INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIETY, CULTURE & LANGUAGE

The Concept of Age in Kazakh Worldview: A Lexical-Semantic and Paremiological Analysis

Aizhan Muldagaliyeva[1*], Yelena Mikhalchenko[1], Bayan Issabayeva[1], Botakoz Bekmasheva[1], Makpal Myrzakhmet[1], Raykhan Zharymbetova[1]

[1]*Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan*

Abstract This study investigates the concept of *"zhas"* (age) in Kazakh linguoculture as a cognitive-cultural category that structures social relations, communicative behavior, and moral expectations. It employs an explanatory-descriptive design combining lexical-semantic field analysis, paremiological analysis, and examination of the *"mushel"* system. The research material comprises 55 age-related terms, 50 peripheral items, and 50 proverbs, related to age and the life course. The findings demonstrate that Kazakh age terminology constitutes a highly structured semantic system comprising four lexical-semantic groups: childhood (*"balalyq shaq"*), youth (*"zhastyq shaq"*), middle age (*"orta zhas"*), and old age (*"qarttyq shaq"*). The particularly fine-grained differentiation of life stages reflects the communicative need to distinguish socially significant phases of human development. Another salient finding is the positive cultural valuation of old age and male-centered predominance reflected in lexical distinctions and paremiological representations. Together, age terminology, proverbs, and the *"mushel"* system constitute an integrated linguistic-cultural model through which Kazakh society conceptualizes the human life course. Overall, the study contributes to linguoculturology, cognitive semantics, intercultural communication, lexicography, and translation studies.

Keywords: *Kazakh linguoculture, Age terminology, Lexical-semantic field, Communicative efficiency, Linguistic worldview*

[*]**Corresponding Author:**
Aizhan Muldagaliyeva
aizhan.mg@gmail.com

Received: April 10, 2026
Revised: June 25, 2026
Accepted: August 1, 2026
First Published: August 19, 2026

© 2026 Muldagaliyeva, Mikhalchenko, Issabayeva, Bekmasheva, Myrzakhmet, and Zharymbetova.
This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

The concept of age occupies an important place in Kazakh culture, contributing to social cohesion, intergenerational relations, and the regulation of social behavior. As a universal anthropological category, age is closely associated with key stages of human development, including childhood, youth, maturity, and old age (Wang, 2024). At the same time, age embodies culturally specific knowledge and values, reflecting a distinct aspect of the Kazakh linguistic worldview and the historical experience of its speakers (Igibayeva et al., 2018). Because perceptions of age are shaped by collective experience, age may be regarded as a universal cognitive category that is expressed in culturally specific ways (Stasevich, 2025). Proverbs are

https://doi.org/10.22034/ijscl.2026.2088744.4622

a valuable source for investigating this concept because they preserve culturally significant representations of different life stages and reveal the qualities associated with particular age groups (Adambayev, 2007; Lauhakangas, 2007; Omarbekova & Aasland, 2023).

The very same social importance that gives rise to the proverbs would also pressure the language to develop a precise and extensive age-related vocabulary. The rich differentiation of age terminology in Kazakh relates to theories of communicative efficiency, which propose that languages develop lexical distinctions for socially important categories that require precise communication (Gibson et al., 2017; Kemp et al., 2018; Regier et al., 2016; Zaslavsky et al., 2019). The extensive age-related vocabulary of Kazakh therefore suggests that age is a highly salient social parameter encoded through a finely differentiated semantic system. In addition to its lexical and paremiological representation, age in Kazakh culture is traditionally conceptualized through the *"mushel"* system, a culturally specific model of the human life course based on recurring twelve-year cycles. While lexical terminology distinguishes particular periods of the life course, the *"mushel"* system highlights culturally significant transitional points within that course.

Previous studies have primarily examined the social and cultural dimensions of age in Kazakh society. Stasevich (2025), for example, highlights the continuing importance of age- and gender-based hierarchies, while Meirmanova et al. (2017) emphasize the role of seniority and respect for elders in regulating social interaction. However, these studies do not examine age as a linguistic-cultural concept, nor do they consider how the lexical-semantic organization of age terminology reflects the culturally recognized stages of the human life course.

To address this gap, the present study examines the concept of age in the Kazakh linguistic worldview through a cognitive-conceptual analysis of age-related lexical-semantic groups, peripheral items, Kazakh proverbs, and the traditional *"mushel"* system. This approach contributes to a deeper understanding of the Kazakh worldview by revealing the cultural values, social expectations, and age-related stereotypes embedded in their linguistic worldview. From a practical perspective, a detailed semantic analysis of age terminology may provide valuable resources for lexicography, language teaching, and translation studies (Meirmanova et al., 2017).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. The Concept of *Zhas* (Age) in the Kazakh Cultural Context

Eckert (1998) defines age as the continuous unfolding of an individual's participation in the world, the fulfillment of their physical and social capacities, their progression through the history of the community and society, and the ongoing expression of their role in the world. Whereas aging represents movement through time, age denotes a person's position at a particular moment in relation to the social order: a stage, a condition, and a place in history. This understanding is reflected in Kazakh culture, where a child's social life is traditionally believed to begin after the *"qyrqynan shygaru"* ceremony, performed on the fortieth day after birth (Kurmambayeva, 2018; Nakipbekova, 2025). From this point onward, an individual's life course is closely guided and monitored by the community. Kazakh cultural norms prescribe the qualities, achievements, and responsibilities expected of a person at a particular age. This culturally structured life course is especially evident in Kazakh proverbs that associate age with specific accomplishments and social duties. For example, the proverb *"Zhiyrma bes zhas – zhigit zhasy"* (Twenty-five is the age of a true *zhigit*) portrays the age of 25 as the height of youth and readiness to assume adult responsibilities. Similarly, *"Otyzynda orda buzar, qyrqynda qamal alar"* (At thirty, he breaks through a horde; at forty, he conquers a fortress) associates maturity with strength, leadership, and accomplishment. The age of 60, described as *"asqarly alpys"* (majestic sixty), is likewise regarded as the culmination of wisdom, experience, and moral authority.

Age also structures social and communicative behavior. Younger people are expected to show respect toward elders, while elders are expected to provide guidance and support. Speech addressed to elders is typically more polite, indirect, and restrained. Kinship terms such as *"aga*, *apa*, *ini*, and *singli"* are widely used beyond biological relationships to indicate relative age and appropriate social distance.

Greeting rituals, turn-taking practices, forms of address, and seating arrangements also reflect age hierarchy, with elders receiving priority and younger participants demonstrating deference (Meirmanova et al. 2017; Qalysh 2015). These communicative norms are deeply embedded in Kazakh proverbs, which encode the social roles, responsibilities, and behavioral expectations associated with different stages of life. Thus, *"zhas"* functions not merely as a chronological marker but also as a cultural code regulating communication, interpersonal ethics, and collective values such as respect, wisdom, continuity, and social harmony.

2.2. Communicative Efficiency and Communicative Need

The study of age terminology is particularly relevant from the perspective of communicative efficiency and communicative need. According to Gibson et al. (2017), Kemp et al. (2018), Regier et al. (2016), and Zaslavsky et al. (2019), semantic systems tend to balance two competing pressures: informativeness and simplicity. A maximally informative semantic system would contain a separate word for every object or distinction within a semantic domain, for example, a separate color term for every distinguishable hue. Such a system would be highly precise but also excessively complex and difficult to use. By contrast, a maximally simple system would use a single word for all objects within a domain, for example, one term for all colors, but would not support precise communication. Efficient semantic systems therefore balance the need to communicate relevant distinctions with the need to remain cognitively and linguistically manageable.

Semantic domains associated with strong communicative needs tend to exhibit a relatively high degree of lexical precision. A highly informative system is fine-grained, detailed, and explicit, but this informativeness necessarily increases its complexity. Regier et al. (2016), for example, argue that concepts such as snow and ice are more likely to be expressed through distinct lexical forms in languages spoken in colder climates because speakers have a greater communicative need to distinguish between them. The same principle may be applied to age terminology. In societies where age plays an important role in social organization, interpersonal relations, status hierarchies, and the distribution of social responsibilities, speakers may require precise lexical distinctions among different stages of life. Such societies are therefore likely to develop more fine-grained age vocabularies that facilitate the communication of socially relevant information.

2.3. The *Mushel* System and *Mushel Zhas*

Alongside the conventional stages of childhood, youth, maturity, and old age, Kazakhs traditionally divide the human life course into 12-year cycles known as *"mushel"*. This system originates from the ancient 12-year animal calendar used by Central Asian nomads and developed through observations of celestial bodies and natural rhythms (Mukhambetova, 2018). The term *"mushel zhas"* refers to the transitional year marking the completion of each cycle, including the ages of 13, 25, 37, 49, 61, and 73, when a person is believed to enter a new stage of life. The first "*mushel"* cycle, extending from birth to the age of 13, corresponds to childhood and culminates in puberty. By the age of 13, children are expected to demonstrate increasing maturity and responsibility, as reflected in the saying *"13 te–ui yesi"* (At 13 - the master of the household). The second *"mushel"*, from 13 to 25, is associated with youth, during which individuals prepare to assume adult responsibilities, including establishing a family and pursuing a profession (Stamgaliyeva, 2026).

The third *"mushel"*, from 25 to 37, is regarded as one of the most active and productive periods of life. It is associated with career development, determination, and vigor, as reflected in expressions such as *"ot zhigit* and *shoq zhigit"* (fiery young man). During this stage, women traditionally assume the roles of wives and mothers. The positive cultural evaluation of this period is reflected in expressions such as *"kelinshek"* (young married woman), *"koktem kelinshek"* (spring-like young wife), and *"balgyn kelinshek"* (young and beautiful wife). The fourth *"mushel"*, from 37 to 49, marks a transition toward wisdom and is traditionally considered a critical period, particularly for men, who are encouraged to pay greater attention to their health and engage in virtuous deeds (Bopaiuly, 2025).

The fifth *"mushel"*, from 49 to 61, represents the onset of later adulthood and is associated with wisdom, resilience, and reflection on the meaning and purpose of life. The sixth *"mushel"*, from 61 to

73, corresponds to old age, when individuals acquire respected social statuses. These statuses are reflected in such terms as *"aqsaqal"* (white-bearded elder) for men and *"aq zhaulyq ana"* (mother in a white headscarf) for women. The seventh *"mushel"*, from 73 to 85, and subsequent cycles are associated with advanced old age, longevity, and the fulfillment of important family and social responsibilities.

In summary, *"mushel zhas"* reflects a traditional philosophy of life cycles in which individuals pass through culturally meaningful stages of growth, reevaluation, and spiritual renewal. Unlike the lexical-semantic categorization of age, which groups individuals into relatively broad life stages, the *"mushel"* system emphasizes culturally salient transitional points within the life course. Thus, the two systems are not contradictory but complementary: a person can belong to a particular lexical-semantic age group while simultaneously experiencing a significant *"mushel"* transition.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

This study employed an explanatory-descriptive research design to examine the cognitive-conceptual representation of age in the Kazakh linguistic worldview. The research combined lexical-semantic and paremiological analyses by constructing the lexical-semantic field (LSF) *"Zhas"* (age) and examining its representation in Kazakh proverbs. The study proceeded through four sequential phases: (1) construction of the LSF *"Zhas"* and identification of its constituent lexical-semantic groups (LSGs); (2) compilation of a corpus of age-related Kazakh proverbs; (3) cognitive-conceptual analysis of the lexical and proverbial data to identify the conceptual meanings associated with age; and (4) interpretation of the findings in relation to the Kazakh linguistic worldview and the theories of semantic informativeness and communicative efficiency.

3.2. Materials

The lexical material used to construct the LSF *"Zhas"* was collected primarily from two specialized online resources on Kazakh age terminology, Massaget.kz (2019) and Bilim-all.kz (2015), as well as from Kaliyev's *Qazaqtyng Tusindirme Sozdigi* (2014). The collected age-related lexical units were independently examined and classified by the six authors of the study (all of whom are specialists in Kazakh linguistics) according to their semantic and functional characteristics. The individual classifications were then compared, and disagreements were discussed and resolved through consensus. The resulting dataset comprised 55 age-related terms, including both individual words and multiword expressions.

The peripheral zone of the LSF *"Zhas"* was identified through a systematic examination of lexical and phraseological units recorded in authoritative Kazakh lexicographic sources, including Kaliyev's *Qazaqtyng Tusindirme Sozdigi* (2014) and Januzakov's *Qazaq Tilining Sozdigi* (1999). These sources were examined to identify words and expressions that do not directly denote chronological age but are semantically associated with particular stages of the human life course through social roles, kinship relations, personal qualities, behavioral characteristics, and culturally significant attributes. Additional lexical items and idiomatic expressions were also collected through informal oral interviews with seven Kazakh speakers from different age groups. The authors subsequently reviewed and classified the collected material according to its semantic relationship with the concept of age. A total of 55 peripheral items were identified and incorporated into the analysis, including both individual lexical units and phraseological expressions.

The paremiological material was compiled from four authoritative collections of Kazakh proverbs: *Kazakh Proverbs and Sayings* (Akkozin, 1990); *Folk Wisdom* (Kaidarov, 2004); *Kazakh Folk Oratory* (Baltabai, 2007); and *Proverbs and Sayings of the Kazakhs of Central Asia* (Sattarov, 2011). Initially, 97 proverbs were collected from these sources. The authors independently evaluated the proverbs according to three criteria: (1) relevance to the research topic; (2) clear association with stages of the human life course and culturally significant characteristics attributed to particular periods of life; and (3) current use in contemporary Kazakh society. Following this evaluation, a final corpus of 50

proverbs was selected as the empirical basis for the cognitive-conceptual analysis. These procedures were intended to enhance the comprehensiveness and cultural authenticity of the research corpus.

3.3. Procedure

The analysis proceeded in several stages. First, the validated lexical material was organized into an LSF representing the concept of age (*"zhas"*). The lexical units were grouped according to their shared semantic features into four major lexical-semantic groups corresponding to stages of the human life course: *"balalyq shaq"* (childhood), *"zhastyq shaq"* (youth), *"orta zhas"* (middle age), and *"qarttyq shaq"* (old age). Within these groups, core and peripheral lexical units were distinguished according to their degree of semantic centrality and their directness in expressing the concept of age.

The selected Kazakh proverbs containing age-related meanings or representations were analyzed as a complementary paremiological corpus. The proverbs were examined in terms of the ways in which different stages of life were conceptualized, evaluated, and associated with culturally established values, social roles, and behavioral expectations.

Finally, the lexical-semantic and paremiological data were interpreted from semantic, cognitive, and cultural perspectives. This combined procedure made it possible to examine both the structural organization of age-related vocabulary and the cultural meanings, values, and social expectations associated with different stages of life in the Kazakh worldview.

4. Results

4.1. The Lexical Field of Age-Related Terminology in Kazakh

In constructing the lexical-semantic field of *"zhas"* (age), we organized the collected age-related lexical units according to their semantic relationships and their reference to different stages of the human life course. The analysis shows that, in the Kazakh linguistic worldview, the conceptual domain of *"adam zhasy"* (human age) is represented by a structured set of semantically inter-connected lexical units. These units form four major LSGs corresponding to the principal stages of the human life course: childhood (*"balalyq shaq"*), youth (*"zhastyq shaq"*), middle age (*"orta zhas"*), and old age (*"qarttyq shaq"*).

One primary meaning of the lexeme *"zhas"* is "young," "fresh," or "possessing potential," as illustrated by expressions such as *"zhas adam"* (young person), *"zhas maman"* (young specialist), and *"zhas kezeng"* (youthful period or younger days). A second and conceptually central meaning of *"zhas"* refers to chronological age, that is, the number of years a person has lived. This meaning constitutes the dominant archiseme of the LSF and forms the semantic core of Kazakh age-related terminology. This meaning is clearly manifested in the interrogative construction *"Zhasyng neshede*?*"* (How old are you?). In this expression, *"zhas"* refers to the biological and temporal dimension of age, which constitutes a universal parameter across languages. This semantic component is present, to varying degrees, in the structure of all lexical units belonging to the field.

In defining the boundaries of the LSF *"zhas"*, the study follows the principle that the field includes different types of lexical units that are related to its central meaning either directly or peripherally. The core of the LSF *"zhas"* consists of lexical units that directly denote stages of life. Its peripheral zone represents age indirectly through kinship relations, social roles, personal qualities, behavioral characteristics, and culturally significant norms. The richness of this peripheral vocabulary contributes to the informativeness of the field by enabling speakers to communicate culturally relevant distinctions that extend beyond chronological age. Although some peripheral items may occur less frequently in everyday communication, they play an important role in transmitting cultural values and regulating social behavior through discourse. The peripheral zone includes evaluative adjectives, words denoting growth and aging, and idiomatic and phraseological expressions.

4.2. The Lexical Semantic Group *"Balalyq Shaq"* (Childhood)

The integral seme of this LSG is *"bala"* (child). Each age-related term included in the group contains this semantic component either explicitly or implicitly. The lexeme *"bala"* may refer broadly to

children of different ages, including those approaching *"baligat shaq"* (adolescence). This meaning is illustrated by expressions such as "*ush zhastagy bala"* (a three-year-old child) and *"zheti zhastagy bala"* (a seven-year-old child). The lexical units constituting the LSG *"Balalyq shaq"* are presented in Table 1 according to their corresponding age ranges, together with their approximate English translations.

Table 1
Kazakh Age Terms Denoting Childhood and Early Adolescence

Age range	Core age terms	Translation
Up to 40 days and up to 1 year	shaqalaq, nareste, saby	newborn, infant
1-2 years	bope (girl), bobek (boy)	baby, babe
2-3 years	buldirshyn	toddler
3-5years	baldyrgan (boy), balausa (girl)	baby kid, baby girl
6-7 years	bala, balaqai	child, kid girl/boy
Early adolescence		
8-13 years	oin balasy, zhetkinshek, qyz bala/yer bala	kid, teenager, teen girl/boy

The LSG *"Balalyq shaq"* (childhood) comprises 14 lexical units and represents the initial stage of the Kazakh age-classification system, covering approximately the first 13 years of life. The semantic structure of each term is composed of an integral seme "Human child" + chronological age + gender: *Bope = child + the age between 1-2 years + girl; Zhetkinshek = child + the age between 8-13 years + boy/girl (qyz/ul bala).*

Within the LSG *"Balalyq shaq"*, age differentiation is highly detailed, with distinct terms denoting successive stages of development before adolescence (*baligat shaq*). This rich vocabulary reflects the communicative needs of traditional Kazakh society, in which a child's developmental stage was associated with particular social expectations, educational practices, and family responsibilities. Consequently, LSG *"Balalyq shaq"* constitutes a highly informative lexical-semantic system in which lexical precision facilitates the identification of culturally significant developmental differences.

This fine-grained categorization becomes particularly evident when Kazakh is compared with English. For example, the English term "*baby"* covers a relatively broad developmental period, whereas Kazakh distinguishes several stages through such terms as *"nareste"* (newborn infant), *"shaqalaq"* (newborn baby), *"sabi"* (infant), *"bobek"* (small child), *"buldirshin*, *baldyrgan"*, and *"balausa"*, each of which highlights a particular phase of early childhood. The cultural importance of these distinctions reflects the traditional view that children require special care and protection because family continuity and prosperity depend on their well-being. In the nomadic Kazakh context, high infant mortality, harsh environmental conditions, and the importance attached to future generations made each stage of childhood socially significant (Stasevich, 2008). This attitude is reflected in the proverb *"Bala adamnyng baur eti"* (A child is a parent's liver), which metaphorically identifies the child with part of the parent's own body. The proverb conveys the idea that children are inseparable from their parents and constitute an extension of their identity, life, and future. The conceptual model of *"Balalyq shaq"* is organized around early socialization, moral development, and preparation for adult life. During this period, parents and older members of the community bear considerable responsibility for shaping a child's character. This view is reflected in numerous proverbs with directive and assertive functions. The importance of educating children from an early age is emphasized in directive proverbs such as *"El bolam deseng, besigingdi tuze"* (If you want to build a strong nation, correct your cradle) and *"Aqyl zhastan"* (Wisdom begins in youth), *"Myng malyng bolgansha, bir balang galym bolsyn"* (Better to have one learned child than a thousand head of livestock). The next proverb offers a strong directive on how to raise a worthy person: *"Balangdy bes zhasqa dein khandai koter, on bes zhasqa dein quldai zhumsa, on besten ary dosyngdai aqyldas"* (Raise your child like a khan until the age of five, discipline him like a servant until fifteen, and after fifteen counsel with him as a friend). These proverbs reflect the culturally embedded belief that the foundations of a strong and prosperous society are laid through early childhood upbringing.

Other proverbs, including *"Bolar adam zheti zhastan bas bolar, bolmas adam qyryqqa kelse de zhas bolar"* (A promising child shows wisdom from the age of seven, whereas an incapable person remains immature even at forty) and *"Bolar elding balasy bir-birin batyr deydi, bolmas elding balasy bir-birin qatyn deydi"* (The children of a nation that will prosper call one another 'hero,' whereas the children of a nation that will decline disparage one another by calling each other 'a woman'), emphasize that the future prosperity of society depends on raising young people who possess wisdom, self-confidence, and mutual respect. The proverbs *"Zhasynda korgeni zhoqtyng oskende aitary zhoq"* (One who has learned nothing in youth will have nothing to say in adulthood), *"Zhasyngda kishiliging bolmasa, oskende kisiliging bolmaidy"* (One who does not show humility in youth will not become a noble, wise, and humane person in adulthood), and *"Zhasyngda qalzhyng bolsang, oskende mylzhyng bolasyng"* (If you are frivolous in youth, you will become a chatterer in adulthood) convey the idea that individuals who have not received proper instruction in behavioral norms, been exposed to cultural practices, or didn't acquire moral, intellectual, and cultural competence will be insufficiently prepared for adult life.

Another proverb, *"Atana ne qylsang, aldyna sol keler"* (Whatever you do to your father will eventually return to you), functions as a warning against neglecting or disrespecting aging parents. It emphasizes intergenerational continuity and the reciprocal nature of family relationships. Thus, *"balalyq shaq"* is conceptualized in the Kazakh worldview as a crucial stage of socialization, moral formation, and preparation for later life. During this period, the child gradually enters the social world through interaction with family members, relatives, and the wider community.

The peripheral zone of the LSG *"Balalyq shaq"* comprises lexemes and phraseological expressions that denote childhood indirectly through salient physical, behavioral, or developmental characteristics. Unlike the core vocabulary, which identifies age through specialized chronological terms, peripheral units conceptualize childhood through metaphorical associations, cultural evaluations, and observable signs of growth. This layer includes expressive lexical items such as *"zhugirmek"* (an active child who runs frequently), *"tentek"* (a naughty or mischievous child), and *"erke"* (a pampered or indulged child). These lexemes describe children's behavior and character while conveying emotional warmth and parental attachment.

Other expressions draw on imagery from the animal world, including *"balapan"* (chick), *"botaqan"* (baby camel), *"qulynshaq"* (foal), *"sary auyz balapan"* (yellow-mouthed chick), *"sary moyyn bala"* (yellow-necked child), *"sary urpek"* (little fluffy one). These expressions reflect the close connection between traditional Kazakh life and the pastoral environment. Such metaphors portray children as small, vulnerable, and dependent beings who require care and protection. The peripheral zone also contains numerous lexical and idiomatic expressions that identify stages of early childhood through developmental milestones rather than chronological age. These include *"emshektegi bala"* (a nursing baby), *"engbektep zhurgen bala"* (a crawling child), *"tai-tai basyp zhurgen bala"* (a child taking their first steps), *"tili shyqpagan bala"* (a child who has not yet begun to speak), and *"zhanga tili shyqqan bala"* (a child who has just begun to speak). Such expressions typically refer to children from birth to approximately three years of age and encode culturally significant indicators of physical and cognitive development.

Idiomatic expressions such as *"auzynan anasynyng suti ketpegen"* (wet behind the ears or still inexperienced), *"buganasy qatpagan"* (whose bones have not yet become strong), and *"aqyly toqtamagan* or *aqyly tolyspagan"* (not yet mature in mind) describe young people, particularly those approaching adolescence, as physically, intellectually, or socially immature. The peripheral vocabulary therefore complements the core age terminology by providing a more experiential and culturally nuanced representation of childhood. It highlights the qualities, behaviors, and developmental milestones that are especially salient in everyday communication.

4.3. The Lexical-Semantic Group *"Zhastyq Shaq"* (Youth)

The integral seme of the LSG *"Zhastyq shaq"* is *"zhas adam"* (young person). This stage covers the period from approximately 14 to 39 years of age and is subdivided into late adolescence, early

adulthood, and late youth. The lexical units associated with these substages, their age ranges, and their approximate English translations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Kazakh Age Terms Denoting Late Adolescence and Youth

Age range	Core age terms	Translation
Late adolescence		
14-15years	eresek bala, zhasospirim qyz/qyz bala	grown-up boy, teenage girl,
16-19years	bozbala (boy), boizhetken (girl)	youngster, maiden
Early youthhood		
20-29 years	zhas zhigit, qyz, kelinshek	young adult, girl, young married woman
Late youthhood		
30-39years	saqa/dur zhigit, kary qyz, kelinshek (married)	a strong, experienced young man, unmarried girl, a young married woman

The LSG *"Zhastyq shaq"* comprises 10 lexical units. This stage is subdivided into late adolescence, early youth, and late youth. Late adolescence is represented by such terms as *"eresek bala"* (grown-up boy) and *"zhasospirim qyz"* (adolescent girl). Early youth covers approximately the ages of 20 to 29 and is lexicalized through terms such as *"zhas zhigit"* (young man), *"qyz"* (unmarried girl), and *"kelinshek"* (young married woman). Late youth covers approximately the ages of 30 to 39 and is represented by such terms as "*dur zhigit"* (strong and experienced young man), *"kelinshek"* (young married woman), and *"kari qyz"* (older unmarried girl).

Late adolescence is represented by the terms *"eresek bala* or *eresek qyz"* (grown child) and *"zhasospirim"* (adolescent), which signal physical maturation and changing social roles. The subsequent stage, lexicalized by *"bozbala* and *boizhetken"* and generally associated with the ages of 16 to 19, denotes near-adulthood. The term *"bozbala"* conveys the idea of a young man who is not yet fully mature but is already approaching adult status. It therefore symbolizes readiness for adult responsibilities, including work, marriage, and participation in community life. This meaning is reflected in the proverb *"Bugingi bozbala – ertengi el qorgaityn azamat"* (Today's *bozbala* is tomorrow's defender of the nation). The transition from *"eresek bala"* and *"bozbala"* to *"zhigit"* represents not only biological growth but also social, moral, and cultural maturation. A *"zhigit"* is expected to possess physical strength, moral integrity, and a sense of responsibility. The status of *"dur zhigit"* denotes a mature and capable young man who is prepared for labor, family responsibilities, and service to society.

Kazakh proverbs portray the ideal *"zhigit"* as honorable, industrious, responsible, and capable of leadership and decisive action. Proverbs such as *"Yer zhigit yelining uly, namysynyng quly"* (A *"zhigit"* is the son of his people and a servant of his honor) and *"Aqyldy zhigit atqa da otyrar, taqqa da otyrar*" (A wise *"zhigit"* can both ride a horse and sit on a throne) highlight these qualities. The birth of a worthy *"zhigit"* is regarded as a blessing for the nation, as expressed in the proverb *"Zhaun zhausa zherge sy, yer zhigit tusa yelge sy"* (Rain is a blessing to the land, and the birth of a worthy *"zhigit"* is a blessing to the nation), *"Tura agash uige tireu, tura zhigit elge tireu"* (A straight tree is a support for the house, a worthy *"zhigit"* is a support for the people), or *"Zhigitke zhetpis turli oner az"* (For a *"zhigit"* mastering seventy skills is still not enough). All these proverbs portray a *"zhigit"* as someone who is expected to become a reliable source of strength and support for his community, who will contribute to the improvement of the country and advancement of the nation. There are also proverbs emphasizing the negative features of *"zhigits"* that contradict societal expectations: *"Aqylsyz zhigit- auzdyqsyz at"* (A foolish *"zhigit"* is like a horse without a muzzle), *"Zhaman teke suziskek, zhaman zhigit urysqaq"* (A bad billy goat butts; a bad *"zhigit"* quarrels), *"Zhaman zigit – sheginshek" (A bad "zhigit" is one who retreats)*. These proverbs function as behavioral warnings,

discouraging young men from foolishness, quarrelsomeness, and cowardice and promoting socially valued models of responsible and courageous manhood.

Female age terms are closely associated with marital status. The term *"boizhetken"* denotes a girl of marriageable age, *"qyz"* refers to an unmarried girl or daughter, and *"kelinshek"* designates a young married woman. In Kazakh culture, the *"kelinshek"* stage is traditionally idealized as a period of vitality, beauty, dignity, and moral refinement. A *"kelinshek"* is expected to demonstrate respect toward elders, modesty in behavior, diligence in domestic responsibilities, and the ability to maintain harmony within the family and community. Considerable importance is attached to the conduct of a *"kelinshek"*, as behavior perceived as inappropriate may be understood as threatening family cohesion and the moral order of the *"aul"* (village). This idea is expressed in the proverb *"Auldy kelinshek buzar, ne kelimsek buzar"* (A village may be disrupted either by a *"kelinshek"* or by an outsider). The proverb reflects the traditional expectation that a young married woman should exercise moral restraint and contribute to social harmony. It also illustrates the considerable social pressure placed on women to preserve family relationships and the moral stability of the community.

The peripheral zone of the LSG *"Zhastyq shaq"* includes a wide range of kinship, social, evaluative, and culturally marked lexical units that characterize young people indirectly through their social roles, interpersonal relationships, and culturally valued qualities rather than through age alone. The richness of this peripheral vocabulary demonstrates the cultural salience of youth in the Kazakh linguistic worldview. A substantial part of the peripheral lexicon refers to young women. It includes *"bikesh"* (young and beautiful woman), *"suikti zhar"* (beloved woman), *"aru"* (beautiful and intelligent young woman), and *"qalyngdyq"* (bride or fiancée). These terms highlight the aesthetic, moral, and family-related expectations associated with young women. The peripheral field also includes kinship and relational terms such as *"qurby"* (female peer or friend), *"qaryndas"* (younger sister in relation to a male), *"singli"* (younger sister), *"apke"* (older sister), and *"baldyz"* (wife's younger sister). These lexical items show that youth is conceptualized through a dense network of social and family relations.

The male component is represented by lexemes such as *"azamat"* (honorable and responsible man), *"batyr"* (hero), *"sarbaz"* (warrior), and *"zhauynger"* (soldier), which emphasize courage, strength, and readiness to serve and protect society. Other units, including "*seri"* (charismatic and artistically gifted young man) and *"Alash uly"* (son of Alash, a traditional designation associated with the Kazakh people), highlight artistic ability, patriotism, and continuity with national heritage. The lexemes *"dos"* (friend), *"zholdas"* (companion), *"aga*" (elder brother), and *"ini"* (younger brother) further underscore the importance of friendship, solidarity, kinship, and collective identity in the Kazakh conceptualization of youth. The peripheral zone also includes phraseological expressions such as *"Tepse temir uzetin"* (strong enough to break iron with a kick), *"Kozinen ot ushyp turgan zhigit"* (a young man with fire sparkling in his eyes), *"Esh narseden taisalmaityn zhigit"* (a young man who fears nothing), and *"Tau qoparuga dain"* (ready to move mountains). These expressions portray young men as possessing exceptional vigor, energy, physical strength, and courage.

Analysis of the proverbial and peripheral corpus of the LSG *"Zhastyq shaq"* reveals a noticeable predominance of male-centered representations, a pattern that is also observed in the broader Kazakh conceptualization of age. References to young men occur more frequently and are associated with a wider range of social roles, responsibilities, and desirable qualities than references to young women. During the *"zhastyq"* stage, Kazakh families traditionally place considerable expectations on sons, viewing them as future sources of moral support, protection, and family continuity (Kuzembayeva, 2024).

4.4. The Lexical-Semantic Group *"Orta Zhas Shaq"* (Middle Age)

The integral seme of the LSG *"Orta zhastıq shaq"* is *"orta zhas adam"* (middle-aged person). This stage covers the period from approximately 40 to 59 years of age and is subdivided into the middle-age period and maturity. The lexical units associated with these substages, their age ranges, and their approximate English translations are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Kazakh Age Terms Denoting Middle Age and Maturity

Age range	Core age terms	Translation
Middle age period		
40-49 years of age range	yer kisi, yerkek, otagasy (head of the family), otanasy (mother of the family) ake, koke, ana, apa, aga, nagashy,tate, sheshe	man, head of the family, mother of the family father, mother, elder sister, elder brother, uncle, aunt, mother/grandmother
Maturity		
50- 59 years of age range	zhigit agasy, yel agasy (father), sary kidir erkek, sary tis erkek, saqa erkek sary kidir ayel (female), sary qaryn baibishe. saqa/kekse ayel	a man in his prime, father of the people/a well-respected person, mature man, yellow-toothed man, mature, sophisticated man mature woman, woman with "yellow belly", meaning mature, sophisticated, experienced woman

The LSG *"Orta zhas shaq"* (middle age) comprises 15 lexical units and covers approximately 20 years of the human life span. In Kazakh culture, *"orta zhas"* is associated with the peak of a person's physical strength, social competence, and family responsibility. At this stage, a man may be recognized as *"otagasy*" (head of the family), while a woman may be acknowledged as *"otanasy"* (mother of the family), emphasizing their central roles in maintaining family cohesion and well-being and in transmitting cultural values. Men between the ages of 50 and 60 may be referred to as *"zhigit agasy"* (mature or senior *zhigit*) in recognition of their accumulated experience, and as *"yel agasy"* (father of the people) because of their contribution to social welfare and service to the community.

Men and women in this age range may also be described by expressions such as *"sary kidir erkek* or *sary kidir ayel*, *sary qaryn baibishe"* (mature woman), and *"saqa erkek* or *saqa ayel"* (mature man or woman). The expression *"sary kidir"* originally denoted someone who was "no longer young." When combined with *"yerkek"* (man) or *"ayel"* (woman), it came to refer to a mature individual who has accumulated considerable life experience, possesses wisdom, and is capable of making balanced judgments. So, these expressions *"sary kidir erkek/ayel*, *sary qaryn baibishe*, *saqa erkek/ayel*, *sary tis erkek*, and *kekse ayel"*, despite their nuanced meanings, share a common semantic core: they refer to individuals who have attained full personal and social maturity. Their abundance reflects the cultural significance of this life stage in the Kazakh linguistic worldview.

Kinship terms such as *"ake*, *ana* or *sheshe*, *aga* and *apa"* may also function as age markers, even though their primary meanings denote family and social relationships. In Kazakh culture, these terms acquire a strong age-indexing function and are commonly used to address people belonging to this stage of life. This pattern shows that "*orta zhas"* is conceptualized not only through chronological age but also through kinship status, family responsibility, and social authority.

In Kazakh proverbs, *"Orta zhas shaq"* is closely associated with leadership, social responsibility, and service to the community. Proverbs such as *"Yer yrystyng kilti"* (A man is the key to prosperity), *"Yel barda yer qor bolmas,"* (As long as there is a people/community, a *"Yer"* will not be miserable*"* and *"Yer barda yel qor bolmas"* (As long as there is a *"Yer"*, a community will not be miserable), *"Zhuk auryn nar koterer, yel auryn yer koterer"* (A camel carries a heavy load; *"Yer"* bears the burden of his people) portray *"Yer"* as a source of social stability and collective well-being, while also suggesting that a mature and capable *"Yer"* draws strength from the community and, in turn, provides it with protection and leadership. The proverb, *"Urandy yerding urpagy qaisar"* (A brave and courageous *"Yer"* gives birth to worthy courageous sons), expresses a culturally significant idea that the noble lineage of *"Yer"* contributes to the formation of a worthy younger generation with valued qualities.

The proverb *"Yerkek – tuzding korki, ayel – uiding korki"* (A man is the ornament of the steppe, and a woman is the ornament of the home) identifies the gendered roles and responsibilities traditionally

assigned to men and women within the family and society. Rather than explicitly establishing the superiority of one role over the other, the proverb emphasizes their complementarity and mutual dependence. Just as the prosperity of the steppe is associated with the efforts of men, the stability and warmth of the household are associated with women. Together, these roles are presented as contributing to the harmony and continuity of the family and, by extension, the community.

Overall, *"Orta zhas shaq"* is conceptualized as the stage of full social maturity, characterized by family leadership, productive activity, recognized social status, and responsibility for guiding younger generations. Individuals at this stage are represented as pillars of society who contribute to economic prosperity, social cohesion, and cultural continuity.

4.5. The Lexical-Semantic Group *"Qarttyq Shaq"* (Old Age)

The integral seme of the LSG *"Qarttyq shaq"* is *"qart adam"* (old-aged person). This stage covers the period from approximately 60 to 100 years of age and is subdivided into young old, middle, advanced old, and longevity. Table 4 presents the lexical units associated with these substages, their age ranges, and their approximate English translations.

Table 4
Kazakh Age Terms Denoting Old Age and Longevity

Age range	Core age terms	Translation
Young old		
60- 69 years	qarasaqal, qara kempir, ana,apa, ata, azhe, koke.	black beard (an elderly man), elderly woman, grandfather, grandmother. A senior citizen, A sexagenarian man/woman
Middle old		
70-79 years	aqsaqal, aq burym/aq zhaulyq, shal, ana, qart, qariya, apa, ata, azhe.	white beard (an old man/adult), white braid (an old, gray-haired woman/ an old woman wearing a white scarf), an old man, grandfather, grandmother, a septuagenarian man/woman
Advanced old		
80-89 years	aq urpek shal, aq urpek ana, aqsaqal, qart, qaria, shal, ata, azhe	an old man/woman with fluffy, thin, grey hair, a respected old man, an old man/woman, grandfather, grandmother, an octogenarian man/woman
Longevity		
90-100 and over	selkildek shal, selkildek kempir, Over 100 – baba, keiuana	a shaky, frail old man and old woman. ancestor, very old woman a nonagenarian

The LSG *"Qarttyq shaq"* (old age) comprises 15 lexical units and represents the final stage of the Kazakh age-classification system. It includes four broad substages: young-old age, middle-old age, advanced old age, and longevity. This fine-grained categorization reflects gradual changes in a person's physical condition, social status, and communicative role. The LSG *"Qarttyq shaq"* therefore provides a clear example of a semantic domain characterized by a high degree of lexical precision arising from the communicative need to distinguish among different stages of aging.

The lexical core of this LSG consists of five principal age-denoting lexemes: *"qart*, *shal*, *aqsaqal*, *qariya*, and *abyz"*. Each of these lexemes characterizes an older person from a distinct perspective and carries specific cultural and evaluative meanings. The terms *"qart* and *qariya"* emphasize age, experience, wisdom, and social authority, whereas *"shal"* primarily denotes chronological and physical old age. The term *"aqsaqal"* refers to a respected male elder whose moral authority, wisdom, and opinions carry considerable weight in communal affairs. By contrast, *"abyz"* denotes a person distinguished by spiritual knowledge, insight, and wisdom.

In the Kazakh linguistic and cultural worldview, old age is conceptualized as a socially and morally significant period marked by authority, wisdom, and responsibility. It is also associated with the ability to guide younger generations (Meirmanova et al., 2017). The presence of an *"ata"* (grandfather) or a *"kone koz qariya"* (an elder with extensive life experience) is regarded as *"shanyraqtyng tiregi"* (the pillar of the family or household), symbolizing stability, order, and spiritual well-being within the family.

This tradition is reflected in the saying *"Balany qartaigansha bagasyng, nemereni olgenshe bagasyng"* (One takes care of one's children until they grow old and one's grandchildren until the end of one's life). The proverb suggests that older people continue to perform socially valuable roles within the family and remain active contributors to family life through the care and guidance they provide to grandchildren. The high status of elders is vividly expressed in numerous Kazakh proverbs. *"Karining bary – igi"* (The presence of an elder is a blessing), *"Kari bilgendi peri bilmes"* (Even a supernatural being does not know what an elder knows), and *"Karisi bardyng yrysy bar"* (A family with an elder enjoys prosperity) all emphasize the cultural value of experience and seniority.

Similarly, *"Aqsaqaly bar aul azbaidy, atasy bar bala tozbaidy"* (A village with an *"aqsaqal"* will not lose its way, and a child with a grandfather will not go astray) highlights the guiding role of elders in maintaining social stability and transmitting moral norms. The proverb *"Karisi kimning zhoq bolsa, zhastary bolar duana"* (If a people have no elders, their young will become *duana*) presents elders as indispensable agents in the moral and social upbringing of younger generations. In this context, *"duana"* refers to people who are aimless, socially ungrounded, or lacking proper direction in life. The proverb *"Osetin elding qarty qazyna bolar, ospeitin elding qarty qazymyr bolar"* (The elder of a prosperous nation is a treasure, whereas the elder of a declining nation is quarrelsome and obstinate) conveys the idea that older people are valued when they continue to contribute to collective well-being through their experience, wisdom, and guidance. It also implies that the social value assigned to old age depends partly on the elder's continuing moral and communal contribution.

Notably, Kazakh appears to lack strongly derogatory age-related terms comparable to the English expressions *"old dodderer* or *old crone"*. The negative expression *"qary qaqpas"* refers not to old age itself but to an elderly person perceived as unfortunate, isolated, or socially unfulfilled. Disrespectful speech toward elders is regarded as *"tarbiesizdik"* (poor upbringing or lack of proper manners), one of the most negative characterizations of a young person. The term implies a lack of discipline, tact, respect, and moral values.

4.6. Comparative Characteristics of the Lexical-Semantic Groups

To synthesize the findings across the four lexical-semantic groups, Table 5 compares their chronological boundaries, core and peripheral lexical units, relative lexical density, and principal communicative and cultural functions. The comparison demonstrates how the Kazakh lexical-semantic field of age combines direct chronological designations with kinship terms, evaluative lexemes, and phraseological expressions to represent the changing social roles, responsibilities, and culturally valued characteristics associated with successive stages of life.

Table 5

Comparative Characteristics of the Lexical-Semantic Groups

Life stages	Core lexical units	Peripheral lexical units	Approximate lexical density	Main communicative and cultural functions
Balalyq shaq (Childhood)				
Up to 40 days and up to one year	shaqalaq, nareste, saby (newborn)	Lexical units: *zhugirme*k (one who runs a lot), *tentek* (naughty), *botaqan* (camel baby), *balapan* (chick), *sary balapan* (yellow chick), *sary urpek balapan* (fluffy chick), *qulyn* (baby foal). Phrases: *emshektegi bala* (*a* nursing baby), *engbektep zhyrgen bala* (a toddler), *tai-tai basyp zhurgen bala* (a child	Very high	Physical growth, parental care and responsibility, early socialization, moral formation, preparation for future life
1-2 years	bope (girl baby), bobek (boy)			
2-3 years	Buldirshyn (toddler)			
3-5years	baldyrgan (boy), balausa (girl)			
6-7 years	balaqai, bala			

Early adolescence 8-13 years range	oin balasy (kid) zhetkinshek qyz bala/yer bala (teenage girl/boy)	taking his first steps), *tili shyqpagan bala* (a child who has not yet begun to speak), *zhanga tili shyqqan bala* (a child who has just started speaking). Phraseological units: *buganasy qatpagan* (bones haven't become strong), *auzynan anasynyng suti ketpegen* (wet behind the ears), *omirding ashysymen tushysyn tatyp kormegen* (hasn't tasted bitter and sweet sides of life), *aqyly tolyspagan* (not yet mature in mind, young, inexperienced)		
Zhastyq shaq (Youthhood)				
Adolescence: 14-19 years old Early youth 20-29 Late youthhood 30-40	eresek bala (grown-up boy), zhasospirim (adolescent), qyz bala (girl), bozbala (boy), boizhetken (girl unmarried), zhas zhigit, young guy), qyz (girl saqa/dur zhigit (grown-up young man), kelinshek (young married woman), kary qyz (an unmarried girl)	*Bikesh*(a young girl), *aru* (a pretty intelligent girl, young woman), *suikti zhar* (beloved girl), *qalyngdyq* (bride, fiancée), *qurby* (female friend), *qaryndas* (sister in relation to a male), *singli* (younger sister), *apke* (older sister), and *baldyz* (wife's younger sister), as *dos* (friend), *zholdas* (companion), *aga* (elder brother), and *ini* (younger brother), *azamat* (honorable and responsible young man), *batyr* (hero), *sarbaz* (warrior), and *zhauynger* (soldier), *seri* (charismatic and talented young man) and *Alash uly* (son of Alash, aincient name of Kazakhs). Phraseological units: *Tepse temir uzetin* (Strong enough to break iron with a kick*); Kozinen ot ushyp turgan zhigit* (A young man with fire sparkling in his eyes*); Esh narseden taisalmaityn zhigit* (A young man who fears nothing*); Tau qoparuga dain* (Ready to move mountains).	Very high	Physical maturation and changing social roles, marriageable age, readiness to serve and protect society, importance of friendship, solidarity, kinship, and collective identity
Orta zhas shaq (middle-aged)				
40-49 years range 50-60 years	yer, yerkek, otagasy (head of the family), otanasy (mother of the family) yel agasy (father of people), sary kidir erkek/ayel, sary tis erkek, saqa erkek (old man/woman), sary qaryn ayel (mature baibishe, ayel), saqa/kekse ayel (experienced woman). Ake(father), koke uncle), ana (mother), apa (elder sister/grandmother), aga (elder brother/uncle), nagashy (uncle/mother's brother), tate (aunt), sheshe (mother/grandmother)	*Qolynan is keletin shaq* (the age at which man is able to solve any problem), *Dyrys soilep, durys sheshim qabyldaityn shaq* (the age at which a man is capable of taking right decisions), *Ongyn –solyn biletin zhasqa kelu* (an age at which one is experienced in all respects), *Zhaqsy men zhamandy, adal men aramdy ayra biletyn zhas qa kelu* (to reach an age at which one can distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong), *Aqyly tolysqan,sabyrdyng molaigan shagy* (an age when one is wise and tolerant*), Zhastarga zhol silteitin shaq* (an age when one can give good advice to youth*), Ul osirip qyz osirip, nemere suetin shaq* (An age when one has raised his sons and daughters and takes care of grandchildren), *Samaina aq tusken(* starts to get old*), Zhasqa kelgen sozi durys adam(a* reasonable elderly*)*	High	The peak of a person's physical strength, social maturity, responsibility, family leadership, productive activity, acquisition of recognized social status, responsibility for economic prosperity, social cohesion, leadership, protection of the community, transmission of cultural values to younger generations.
Qarttyq shaq (Old age)				
Young old: 60-69 years Middle old: 70-79 years	Qarasaqal (black beard), qara kempir (elderly woman), ana(mother), apa (elder sister/grandmother), ata (grandfather, azhe grandmother), koke (uncle), nagasgy (uncle/mother's brother), tate (aunt), sheshe (mother, grandmother) Aqsaqal (white beard), aq burym/aq zhaulyq (elderly women, wife), shal/qart/qariya (elderly men), ana(mother),	*Omirding ashysyn da, tushysyn da tatqan* (one who has tasted both the bitter and sweet of life) – an elderly person with rich life experience), *Omir korgen adam/korgeni kop adam* (a man who has seen life), *Adam tanityn zhasqa kelu* (to reach the age at which one begins to understand life and people), *Kozderi kopti korgen (*one who has seen much), *Saqaly agargansha* (until one's beard turns white/ until old age), *Zhasy ulgaıgan* (advanced in years), *Saqaly*	High	The final stage of the age-classification system, a socially and morally significant period marked by authority, wisdom, and responsibility, associated with the ability to guide the younger generation

	apa (elder sister/grandmother), ata (grandfather, azhe grandmother), koke (uncle), nagasgy (uncle/ mother's brother), tate (aunt), sheshe (mother/grandmother)	*sapsigan shal* (big white bearded old man), *Beti azhim-azhim*, *qoldqry taram-taram (*heavily wrinkled*),*
Advanced old 80-89 years	Aq urpek shal/aq urpek ana (white-haired old man/woman), shal/qart/qariya (elderly men)	
Longevity 90-100 and over	selkildek shal, selkildek kempir (shaky old man and woman) Over 100 – baba (ancestor), keiuana (very old woman)	

5. Discussion

The findings help explain why age occupies such a central position in the Kazakh linguistic worldview. The concept of *"zhas"* is more than a means of measuring chronological time. In the Kazakh cultural context, age functions as a fundamental organizing principle of social life by linking biological development with moral expectations, social responsibilities, and culturally prescribed forms of behavior. Human life is therefore conceptualized as a meaningful progression through culturally significant stages that contribute to both individual development and communal well-being (Albert, 2014).

The comparative analysis of the lexical-semantic groups presented in Table 5 demonstrates that each stage of life is assigned a distinct social and cultural significance. Childhood is represented as a period of preparation for later life; youth as a period of strength, initiative, and active participation in society; middle age as a stage of responsibility, productivity, and leadership; and old age as the culmination of wisdom and moral authority. The transition from one stage to another reflects not merely biological aging but also a gradual transformation of social roles and functions. This conceptualization reveals a holistic understanding of human existence in which each stage of life contributes to the continuity and stability of the community. Each stage acquires meaning through its relationship to preceding and succeeding generations. Children are future adults, adults are future elders, and elders preserve the knowledge and experience required for the upbringing of future generations. Age therefore functions as a mechanism through which cultural memory, social norms, and moral values are transmitted across generations (Albert, 2014; Nsamenang, 2012).

The concept of *"mushel"* reinforces this worldview by introducing a cyclical understanding of the human life course. In contrast to purely linear models of aging, the *"mushel"* system conceptualizes life as a sequence of transitional cycles requiring reflection, adaptation, and moral and physical renewal. The cultural significance attached to *"mushel zhas"* demonstrates that biological change is interpreted through ethical and social frameworks. The *"mushel"* system and the four-stage age classification should therefore be regarded as complementary rather than competing models. Together, they show that the Kazakh conceptualization of age integrates both linear and cyclical understandings of human development (Mukhambetova, 2018).

Another significant finding concerns the relationship between lexical differentiation and communicative need. The theory of communicative efficiency proposes that semantic domains of high social importance tend to develop more precise lexical distinctions because speakers need to communicate relevant differences efficiently (Gibson et al., 2017; Kemp et al., 2018; Regier et al., 2016; Zaslavsky et al., 2019). The abundance of Kazakh age terms may therefore be understood not as accidental lexical richness but as a response to the social importance of age distinctions. The findings are consistent with the proposition that culturally salient semantic domains tend to exhibit a high degree of lexical specificity. A further finding is the predominance of male-centered lexical units and proverbial representations across the four age-related lexical-semantic groups. This pattern indicates a degree of gender asymmetry in the analyzed lexical and proverbial corpus. However, it should not

automatically be interpreted as evidence that women occupied a marginal position in the traditional Kazakh worldview. Rather, it appears to reflect the historically differentiated social spheres and responsibilities assigned to men and women in nomadic society. Men were more frequently associated with public life, leadership, warfare, protection, and intertribal relations, whereas women were associated with household management, family continuity, child-rearing, and the transmission of moral values (Tanalinova, 2018).

This complementary representation of gender roles is encapsulated in the proverb "*Yerkek – tuzding korki, ayel – uiding korki"* (A man is the ornament of the steppe, and a woman is the ornament of the home). The proverb presents male and female social functions as interdependent, although the division itself remains culturally and historically gendered.

Age segregation and negative stereotypes about older people are documented in many contemporary societies (Johfre & Saperstein, 2023). By contrast, old age in the Kazakh linguistic and cultural worldview is represented as a socially and morally significant stage associated with authority, wisdom, responsibility, and the guidance of younger generations (Meirmanova et al., 2017; Qalysh, 2015). Within the analyzed corpus, strongly derogatory age-related terms comparable to the English expressions 'old dodderer' and 'old crone' were not prominent. This pattern is consistent with the traditionally respectful attitude towards grandparents and older members of society. They continue to play a valuable social role within the family, providing care and guidance to grandchildren, as emphasized by the saying *"Balany qartaigansha bagasyng, nemereni olgenshe bagasyng"* (One takes care of one's children until they grow old, and one's grandchildren until the end of one's life).

The study contributes to cognitive and conceptual linguistics by demonstrating how language encodes a culturally specific model of the human life course. Through the concept of *"zhas"*, the Kazakh language represents life as a sequence of socially meaningful stages in which every generation has a distinct role and individual existence is closely connected to communal continuity. This concept distributes cultural value across the entire life course by emphasizing that each stage possesses its own significance and contributes to the continuity, stability, and well-being of society. By revealing how this model is encoded in language, the study deepens understanding of the relationship between language, cognition, culture, and social organization.

The findings also have practical implications for lexicography, translation, language teaching, and intercultural communication. Many Kazakh age terms lack exact English equivalents because they encode culturally specific combinations of chronological age, gender, marital status, moral evaluation, and social role. Translating *"zhigit"* simply as "young man" or *"aqsaqal"* as "old man," for example, results in a loss of important cultural meaning. The English expressions primarily denote chronological or biological age, whereas *"zhigit"* and *"aqsaqal"* also encode socially valued identities, responsibilities, and moral attributes. In English-language texts, such terms may therefore be retained in transliteration and accompanied by an explanatory gloss at first mention.

The study also has several limitations that suggest directions for future research. First, it is based primarily on qualitative semantic and cultural analysis of lexical, phraseological, and proverbial material. Quantitative surveys could examine whether contemporary Kazakh speakers from different generations assign the same meanings and social values to traditional age-related terms. Second, interview-based studies could investigate how age terminology is used in everyday communication and whether urbanization, globalization, and digital communication are reshaping traditional age hierarchies. Third, comparative studies involving other Turkic languages could identify both shared and culture-specific patterns in the conceptualization of age. Finally, corpus-based research on contemporary media discourse could examine how traditional and modern representations of age coexist and interact in present-day Kazakh society.

Acknowledgments

The authors used an AI-based tool solely for linguistic polishing. The ideas, interpretations, and analyses presented in this paper are entirely original and the sole responsibility of the authors.

Disclosure Statement

The authors claim no conflict of interest.

Funding

The research did not receive any specific grants from funding agencies.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are included in the article. Additional materials underlying the analysis are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration Ethics

Ethical review and approval were not required for this study because it involved the analysis of publicly available linguistic and cultural materials, including Kazakh lexical units, phraseological expressions, and proverbs, and did not involve human participants or the collection of personal data.

References

Adambayev, B. (2007). *Kazakh oral folk art* (B. Adambayev, Trans.; 3rd ed.). Ana Tili.

Akkozin, M. (1990). *Kazakh proverbs and sayings*. Kazakhstan.

Albert, I., & Trommsdorff, G. (2014). The role of culture in social development over the lifespan: An interpersonal relations approach. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture, 6*(2), 3–28. https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1057

Baltabai, B. (1994). *Kazakhskoe narodnoe oratorskoe iskusstvo* (Kazakh folk oratory). Ana Tili.

Bilim-all.kz. (2015, September 17). Adamnyng zhasyna bailanysty ataular *(Age-related names for a person)*. https://bilim-all.kz/article/2095

Bopaiuly, B. (2025). *Mushel zhas: A dangerous period or a new stage in life*. Kazinform. https://www.inform.kz/ru/mushel-zhas-opasniy-period-ili-noviy-zhiznenniy-etap-558fce

Eckert, P. (1998). Age as a sociolinguistic variable. In F. Coulmas (Ed.), *The handbook of sociolinguistics* (pp. 151–167). Blackwell.

Gibson, E., Futrell, R., Jara-Ettinger, J., Mahowald, K., Bergen, L., Ratnasingam, S., Gibson, M., Piantadosi, S. T., & Conway, B. R. (2017). Color naming across languages reflects color use. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 114*(40), 10785–10790. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1619666114

Igibayeva, A. K., & Kassymbekova, G. K. (2018). Sotsiokul'turnye i psikhologicheskie aspekty vozrastnoi periodizatsii kazakhov (Sociocultural and psychological aspects of age periodization among Kazakhs). In I. V. Kazakova (Ed.), *Zhenshchiny-uchenye Belarusi i Kazakhstana: Sbornik materialov Mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii* [Women scholars of Belarus and Kazakhstan: Proceedings of the International Scientific and Practical Conference] (pp. 150–153). RIVSh.

Januzakov, Q. (1999). *Qazaq tilining sozdigi*. Daik Press.

Johfre, S., & Saperstein, A. (2023). The social construction of age: Concepts and measurement. *Annual Review of Sociology, 49*, 339–358. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-031021-121020

Kaidarov, A. (2004). *Halyq danalygy* (Folk wisdom). Toganai.

Kaliyev, B. (2014). *Qazaqtyng tusindirme sozdigi* [Explanatory dictionary of the Kazakh language]. Keremet Media.

Kemp, C., Xu, Y., & Regier, T. (2018). Semantic typology and efficient communication. *Annual Review of Linguistics, 4*, 109–128. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-linguistics-011817-045406

Kurmambayeva, Zh., Baltabayeva, Zh., Yessenova, K., Ayapova, T., & Ashirova, B. (2018). Cognitive and lingua-cultural aspects of the concept of the numerals in Kazakhstan. *Opción, 35*(88). 177-192.

Kuzembayeva, G. (2024). The ethnic content of the values son and daughter in Kazakh culture: An ethnopsycholinguistic study of family and kinship values. *Psycholinguistics, 35*(2), 82–107. https://doi.org/10.31470/2309-1797-2024-35-2-82-107

Lauhakangas, L. (2007). Use of proverbs and narrative thought. *Folklore, 35*, 77–84.

Massaget.kz. (2019, December 22). Adamnyng zhas ataulary (*Names for human ages).* https://massaget.kz/salt-dastur/adamnyin-jas-ataularyi-35741/

Meirmanova, G. A., Egyzbaeva, M. K., & Iovita, R. P. (2017). The Kazakh etiquette and its transformation. *Central Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 3*, 29–34.

Mieder, W. (2004). *Proverbs: A handbook*. Greenwood Press.

Mukhambetova, A. (2018). *Mushel': Drevneishii kalendar' kochevnikov* (Mushel: The ancient calendar of nomad). Nomad. https://nomadmgz.kz/index.php/heritage/177-drevnejshij-kalendar-kochevnikov

Nakipbekova, A. (2025, January 11). *Timeless Kazakh traditions from birth to adulthood*. The Astana Times. https://astanatimes.com/2025/01/timeless-kazakh-traditions-from-birth-to-adulthood/

Nsamenang, A. B. (2012). The intergenerational continuity of values. In J. Valsiner (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of culture and psychology* (pp. 767–782). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195396430.013.0037

Omarbekova, G., & Aasland, E. (2023). *Kazakh proverbs: What can they tell us about the Kazakh nation, its traditions, and its transformation?* Peter Lang.

Qalysh, A., Nuketayeva, D., Kanagatova, A., Suleimenova, Z., Sadikovych, S., & Zhumasheva, Z. (2015). On family etiquette of Kazakhs. *Global Journal of Sociology, 5*(1), 28–33.

Regier, T., Carstensen, A., & Kemp, C. (2016). Languages support efficient communication about the environment: Words for snow revisited. *PLOS ONE, 11*(4), e0151138. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0151138

Sattarov, Q. (2011). *Proverbs and sayings of the Kazakhs of Central Asia*. Tangbaly.

Stamgaliyeva, D. (2026). *A dangerous age or a wise transition? How to properly celebrate mushel zhas*. Liter.kz. https://liter.kz/mushel-zhas-opasnyi-vozrast-ili-mudryi-perekhod-1772189047/

Stasevich, I. V. (2025). Traditional conceptions of gender and age stratification in contemporary Kazakh culture: The case of Western Kazakhstan. *Herald of Anthropology/Vestnik Antropologii, 3*, 159–174.

Tanalinova, A. U. (2018). Status of women in the historical development of Kazakh society. *Journal of Actual Problems of Jurisprudence*, *86*(2), 24–29.

Wang, S. (2024). Leksemy *vozrast* i vozrastnoi kak evfemizmy v sovremennom mediadiskurse (The lexemes age and age-related as euphemisms in contemporary media discourse). *Litera*, *5*, 107-114. https://doi.org/10.25136/2409-8698.2024.5.70684

Zaslavsky, N., Kemp, C., Tishby, N., & Regier, T. (2019). Color naming reflects both perceptual structure and communicative need. *Topics in Cognitive Science*, *11*(1), 207–219. https://doi.org/10.1111/tops.12395

Zaslavsky, N., Kemp, C., Tishby, N., & Regier, T. (2020). Communicative need in color naming**.** *Cognitive Neuropsychology, 37*(5–6), 312–324. https://doi.org/10.1080/02643294.2019.1604502