körımdık* include family (88.7%), traditions and customs (41.9%), environment (friends) (22.6%), literature (19.4%), and culture (17.7%). Additionally, participants indicated that their linguistic consciousness has been influenced by social media, history, cinema, cartoons, works of art, school, university, mass media, kindergarten, and government programs.

Figure 1

Factors Shaping the Associative Field of "Körımdık"



Note: The horizontal bars represent different factors, while the length of each bar corresponds to the number and percentage of participants who selected that factor: family (55 – 88,7%); kindergarten (2 – 3,2%); surrounding environment (friends, etc.) (14 – 22.6%); school (8 – 12,9%); higher institution (3 – 4,8%); mass media (2 – 3,2%); social networks (6 – 9,7%); works of art (4 – 6,5%); cinema and cartoons (5 – 8,1%); history (5 – 8,1%); culture (11 – 17,7%); literature (12 – 19,4%); traditions and customs (26 – 41.9%); government programs (1 – 1,6%).

The next stimulus word presented in the study was *qūiryq-bauyr*. *Qūiryq-bauyr* is the name of a traditional dish served during the matchmaking ceremony to solidify the betrothal agreement between two families. According to the "Dictionary of the Kazakh Literary Language" (Malmaqov et al., 2011), the phrase "Qūda boldy (bolyp), qūiryq jestı" is explained as: "To arrange a marriage by giving one's daughter in marriage or receiving a bride for one's son; to establish in-law relations"; "Qūda boldy (bolyp), qūiryq jestı is to complete the matchmaking ceremony" (p. 534). For example: "Äkeñ sen besıkte jatqanda olarmen töske tös tüiıstırıp, qūda bolyp, qūiryq-bauyr jesken (When you were still in

the cradle, your father established in-law ties with them, chest to chest, and sealed it by eating qūiryq-bauyr)" (Ö. Qanakhin. Jas Däuren) (Sozdikqor Portal, 2025). Kaidar (2013) describes qūiryq-bauyr as a traditional matchmaking ritual and elaborates: "This matchmaking ceremony occurs when both parties agree on the marriage arrangement, at which point they are presented with qūiryq-bauyr and a special gift. The woman bringing the dish offers a blessing: 'May you be as close as the liver (bauyr) and as sweet as the tail fat (qūiryq)'. All in-laws take a symbolic bite. In Kazakh tradition, qūiryq-bauyr serves as an official confirmation of the betrothal agreement. Hence, the proverb: 'Qūiryq-bauyr jedıñ be, qūda boldym dedıñ be (Have you eaten qūiryq-bauyr? Then you are officially in-laws)'" (Kaidar, 2013).

Analysis of respondent answers revealed that the stimulus word *qūiryq-bauyr* was associated with 22 different images and representations. The most common association was the word *qūdalyq* (matchmaking/in-law relations), which appeared in 18 responses and was placed at the center of the associative-verbal field. This is because the *qūdalyq* lexeme was the most frequently repeated unit, accounting for 29.03% of participants' responses.

The following associations were recorded from respondents, with most of these responses reflecting concepts related to the matchmaking ceremony (qūdalyq): *qūda(lar) (In-laws)* (8); *Kazakh national traditions and customs* (5); *dish served to in-laws* (4); *food, a dish offered to in-laws, a dish given by in-laws to each other* (4); *wedding* (3); *meal* (3); *food eaten by in-laws* (2); *meat* (2); *qūiryq-bauyr* (1); *a dish served to in-laws* (1); *given by two in-laws to each other* (1); *"I think it's a phrase, meaning close interaction"* (1); *sheep* (1); *sheep fat* (1); *marriage* (1); *type of food* (1); *brother (bauyrym)* (1); *Relatives* (1); *quyrdaq (a traditional meat dish)* (1); *dog food* (1); *"Qūda, qūda degizgen, qūiryq-bauyr jegizgen (Made them call each other 'qūda, qūda' by making them eat qūiryq-bauyr)"* (1). The responses indicate that the stimulus word *qūiryq-bauyr* is strongly associated with matchmaking, in-laws, traditions, food, liver (bauyr), relatives, and sheep. The last response has an intertextual character, as it originates from a folk wedding ritual song traditionally recited during the *qūiryq-bauyr* ceremony.

Qūda, qūda degızgen,
Qūiryq-bauyr jegızgen.
Ainalaiyn baladan,
Qūdasy bar degızgen.

Or:

Qūda, qūda degızgen,
Qūiryq-bauyr jegızgen.
Qūiryq-bauyr jemese,
Nesıne qūda degızgen

Translation:

Made them call each other "qūda, qūda",
By making them eat qūiryq-bauyr.
Blessed be the child,
Who brought them in-laws to call upon.

Or:

Made them call each other "qūda, qūda",
By making them eat qūiryq-bauyr.
If they haven't eaten qūiryq-bauyr,
Why should they be called in-laws? (Seitzhanuly, 2015, p. 158)

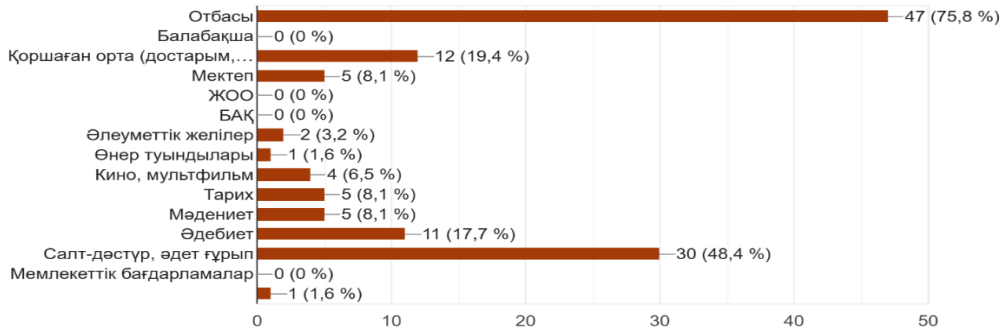
There are very few Kazakh families that do not hold matchmaking ceremonies (qūdalyq), so the verses traditionally recited when serving *qūiryq-bauyr* have been preserved in memory. In this context, Leontiev's (1993) statement is relevant: "Every nation's worldview and understanding are based on its unique system of material meanings, social stereotypes, and cognitive schemes. Human consciousness is always ethnically conditioned" (p. 20). Thus, the linguistic units (words, phrases, and sentences)

mentioned above confirm that in the ethnocultural consciousness of modern Kazakh youth, the tradition of serving *qūiryq-bauyr* as part of the matchmaking ceremony remains deeply ingrained.

In response to the question "What influenced the formation of these associations?" (Figure 2), participants identified the following factors: 75.8% – family; 48.4% – traditions and customs; 19.4% – surrounding environment (friends, etc.); 17.7% – literature; 8.1% – history; 8.1% – culture; 8.1% – school; 6.5% – cinema and cartoons; 3.2% – social networks; 1.6% – works of art. The association of *qūiryq-bauyr* with matchmaking (qūdalyq) was primarily influenced by family and traditions, as matchmaking is a family celebration deeply rooted in Kazakh customs and traditions.

Figure 2

Factors Shaping the Associative Field of "Qūiryq-bauyr"



Note: The horizontal bars represent different factors, while the length of each bar corresponds to the number and percentage of participants who selected that factor: family (47 – 75,8%); kindergarten (0 – 0%); surrounding environment (friends, etc.) (12 – 19,4%); school (5 – 8,1%); higher institution (0 – 0%); mass media (0 – 0%); social networks (2 – 3,2%); works of art (1 – 1,6%); cinema and cartoons (4 – 6,5%); history (5 – 8,1%); culture (5 – 8,1%); literature (11 – 17,7%); traditions and customs (30 – 48,4%); government programs (0 – 0%).

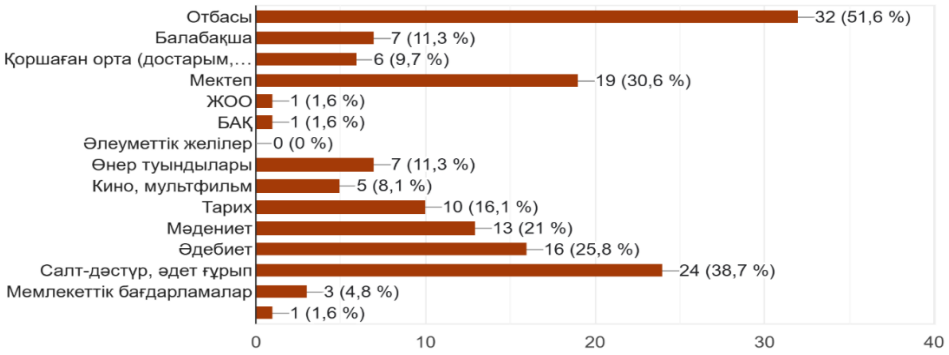
Kazakh ornament is an ethnographic handicraft. These are decorative patterns used to embellish furniture, household items, and clothing. Among Kazakh ornaments, patterns resembling the external features of animals such as their horns, claws, necks, or hooves are widely spread, with over 300 morphological types recorded" (Ayaghan, 2004, p. 256). Another common type of Kazakh ornament used in furniture design features plant-like patterns (Sozdikqor Portal, 2025). The "qoşqar müiız" (ram's horn) is an ornament resembling the curved horns of a ram (Sozdikqor Portal, 2025). The Kazakh people have traditionally used this pattern extensively in decorating carpets, clothing, and other items, and it continues to be applied today for various decorative purposes (sewn or engraved). The next stimulus word presented to the respondents was the Kazakh ornament name – *qoşqar müiız*.

During the experiment, 16 responses were recorded for this stimulus word. 34 participants wrote the word *oiu* (ornament), while 7 respondents provided phrases incorporating this lexical unit, such as "*a type of oiu*" (3), "*Kazakh oiu*" (2), and "*oiu name*" (2). The association between *qoşqar müiız* and *oiu* appeared in 41 responses, accounting for 66.12% of participants. The ethnolinguistic term "*oiu*" (ornament) is at the core of the associative-verbal field of *qoşqar müiız*.

Additionally, the following responses were recorded: *ornament* (4), *sheep* (3), *ram* (2), *ram's horn* (2), *horn* (2), *Kazakh ornament-pattern* (1), *pattern* (1), *red ram-horn pattern on white felt (kiız)* (1), *Kazakh double-horn pattern* (1), *felt (kiız)* (1), *goat's horn* (1), *mountain* (1), *dance* (1). Among these, the words *"ornament" (oiu-örnek)* and *"pattern" (örnek)* appeared in 8 responses, confirming that the stimulus word *qoşqar müiız* is primarily associated with ornamental patterns in the minds of Kazakh youth. However, some respondents answered *"I don't know"* (2) or *"Nothing"* (1), indicating that they either lacked a mental representation of this ethnocultural term, did not understand its meaning, or chose not to respond.

Figure 3

Factors Shaping the Associative Field of "Qoşqar müiız"



Note: The horizontal bars represent different factors, while the length of each bar corresponds to the number and percentage of participants who selected that factor: family (32 – 51,6%); kindergarten (7 – 11,3%); surrounding environment (friends, etc.) (6 – 9,7%); school (19 – 30,6%); higher institution (1 – 1,6%); mass media (1 – 1,6%); social networks (0 – 0%); works of art (7 – 11,3%); cinema and cartoons (5 – 8,1%); history (10 – 16,1%); culture (13 – 21%); literature (16 – 25,8%); traditions and customs (24 – 38,7%); government programs (3 – 4,8%).

As seen in Figure 3, the majority of respondents identified family (51.6%) as the primary factor influencing their associations with the word "*qoşqar müiız*". Other significant factors include traditions and customs (38.7%), school (30.6%), literature (25.8%), and culture (21%). Additionally, some participants mentioned history, kindergarten, works of art, surrounding environment (friends, etc.), cinema, cartoons, government programs, universities, and mass media as contributing factors.

5. Discussion

The aim of this study, which was based on a free associative experiment with three ethnocultural stimuli (*körimdik*, *quiyryq-bauyr*, and *qoshqar muiiz*), was to identify the features of the linguistic consciousness of Kazakh youth in relation to traditional cultural concepts. In accordance with this aim, the following objectives were set: first, to collect associative responses to the specified stimuli and describe the resulting associative fields for each concept; second, to interpret the associations from an ethnocultural perspective, identifying dominant semantic zones and typical images related to each stimulus; and third, to determine the degree of preservation or transformation of the original (traditional) meanings of these ethnocultural terms in the minds of the younger generation.

The results of the free associative experiment revealed that the associative fields of the selected stimuli reflect the current state of ethnocultural knowledge and values within youth consciousness. Some traditional connotations are retained (e.g., most responses to *qoshqar muiiz* are associated with ornamentation, strength, and abundance), whereas, for other stimuli, gaps or shifts in meaning were observed (e.g., responses to *quiyryq-bauyr* were often fragmentary or literal). These findings are consistent with the ideas of Vygotsky (1982), who emphasized that the meaning of a word is formed in a sociocultural context and evolves alongside thought. Changes in the associative fields of young language users suggest a transformation of the experience and environment in which these meanings are acquired, aligning with Vygotsky's concept of the dynamic nature of verbal meaning. In his classical works, Tarasov (1988) defined linguistic consciousness as a system of world knowledge mediated by language signs and collective experience. Our data support this view: the most frequent associations constitute a kind of "semantic core" reflecting internalized cultural knowledge, while rare and individual responses form the periphery. Furthermore, in his later work, Tarasov (2000) introduced the concept of "images of linguistic consciousness," mental constructs generated through language and culture. The associations revealed in our study (e.g., those linking *körimdik* to gifts and money) point to a transformation of these constructs under the influence of modern life. The results also align with Zhabaeva (2004), who demonstrated that national cultural concepts undergo changes across generations and linguistic communities. In our case, Kazakh youth conceptualize traditional terms in their own way, highlighting their practical and contemporary aspects. Finally, our findings correspond with the

conclusions of Ufimtseva (2011), who stated that the method of free association makes it possible to reveal the core and periphery of a linguistic worldview. The most common reactions in our experiment reflect fundamental cultural and semantic orientations of Kazakh society, while the absence of some expected traditional associations suggests a generational gap in the transmission of certain elements of the national worldview.

The free association method is widely used in global scientific research to study the structure of consciousness and the meanings of words. Classic studies by Kent and Rosanoff (2006) demonstrated that a significant portion of native speakers tends to produce similar associative responses to keywords, which led to the formulation of associative field norms and the concept of collective linguistic experience. In a similar vein, the work of Pollio (1966) revealed that the structure of verbal associations is systemic in nature The most frequent responses reflect semantic clusters and cognitive connections common to most individuals, while unique responses are tied to personal experience. The associative fields obtained in our study of Kazakh youth align with these patterns. For instance, the most typical responses to the stimuli can be viewed as elements of the semantic core (Kent & Rosanoff, 2006), while more varied individual responses represent the periphery of the field (Pollio, 1966). Contemporary scholars continue to develop and confirm the effectiveness of the associative method. For example, Zahorodnia (2021), through the web-based project “STIMULUS,” convincingly demonstrated that a free associative experiment, when automated and transferred into an online environment, is capable of identifying fragments of the linguistic worldview and tracking the dynamics of meaning on a large scale.

The results obtained hold significant value across several fields. First, for applied linguistics, they offer empirical material on the current functioning of ethnocultural vocabulary; such data can inform the development of associative dictionaries and corpora that reflect native speakers’ living consciousness. Second, from the standpoint of ethnopsychology, our findings shed light on collective unconscious elements and the value orientations of youth. The character of their associations (e.g., the prevalence of utilitarian responses or the retention of symbolic connotations) indicates which elements of national culture remain psychologically significant to the younger generation and which are gradually losing their relevance. Third, in education, these results can be incorporated into curricula to enrich the teaching of the native language and literature. They can serve as the basis for exercises and training modules introducing students to national cultural concepts through associations, facilitating deeper internalization of cultural heritage. Fourth, in the context of intercultural communication, understanding the specific associative fields of Kazakh youth can help anticipate potential misunderstandings and semantic conflicts. Since some traditional terms and images (e.g., the *quiyryq-bauyr* ritual) may be unfamiliar outside the Kazakh context, explaining their meanings to interlocutors from other cultures in advance can improve communication effectiveness. Finally, in terms of ethnic identity formation, the study of such associations allows us to assess the extent to which the younger generation is connected to its cultural roots. If traditional symbols and customs elicit meaningful responses among youth, this suggests their inclusion in contemporary identity. Conversely, the absence of significant associations may indicate a generational rupture and a weakening sense of ethnic belonging. Thus, our research not only contributes theoretical insights but also holds practical significance for the preservation and strengthening of national and cultural consciousness.

The prospects for future research in this area are considerable. First, the participant sample should be expanded: future experiments should include a broader and more diverse group, covering youth from various regions of Kazakhstan, different socio-educational backgrounds, and members of the Kazakh diaspora. This will enhance the representativeness of the data and help identify regional or social variations in associative fields. Second, a more in-depth analysis of the stimuli is needed: in addition to primary reactions, researchers should explore secondary associations (chains of successive responses) and compare the associative fields of stimuli with their lexicographic definitions, phraseological contexts, and historical-cultural backgrounds. Such a multifaceted approach would offer a deeper understanding of the semantic structure and evolution of each ethnocultural concept. Third, cross-cultural comparisons would be valuable. Similar associative experiments could be conducted among youth of other ethnic groups (e.g., Russian, Kyrgyz, Uzbek) and compared with our findings. This would clarify whether the observed tendencies are uniquely Kazakh or reflect more universal patterns in the perception of cultural symbols. Fourth, it is important to consider integrating both the results and

methodology of this research into educational settings. Developing learning modules based on associative experiments (e.g., interactive tasks where students provide associations to culturally significant words and discuss their meanings) could enhance student interest in their native culture and language. Such activities would also serve as tools for intercultural education, helping youth recognize the uniqueness of their cultural code and communicate it effectively to others. Thus, further expansion and deepening of research into the linguistic consciousness of Kazakh youth promises valuable insights for both science and practice, contributing to the preservation of linguistic heritage and mutual understanding across cultures.

Disclosure Statement

The authors claim no conflict of interest.

Funding

This work was supported by the grant financing of the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2024-2026 within the framework of the project AP23488671, “Linguistic manifestations of ethnocultural consciousness of Kazakh youth”.

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