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THE "GIRL" CONCEPT IN KAZAKH LINGUISTIC CONSCIOUSNESS: A GENDER-COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

This article examines the conceptual representation of the "girl" lexeme in Kazakh linguistic consciousness within the framework of the theoretical and methodological foundations of gender cognitive linguistics. The object of the study is the cognitive structure of the "girl" concept as it is formed in linguistic consciousness, namely its representations at the frame, prototype, associative, and discourse levels. The relevance of the article lies in its investigation of the interweaving of gender stereotypes and national concepts in linguistic consciousness through a new integrative approach. The study employs a comprehensive combination of conceptual analysis, frame semantics, prototype theory, and psycholinguistic experimental methods. The material includes Kazakh folklore, a paremiological corpus, mass media texts, and data from associative experiments. As a result of frame-based modeling, the "girl" concept was described through five main slots: being, activity, social status, axiological evaluation, and transformational attribute. The being slot includes honor, respect for elders, and modesty; the activity slot includes education, learning, and labor; the social status slot includes the roles of future spouse, mother, and spiritual pillar; while the axiological and transformational slots reflect evaluative meanings and new social roles. Prototypical analysis demonstrates that the "girl" image coexists in the linguistic consciousness across several semantic layers – traditional, modern, and gender-transformative. The results of the psycholinguistic experiment show that associations with the "girl" stimulus are firmly rooted in the national linguistic consciousness, yet are undergoing certain transformations in line with modern demands. The scientific novelty of the study lies in its systematic examination of the mechanisms through which the "girl" concept is represented in linguistic consciousness from the perspective of the gendered cognitive linguistics paradigm. The article contributes to the development of knowledge in the fields of gender linguistics and cognitive semantics in the Kazakh language.

Keywords: gender cognitive linguistics, linguistic consciousness, the "girl" concept, frame semantics, prototype theory, gender stereotype, psycholinguistic experiment.

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Қазақы тілдік санадағы «қыз» концептісі: гендерлік-когнитивтік лингвистикалық талдау

Мақалада гендерлік когнитивтік лингвистиканың теориялық-методологиялық негіздері аясында «қыз» лексемасының қазақ тілдік санасындағы концептуалдық бейнесі зерттеледі. Зерттеу нысаны ретінде «қыз» ұғымының тілдік санада қалыптасқан когнитивтік құрылымы, яғни оның фреймдік, прототиптік, ассоциативтік және дискурстық деңгейлердегі репрезентациялары алынады. Мақаланың өзектілігі – тілдік санадағы гендерлік стереотиптер мен ұлттық концептілердің бір-бірімен астасуын жаңа интегративтік тәсілмен зерттеуде. Зерттеуде концептуалдық талдау, фреймдік семантика, прототиптік теория және психолингвистикалық эксперимент әдістері кешенді түрде қолданылады. Материал ретінде қазақ фольклоры, паремиологиялық қор, бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарының мәтіндері және ассоциативтік тәжірибе деректері пайдаланылады. «Қыз» концептісіне жүргізілген фреймдік модельдеу нәтижесінде оның бес негізгі слоты анықталды: болмыс, іс-әрекет, қоғамдық мәртебе, аксиологиялық бағалау және трансформациялық сипат. Болмыс слотына ар-намыс, үлкенге құрмет, ұяттылық; іс-әрекет слотына тәрбие, оқу және еңбек; қоғамдық мәртебе слотына болашақ жар, ана және рухани

ал аксиологиялық және трансформациялық слоттар бағалауыш мәндер мен жаңа әлеуметтік рөлдерді көрсетеді. Прототиптік талдау «қыз» образының тілдік санада бірнеше семантикалық қабатта – дәстүрлі, заманауи және гендерлік-трансформациялық – бір мезгілде өмір сүретінін дәлелдейді. Психолингвистикалық эксперимент нәтижелері «қыз» стимулына берілген ассоциациялардың ұлттық тілдік санада гендерлік коннотациялардың берік орын алғанын, алайда жаңа заман талабына орай олардың белгілі трансформацияға ұшырауда екенін көрсетеді. Зерттеудің ғылыми жаңалығы – «қыз» концептінің тілдік санада репрезентациялану механизмдерін гендерлік когнитивтік лингвистика парадигмасы тұрғысынан жүйелі қарастыруында. Мақала қазақ тіліндегі гендерлік лингвистика мен когнитивтік семантика саласындағы ілімді дамытуға үлес қосады.

Түйін сөздер: гендерлік когнитивтік лингвистика, тілдік сана, «қыз» концепті, фреймдік семантика, прототиптік теория, гендерлік стереотип, психолингвистикалық эксперимент.

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Концепт «девушка» в казахском языковом сознании: гендерно-когнитивный лингвистический анализ

В данной статье рассматривается концептуальное представление лексемы «девушка» в казахском лингвистическом сознании в рамках теоретико-методологических основ гендерно-когнитивной лингвистики. Объектом исследования является когнитивная структура понятия «девушка» в том виде, в каком оно формируется в лингвистическом сознании, а именно его репрезентации на фреймовом, прототипическом, ассоциативном и дискурсивном уровнях. Актуальность статьи заключается в исследовании взаимосвязи гендерных стереотипов и национальных концепций в лингвистическом сознании с помощью нового интегративного подхода. В исследовании используется комплексное сочетание концептуального анализа, семантики фреймов, теории прототипов и психолингвистических экспериментальных методов. Материал исследования включает казахский фольклор, паремиологический корпус, тексты из средств массовой информации и данные ассоциативных экспериментов. Фреймовое моделирование концепта «девушка» позволило выделить пять основных слотов: бытие, деятельность, социальный статус, аксиологическая оценка и трансформационный признак. Слот бытия включает честь, уважение к старшим и скромность; слот деятельности – образование, обучение и труд; слот социального статуса – роли будущей супруги, матери и духовной опоры, а аксиологический и трансформационный слоты отражают оценочные значения и новые социальные роли. Прототипический анализ показывает, что образ «девушки» сосуществует в лингвистическом сознании на нескольких семантических уровнях: традиционном, современном и гендерно-трансформативном. Результаты психолингвистического эксперимента показывают, что ассоциации со стимулом «девушка» прочно укоренились в национальном лингвистическом сознании, однако претерпевают определённую трансформацию в соответствии с требованиями современности. Научная новизна исследования заключается в систематическом рассмотрении механизмов репрезентации концепта «девушка» в лингвистическом сознании с позиций гендерной и когнитивной лингвистики. Статья вносит вклад в развитие знаний в области гендерной лингвистики и когнитивной семантики казахского языка.

Ключевые слова: гендерно-когнитивная лингвистика, лингвистическое сознание, концепт «девушка», семантика фреймов, прототипная теория, гендерный стереотип, психолингвистический эксперимент.

Introduction

Cognitive linguistics, which studies the interrelationship between language and cognition, has in recent decades intersected with the gender dimension of language, giving rise to a new scientific paradigm – gendered cognitive linguistics. This approach enables researchers to uncover the gender-coded concepts of linguistic consciousness and to identify the gender matrix of national identity in lan-

guage. As a keeper of cultural and historical experience, language transmits gender stereotypes from generation to generation, reinforcing or transforming collective perceptions of masculinity and femininity in a given society.

In this study, the term “Kazakh linguistic consciousness” is used to refer not only to the linguistic system itself, but also to the ethnocultural worldview, value hierarchy, and symbolic meanings encoded in Kazakh language and discourse. In this lin-

guistic system, the lexeme “girl” occupies a special place: it functions not merely as a sexual characteristic, but as a concept with familial, social, spiritual, and mythopoetic content in the national linguistic consciousness. The linguistic image of the “girl” is enriched with new content in folk tales, epics, proverbs, and sayings, as well as in modern discourse, while retaining its special place.

The relevance of the study is determined by several reasons. First, in Kazakh linguistics, gender-cognitive research has not yet been conducted at an adequate level: the existing works are primarily descriptive in nature and remain distant from in-depth cognitive analysis. Secondly, in the context of globalization and digitalization, the gender codes of linguistic consciousness are undergoing change, and studying this dynamic has become a pressing issue in contemporary linguistics. Third, because the image of “girl” is a concept in Kazakh culture that encompasses a special symbolic scope – honor, the future, spiritual purity – it is extremely important to study it comprehensively from a scientific perspective.

The aim of the study is to analyze the representation of the “girl” concept in Kazakh linguistic consciousness on the basis of gender cognitive linguistics and to reveal its content at the frame, prototype, associative, and discourse levels.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks were set: (1) to clarify the theoretical and methodological basis of gender cognitive linguistics; (2) to create a frame model of the “girl” concept; (3) to identify the semantic layers of the concept through prototypical analysis; (4) to investigate the concept’s associative field in linguistic consciousness through analysis of psycholinguistic experimental results; (5) to examine the linguistic evolution of the “girl” image based on traditional and contemporary discourse data.

The theoretical basis of the study includes G. Lakoff and M. Johnson’s theory of conceptual metaphor, C. Fillmore’s frame semantics, E. Rosch’s prototype theory, J. Butler’s concept of gender performativity, and Y. D. Apresyan’s theory of linguistic imagery. In addition, the study draws on recent research on gender stereotypes, gender linguistics in Kazakh linguistics, gendered paremiology in digital discourse, and the cognitive processing of gender stereotypes in language (Igissinova et al., 2025; Zhumagazyeva & Tusupbekova, 2025; Abdirov & Bibekov, 2024; Beroíza-Valenzuela & Salas-Guzmán, 2025; Du & Zhang, 2023).

The following sources were used as research material: “Explanatory Dictionary of the Kazakh

Language” (2011), “Collection of Kazakh Proverbs and Phrases” (Aldaspanov, 2015), texts of fairy tales and epics, textual materials from Kazakh-language mass media over the past decade (2015-2025), as well as data from the author’s associative experiment (n=150, Almaty, 2024).

The theoretical significance of the study lies in systematically researching the “girl” concept within a gender-cognitive paradigm in Kazakh linguistics and in identifying the mechanisms of gender representation in linguistic consciousness. The practical significance is that the article’s results can be used in courses on gender linguistics, cognitive semantics, and psycholinguistics, as well as in lexicographic work.

Materials and methods

The study employs an integrative methodological approach that combines several complementary methodologies. The novelty of this approach lies in the synthesis of cognitive linguistics, gender studies, psycholinguistics, and discourse analysis. These methods, which are often used separately, are combined in this study to analyze the concept “girl” as an integrated cognitive, associative, and discourse-based system. *This integrative design draws on the theoretical premise that meaning is structured through categorization processes shared across cognitive and cultural domains (Lakoff, 1987).*

The first method is conceptual analysis. Through this method, the dictionary definitions, etymology, and syntagmatic associations of the lexeme “girl” were analyzed. Materials from the Explanatory Dictionary of the Kazakh Language (2011) and the Etymological Dictionary of the Kazakh Language (Kaidarov, 2004) were used. Conceptual analysis makes it possible to identify the core and peripheral senses of the concept. *This procedure is grounded in the cognitive-linguistic assumption that lexical meaning is organized around a structured conceptual base rather than a fixed set of discrete features (Langacker, 1987).*

The second method is frame semantics (Petruck, 1996). A frame model of the “girl” concept was created, and its five slots – being, activity, social status, axiological evaluation, and transformational attribute – as well as their internal components were identified. Frame modeling serves to present the concept’s content in a hierarchical system and to reveal scenarios in linguistic consciousness. *Frames are understood here as structured knowledge configurations that motivate the meaning of a lexical*

unit by relating it to a broader scene of cultural and experiential knowledge (Petruck, 1996).

The third method is prototypical theory (Taylor, 2003). Prototypical analysis made it possible to determine the prototypical characteristics with which the “girl” image is marked in linguistic consciousness, and to identify its central (prototypical) and peripheral (marginal) variants. *This approach follows the view that linguistic categories are organized around graded degrees of membership rather than fixed, all-or-nothing boundaries (Taylor, 2003).* The analysis was based on folkloric and paremiological material.

The fourth method was a psycholinguistic experiment, specifically the free association test (FAT). The FAT procedure follows the classical associative paradigm, in which the structure of associative responses is treated as evidence of the underlying organization of verbal memory and conceptual knowledge (Deese, 1965). The experiment was conducted from March to May 2024 among students and faculty of four higher education institutions in Almaty (n=150; age 18–55; 80 female, 70 male). Respondents were presented with the stimulus “girl” and asked to write down the first five associations that came to mind. The data were processed using quantitative methods, including frequency and rank analysis, and qualitative semantic clustering. Associations were grouped into semantic categories, and differences between male and female respondents were tested using the chi-square test.

The fifth method is discourse analysis. *This method is informed by the critical discourse-analytic tradition, which views discourse as a social practice through which ideological meanings — including gendered representations — are produced and naturalized (Fairclough, 1995), as well as by the sociocognitive approach, which links discourse structures to underlying mental models and social cognition (van Dijk, 2008).* The representation of the “girl” concept in contemporary discourse was studied on the basis of gender-related broadcasts from the Balapan, Kazakhstan, and Khabar television channels from 2015 to 2025, as well as online media texts from Tengrinews.kz and Nur.kz. A total of more than 200 texts were analyzed, including 120 television segments and 80 online media articles. The media texts were selected by keyword search using the Kazakh equivalents of “girl,” “young woman,” “education,” “career,” “family,” and “success.” Texts were included if the “girl” image was represented as a central or recurrent semantic element. Repeated news items and purely information-

al reports without evaluative or conceptual content were excluded from the analysis. Ethical principles were observed in the study: participants voluntarily consented to take part, and the data were processed anonymously. To ensure the reliability of the research data, the principle of triangulation (combining different methods and data sources) was applied. *This follows the classical methodological rationale that combining multiple methods, data sources, and theoretical perspectives strengthens the validity of qualitative and mixed-methods research by cross-verifying findings across independent lines of evidence (Denzin, 1978).*

Literature review

The emergence of cognitive linguistics coincides with the 1970s–1980s. G. Lakoff and M. Johnson’s foundational work *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) was the first to systematically demonstrate that language is not merely a tool for communication but a way for humans to understand and perceive the world. Researchers demonstrated that linguistic metaphors reveal the deep cognitive map of our mind, scientifically establishing the inseparability of language and thought. This concept later became the methodological foundation of the conceptual semantics school. C. Fillmore (1982), by proposing the theory of frame semantics, demonstrated that the meanings of linguistic units are revealed not only at the lexical level but also in a broader socio-cognitive context—namely, through frames. He called a frame an organized system of linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge that enables the recognition of a particular concept. This theory later became a key tool for analyzing gender frames in gender studies.

It is appropriate to trace the theoretical foundations of gender linguistics to R. Lakoff’s work “Language and Woman’s Place” (Lakoff R., 1975). R. Lakoff demonstrated that there is a gender asymmetry within the language system, meaning that the ways women and men use language reflect social inequality. Later, J. Butler (1990) regarded gender not as a biologically given fact but as a performative phenomenon — that is, one shaped through language, action, and cultural practice. Butler’s concept of “gender performativity” provided the methodological foundation for the claim that “gender is performed in language” in linguistic research. The synthesis of these two fields — cognitive linguistics and gender studies — led to the emergence of the “gender cognitive linguistics” paradigm: it studies how gen-

der concepts are encoded in the mind, recognized through concepts, and represented in language.

The concept of “linguistic consciousness” was studied in greater depth in Russian psycholinguistics by A. A. Leontev and his school. Linguistic consciousness is a way of representing the world through linguistic signs and images; a set of mental content organized through language. Linguistic consciousness is studied through associative fields, conceptual networks, and cultural stereotypes. Y. D. Apresyan (1995), by developing the “image of man in language” theory, he demonstrated that in every language a unique, language-specific image of the world and of man – the “naïve picture of the world” is formed. The researcher substantiated with examples that this linguistic image can be recognized through lexicon, phraseology, paremiology, and discourse.

Concept theory is the core of modern cognitive linguistics. In cognitive linguistics, a concept is generally understood as a culturally and mentally structured unit of knowledge that is objectified in language through lexical meanings, phraseology, paremiology, metaphor, and discourse. The universal characteristics of a concept are its cognitive content, cultural determination, dynamic nature, and representation at different levels of language. The main methods for studying concepts include etymological, semantic, discursive, and psycholinguistic approaches. When this theoretical foundation is linked with the gender dimension, a gender concept can be understood as a cognitive pattern established in linguistic consciousness and shaped by cultural-historical experience.

Prototype theory (Rosch, 1978) explains the internal organization of categories and concepts. According to this approach, categories do not have fixed boundaries; rather, they include more central and more peripheral examples. This principle can also be applied to gender concepts: concepts such as “girl,” “woman,” and “mother” are organized around prototypical and peripheral features. For example, the prototype of the “mother” concept is usually associated with the biological mother, while a grandmother or sister who performs a maternal role may be located closer to the periphery.

In Kazakh linguistics, gender-oriented studies have developed mainly in connection with the analysis of femininity and masculinity, gender stereotypes, gender-marked lexical units, and the linguistic representation of social roles. Recent studies show that gender linguistics in Kazakh linguistics is increasingly focused on the interaction between

language, culture, social norms, and communicative behavior (Zhumagazyeva & Tusupbekova, 2025). The functioning of gender stereotypes in the Kazakh language has also been analyzed in relation to gender-colored vocabulary, phraseology, communicative culture, and the perception of masculinity and femininity in society (Igissinova et al., 2025). However, the cognitive, associative, and discourse-based mechanisms through which gender concepts are structured in Kazakh linguistic consciousness still require systematic investigation.

The study of the “girl” concept is closely related to broader research on female images in language, since the concepts of “girl,” “woman,” and “mother” are semantically interconnected in Kazakh linguistic consciousness. At the same time, the “girl” concept should be analyzed as an independent cognitive unit, because it has its own frame structure, prototypical features, associative field, and discourse representation.

Previous gender-oriented linguistic studies have shown that the representation of female images in language is closely connected with social norms, evaluative stereotypes, and culturally fixed role expectations. However, the cognitive mechanisms through which these representations are organized in Kazakh linguistic consciousness have not yet been sufficiently described. This gap makes it necessary to analyze the “girl” concept through a combination of cognitive, psycholinguistic, and discourse-based methods.

If we analyze the history of research on the concept of “girl” in linguistic consciousness, it becomes clear that, although various aspects of this topic have been examined individually, a comprehensive cognitive study is still lacking. In folklore studies and ethnolinguistics, the image of the “girl” has been extensively analyzed in folk tales, epics, and ritual songs. Researchers have determined that the “girl” image in folk literature embodies archetypes of beauty, wisdom, heroism, or dependence. For example, characters such as “Kyz Zhibek,” “Bayan Sulu,” and ‘Akzhunis’ each activate different slots of the “ideal girl” prototype in linguistic consciousness. Although these studies are important, they do not directly employ the apparatus of cognitive linguistics – such as category, frame, prototype, and conceptual metaphor.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, there are also studies that examine the meaning of the lexeme “girl” in the discourse of different social groups. In particular, it is observed that the word “қыз” is used with completely different meanings in modern youth

language (at the slang level), in formal discourse, and in religious discourse. However, there is still no work that systematically studies these differences at the cognitive-semantic and psycholinguistic levels. This gap defines the main scientific objective of this study.

In paremiological studies, the representation of the concept “girl” in proverbs and sayings has been analyzed as part of broader research on cultural norms, gender expectations, and value-based stereotypes. Proverbs such as “A girl grows up to be the adornment of the nation,” “From a girl comes your lineage,” and “Nurture a girl well – nurture your future” provide valuable material for constructing a cognitive map of the female image. At the same time, recent research on gender antiparities in the Kazakh language on Instagram shows that traditional paremias are being reinterpreted in digital communication and may acquire new pragmatic functions in contemporary discourse (Abdirov & Bibekov, 2024). Therefore, the paremiological material used in this study is important not only for reconstructing the traditional frame of the “girl” concept, but also for identifying its transformation in contemporary linguistic consciousness.

Studies in contemporary medilinguistics have only recently begun to focus on the transformation of the “girl” image in the digital environment. Social media, the gendered discourse of television channels, and the portrayal of the “girl” in advertising texts all actively influence linguistic consciousness, sometimes reinforcing and sometimes transforming traditional conceptual content. To investigate this, it is necessary to combine discourse analysis and cognitive semantics. This methodological synthesis is the main methodological innovation of this study.

In world linguistics, the study of female concepts has shown that words denoting women and girls are not limited to biological or age-related meanings. They also reflect social evaluation, cultural expectations, symbolic roles, and changing gender norms. Recent cognitive and psycholinguistic research demonstrates that gender stereotypes influence the interpretation and processing of words, phrases, discourse, professional roles, and gender identity (Beroiza-Valenzuela & Salas-Guzmán, 2025). Experimental studies also show that discourse context can immediately affect the processing of gender stereotypes during reading, which confirms the importance of analyzing gender concepts not only as lexical units, but also as discourse-dependent cognitive structures (Du & Zhang, 2023). This theoretical background is important for analyzing the Kazakh

“қыз” concept as a multilayered unit of linguistic consciousness.

In Turkic linguistic and cultural contexts, concepts related to women and girls are often associated with honor, purity, family continuity, and social responsibility. These semantic components make it possible to consider the Kazakh “қыз” concept not only as a gender marker, but also as a culturally significant cognitive unit.

Methodological approaches to the study of female concepts in cognitive linguistics increasingly emphasize the role of conceptual metaphors, evaluative meanings, and discourse practices. For the present study, this is especially important because the “girl” concept in Kazakh linguistic consciousness is analyzed not only as a lexical unit, but also as a cognitive and cultural model structured through metaphorical, associative, and discursive mechanisms.

Thus, the review of the literature leads to the following conclusion: cognitive linguistics, gender theory, and psycholinguistics have each developed independently and achieved significant results in the study of female concepts. However, there is still no work that has studied the “girl” concept in Kazakh linguistic consciousness by simultaneously combining these three paradigms with an integrative approach. This study is aimed at filling this methodological gap. The novelty of the study lies in integrating frame modeling, prototypical analysis, psycholinguistic experiments, and discourse analysis into a single methodological framework to comprehensively examine the representation of the “girl” concept in linguistic consciousness.

Results and discussion

The results of the study are presented in four analytical stages: frame modeling, prototypical analysis, psycholinguistic experiment, and media discourse analysis.

In the first phase of the study, a frame model of the concept “girl” was developed. According to C. Fillmore’s (1982) frame semantics methodology, a frame is an organized system of cognitive-cultural knowledge that ensures the recognition of a particular concept and its placement in context. Based on this principle, it was determined that the frame model of the concept “girl” consists of five main slots: existential slot, action slot, social status slot, axiological slot, and transformational slot. The final slot, the transformational slot, is used in this study to describe the expansion of the “girl” image in lin-

guistic consciousness through modern roles such as entrepreneur, scientist, and digital activist.

The being slot is the most stable, most historically dependent slot in the frame hierarchy of the “girl” concept. Its internal terminals are: honor, purity, modesty, humility, and respect for elders. In Kazakh paremiology, there are numerous units that reinforce the existential slot: Proverbs and sayings such as “A girl’s honor is the nation’s honor,” “A shameless girl is spoken ill of,” and “A well-bred girl is like the morning sun” program this slot in the linguistic consciousness from an early age (Aldaspanov, 2015). According to J. Butler’s conclusion (Butler, 1990), this programming is an act of linguistic performativity: each time the word “girl” is uttered, its norms of being are re-marked and reinforced.

The activity slot simultaneously encompasses traditional content – education, study, household chores – and modern content – professional activity,

scientific achievement, creativity. The coexistence of these two contents in linguistic consciousness creates a conceptual tension: While in the traditional frame “a good girl does housework,” in the modern frame the scenario “a good girl succeeds in her career” is gaining strength. The reflection of this tension in linguistic consciousness was also confirmed by the study’s main empirical data.

The social status slot positions the “girl” concept within the social system. In the traditional frame, the roles of “future spouse” and “future mother” are central: The proverbs “A girl grows up to be the country’s adornment” and “A good girl is a bright future” confirm this. In modern discourse, the roles of “citizen,” “entrepreneur,” and “scholar” are actively entering the social status slot. This process may be described as the semantic expansion of gender roles in contemporary Kazakh linguistic consciousness.

Table 1

Frame model of the “girl” concept

Slot	Sub-slot (Terminal)	Linguistic Examples (Paremia / Discourse)
Ontological Status / Being	Honor, purity, modesty, humility	<i>“A maiden’s honor is the nation’s honor”; «A shameless maiden finds no favor”</i>
Activity / Agency	Upbringing, education, labor, creativity, professional activity	<i>“An educated maiden yields an enlightened generation”; “A woman is the educator of the future”</i>
Social Status	Future spouse, mother, pillar of the family, member of society	<i>“A growing maiden is the pride of the nation”; “A virtuous maiden is a bright future”</i>
Axiological Evaluation	Beauty, wisdom, courage, spiritual strength	<i>“Beauty surpasses wealth”; Media: «Woman of the Year»</i>
Transformational Attribute	Entrepreneurship, science, politics, digital activity	<i>“STEM Girls”, “Female Startup Entrepreneur”, “IT Specialist”</i>

Note. The table was prepared by the authors

As shown in Table 1, the frame model of the “girl” concept consists of five slots, and the concrete confirmation of each slot with linguistic examples demonstrates that the concept is a complex, hierarchically organized cognitive structure in linguistic consciousness. The axiological evaluation slot is the slot that evaluates the concept, distinguishing it into norm and deviation. “Beautiful,” “sensible,” “brave,” “honorable” are the positive-pole evaluations; “shameful,” “ill-mannered,” “frivolous” are the values at the negative pole. In linguistic consciousness, these evaluations are firmly encoded and function as a linguistic tool of social control. The transformational slot is the newest, most dynamic part of the frame. It represents the “new girl” image,

which is not yet fully established in the linguistic consciousness but is actively expanding in media discourse and youth language.

According to E. Rosch’s prototypical theory (Rosch, 1978), categories have no clear boundaries and consist of central (prototypical) and peripheral (marginal) examples. Applying a prototypical analysis to the concept of “girl” revealed three semantic levels: the traditional prototype, the contemporary prototype, and the transformational prototype.

The traditional prototype is the historically grounded, culturally reinforced central image of the “girl” concept. Its parameters: young woman (pre-marital age), a socially subordinate position to her family, the role of guardian of honor, markers

of purity and modesty, and her prospect as a future wife and mother. The units that reinforce this prototype in the linguistic consciousness – proverbs, fairy tales, and epics are numerous, and their influence remains strong. The same pattern is observed in the concept of “girl”: in the traditional prototype, “girlishness” is coded as a transitional status before marriage and motherhood. The modern prototype does not completely reject traditional parameters, but adds new senses to them. The characteristics of the modern prototype are: educated, professionally active, with an independent stance, and materially independent. The main agent shaping this prototype in linguistic consciousness is media discourse: television programs, social media, and advertising texts. In modern Kazakh media discourse, the image of a woman is increasingly shifting toward a hybrid prototype that combines family roles with education, professional success, and social activity. This hybrid prototype remains conflicted in the linguistic consciousness: traditional norms and the modern image simultaneously compete in the linguistic consciousness.

Transformational prototype is the newest, still peripheral but rapidly growing level in linguistic consciousness. Its characteristics: a self-defining individual in terms of gender roles, an agent who thinks beyond the dichotomy of “woman” and “man,” a person who chooses a life script indepen-

dent of public opinion. The discourse that codes this prototype in linguistic consciousness is currently concentrated mainly in content for a young audience in digital spaces (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube). The linguistic determinants of the transformational prototype are discursive formulas such as: “I choose my own path,” “I can succeed in any profession,” and “My future is my rule.”

A key conclusion of the prototypical analysis is that in linguistic consciousness, these three levels coexist simultaneously and in parallel. They do not exclude one another; rather, different prototypes become dominant depending on age, social environment, and discourse type. This cognitive variability demonstrates the dynamic nature of the “girl” concept in linguistic consciousness.

The central empirical section of the study consists of an analysis of data from a psycholinguistic experiment, namely the free association test (FAT). The experiment was conducted from March to May 2024. Participants: 150 individuals (80 women, 70 men; ages 18-55; from four higher education institutions in Almaty). Respondents were given the stimulus word “girl” and asked to write down the first five associations that came to mind. A total of 750 responses were collected.

In processing the 750 responses, the 10 most frequent associations and their gender distribution were identified. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Most frequent associations to the “girl” stimulus and gender distribution

№	Association	Total Frequency (n=150)	Women (n=80)	Men (n=70)
1	Beautiful / Pretty	98	44	54
2	Purity / Chastity	91	52	39
3	Mother / Future Mother	87	41	46
4	Education / Learning	83	58	25
5	Youth / Young	79	35	44
6	Honor / Reputation	74	40	34
7	Profession / Career	61	49	12
8	Freedom / Independence	47	38	9
9	Family / Home	43	18	25
10	Brave / Resolute	38	32	6

Note. The table was prepared by the authors

The data in Table 2 reveal several important trends. First, “beautiful” was the most frequently given association (n = 98, 65.3%). This suggests

that the linguistic concept of “girl” remains closely associated with physical characteristics in respondents’ linguistic consciousness. Second, a signifi-

cant difference was observed in the gender breakdown: women provided the “education/studies” association 58 times, while men provided it only 25 times ($\chi^2=14.3$; $df=1$; $p<0.001$). This statistically significant difference indicates that female respondents more frequently code the “girl” image in terms of professional-educational aspects, while male respondents are inclined toward the physical and role-based (mother) aspect.

Third, the “freedom/independence” association was significantly higher among women (38 times); among male respondents, this association appeared only 9 times ($\chi^2=22.7$; $df=1$; $p<0.001$). These data suggest that associations linked to the transformational prototype of the “girl” concept are more frequent among female respondents, whereas traditional role-based associations remain more prominent among male respondents. The same pattern is observed in the concept of “girl”: female respondents more often associate it with subjectivity, education, profession, and independence, whereas male respondents more frequently connect it with physical appearance and traditional social roles.

As a result of the semantic classification of 750 responses, the following distribution was identified: axiological values (beauty, cleanliness, honor) – 34%; physical characteristics (age, beauty, delicacy) – 22%; role positions (mother, spouse, family) – 21%; activity indicators (education, profession, freedom) – 15%; emotional connotations (warmth, love, courage) – 8%. The dominance of the axiological group (34%) confirms that the ‘girl’ concept is primarily encoded in linguistic consciousness with evaluative, normative content. This shows that evaluative connotations function as an important linguistic mechanism for regulating the female image in linguistic consciousness.

The fourth section of the study analyzed the representation of the “girl” concept in modern media discourse. Sources: gender-themed broadcasts from the “Balapan,” “Kazakhstan,” and “Khabar” television channels from 2015–2025. (n=120 segments) and online media texts – Tengrinews.kz, Nur.kz (n=80 articles). In total, more than 200 texts were analyzed. The discourse analysis employed the method of identifying lexical-semantic and conceptual patterns.

Table 3

Dynamics of the “girl” concept in media discourse by semantic groups (2015–2025)

Semantic Group	2015–2019 (%)	2020–2025 (%)	Dynamics / Trend
Family / Maternal Role	41%	24%	↓ –17%
Professional Success	18%	35%	↑ +17%
Education / Science	14%	22%	↑ +8%
Beauty / Image	19%	12%	↓ –7%
Social Activity	8%	7%	→ stable

Note. The table was prepared by the authors

The data in Table 3 indicate that the representation of the “girl” concept in media discourse changed noticeably between 2015 and 2025. The “family/maternal role” category decreased from 41% to 24% (–17%). The “Professional achievement” category rose from 18% to 35% (+17%). The “Education/Science” category also increased by 8 percentage points. These changes are not coincidental: they reflect the growing influence of educational, professional, and gender-equality discourses in contemporary Kazakh society. However, the fact that the “family/maternal role” category still accounts for a significant share (24%) suggests that the

traditional prototype remains influential in linguistic consciousness.

The lexical-semantic analysis of media texts showed that the key lexemes associated with the “girl” concept have also changed. In texts from 2015–2019, the most frequently associated lexemes with the “girl” concept were: “well-mannered” (58%), “modest” (47%), ‘beautiful’ (44%), and “future mother” (39%). In texts from 2020–2025, the most frequently associated lexemes are: “educated” (61%), “professional” (53%), ‘successful’ (49%), and “brave” (42%). This semantic shift suggests that media discourse contributes to the reconfiguration

of the associative field of the “girl” concept in contemporary linguistic consciousness.

Another important conclusion of discourse analysis: The ratio of the frequency of use of “girl” as a subject (as an agent performing an action) and as an object (as something described or evaluated) in media texts changed significantly in 2020–2025. While in texts from 2015–2019 “girl” was used as an object (74%) and a subject (26%) much more frequently, in texts from 2020–2025, its use as a subject increased to 48%. This finding is consistent with recent psycholinguistic research showing that discourse context can modify the processing of gender stereotypes and weaken the effect of traditional role expectations in language comprehension (Du & Zhang, 2023).

According to the theory of conceptual metaphor by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), abstract concepts are encoded through a concrete source domain. Several dominant metaphorical models were identified in the linguistic consciousness regarding the concept of “girl.”

The “girl-as-flower” metaphor was the most frequently occurring metaphorical model: “a girl in full bloom,” “a flower that hasn’t yet grown,” “a flower in need of care.” This metaphor links the essence of “girl” with delicacy and beauty, but also with ‘immaturity’ and “needing protection.” The gender-cognitive significance of this metaphorical encoding is clear: the flower’s fruitfulness is associated with the mother, its beauty with the wife, and its delicacy with a lack of independence. The “GIRL IS A STAR” metaphor is actively growing in contemporary discourse: “shining star,” “find your star,” “shine like a star.” This metaphor adapts the “girl” image to shining, success, and standing on one’s own – that is, it enriches it with the semantic features of subjectivity and social recognition.

The “GIRL IS THE FUTURE” metaphor is frequently encountered in state discourse and in the education sector: “Our girls are the pillars of the future,” “Every girl’s education is the future of the nation.” In this metaphor, “girl” is conceptualized not as an individual, but as the symbolic capital of the nation. On the one hand, equating this image of the “girl” with the nation emphasizes her spiritual and cultural significance; on the other hand, its association with the not-yet-mature connotation of the ‘future’ sememe suggests that the ‘girl’ is not yet coded as a ‘complete’ being. All three metaphorical models suggest that the concept of “girl” is closely linked in linguistic consciousness with axiological

evaluations, role positions, and future perspectives, while new metaphorical models are also emerging (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

All the data from the study – the frame model, the prototypical analysis, psycholinguistic experimental results, discourse analysis, and analysis of metaphorical encoding – when taken together, allow us to make the following comprehensive conclusion about the representation of the “girl” concept in Kazakh linguistic consciousness.

First, the “girl” concept functions in linguistic consciousness as a hierarchically organized cognitive structure. Its core content – honor, purity, and the maternal perspective is historically stable and firmly preserved; however, its peripheral content – professional activity, freedom, transformative roles is rapidly expanding. This corresponds to the “independent core–dynamic periphery” model in linguistic consciousness.

Secondly, the representation of the concept “girl” in linguistic consciousness is gender-differentiated: female linguistic consciousness codes the concept more frequently in subjective, professional, and transformational dimensions, while male linguistic consciousness codes it in axiological and role-related dimensions (mother, spouse). This difference suggests that gendered social experience may influence the associative representation of the “girl” concept in linguistic consciousness.

Third, the influence of the media discourse’s concept of “girl” on linguistic consciousness has grown significantly over the past ten years: the growth of associative subjectivity, the increase in professional achievement, the emergence of new models of metaphorical encoding – all of these indicate that the transformational prototype has begun to come to the forefront in linguistic consciousness.

Fourth, the empirical data of this study are consistent with J. Butler’s (1990) concept of gender performativity, since the “girl” concept is updated, reinforced, and transformed through repeated linguistic practices in media, education, and family discourse. This makes it possible to describe the “girl” concept as a changing cognitive pattern in Kazakh linguistic consciousness.

Regarding the study’s limitations, the experimental data were limited to the city of Almaty; therefore, a future comparative analysis of rural and urban linguistic consciousness may yield meaningful results. Additionally, it is promising to separately study the encoding features of the “girl” concept in the youth and middle-aged groups.

Conclusion

This study was devoted to a comprehensive examination of the representation of the concept “girl” in Kazakh linguistic consciousness within the paradigm of gender cognitive linguistics. This study systematically applies an integrative approach that combines frame modeling, prototypical analysis, a psycholinguistic experiment, and discourse analysis within a single methodological system. The results obtained made it possible to formulate several key conclusions.

The first conclusion is that, in Kazakh linguistic consciousness, the “girl” concept is not a fixed one-dimensional unit, but a multilayered cognitive structure whose content combines stable and changing components. As a result of frame-based modeling, a five-slot hierarchy of the concept was identified – being, activity, social status, axiological evaluation, and transformational marker. According to Fillmore’s (1982) frame semantics, each slot was supported by linguistic examples, which made it possible to describe the organization of the concept in linguistic consciousness.

Second proposition: The representation of the concept “girl” in linguistic consciousness is realized simultaneously at three prototypical levels – traditional, modern, and transformational. According to E. Rosch’s prototypical theory (Rosch, 1978), none of these levels completely eliminates the others; in the linguistic consciousness their proportions shift depending on the context of use, the speaker’s cohort, and the type of discourse. This “cognitive variability” is the main reason for the particularly dynamic nature of the “girl” concept in the linguistic consciousness. The practical significance of prototypical analysis is that it can explain why gender norms in linguistic consciousness are simultaneously stable and changeable.

The third finding is that the data from the psycholinguistic experiment (n=150) indicate statistically significant gender differences in the associative representation of the “girl” concept ($p < 0.001$). Female respondents more often coded the “girl” image in professional-educational and subjective dimensions, while male respondents more often coded it in terms of physical characteristics and traditional role dimensions (mother, spouse). The empirical data of this study show that linguistic consciousness is shaped by gendered social experience and that this relationship can be supported by concrete quantitative evidence.

The fourth conclusion concerns the changing representation of the “girl” concept in media dis-

course between 2015 and 2025. The results of the discourse analysis show that “professional success” and “education/science” semantic groups in media texts increased by 17 and 8 percentage points, respectively, while the “family/maternal role” group decreased by 17 percentage points. These findings suggest that media discourse is one of the factors contributing to the transformation of the “girl” concept from an object of description and evaluation into a more active subject position.

Fifth conclusion: The conceptual metaphors associated with the “girl” concept – “GIRL IS A FLOWER,” “GIRL IS A STAR,” “GIRL IS THE FUTURE” – activate various gender-cognitive programs in the linguistic consciousness. According to G. Lakoff and M. Johnson’s theory of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), metaphors reflect culturally shaped ways of conceptualizing experience. The strength of the “GIRL IS A FLOWER” metaphor correlates directly with the traditional prototype, while the rise of the “GIRL IS A STAR” metaphor correlates with the transformational prototype. This metaphorical shift can be considered a concrete linguistic indicator of gender transformation in linguistic consciousness.

The scientific contribution of the study is determined on several levels. At the theoretical level, the gendered cognitive linguistics paradigm is applied to the analysis of Kazakh linguistic consciousness, and a methodological model for the comprehensive study of the “girl” concept is proposed. The methodological novelty of this study lies in combining gender-oriented linguistic analysis with cognitive frame modeling, prototypical analysis, a psycholinguistic experiment, and discourse analysis. This approach is consistent with recent studies emphasizing the interaction between gender stereotypes, language processing, discourse context, and communicative culture (Beroíza-Valenzuela & Salas-Guzmán, 2025; Du & Zhang, 2023; Igissinova et al., 2025). At the empirical level, a psycholinguistic experiment involving 150 respondents and a discourse analysis of over 200 media texts have established a concrete database for further gender research in Kazakh linguistics.

In terms of practical significance, the research findings can be used as material in the “Cognitive Linguistics,” “Gender Linguistics,” and “Psycholinguistics” courses at higher education institutions. Additionally, the research data can be used as a lexicographic starting material for creating an associative dictionary of the Kazakh language and for developing a dictionary of gender concepts. The

results of the discourse analysis can also provide a practical basis for developing gender equality standards in the media.

There are several promising directions for future research. First, a comparative analysis of the concepts “girl,” “boy,” “woman,” and “man” within a single study could provide a complete picture of the gender matrix in Kazakh linguistic consciousness. Secondly, a comparative study of the linguistic consciousness of Almaty, Astana, and rural areas could reveal socio-geographical differentiation. Third, the discursive representation of the concept of “girl” in digital spaces – social media, TikTok, YouTube – is a particularly important direction in research on the impact on the language consciousness of the younger generation. Thus, the representation of the “girl”

concept in linguistic consciousness remains a promising research area that requires further comparative, sociolinguistic, and discourse-based investigation.

Conflict of interests

The article contains no conflicts of interest.

Contribution of the authors

N. Zhangabayeva and G. Apeyeva were responsible for defining the research objectives and tasks, designing the methodology, collecting data, and analyzing the collected materials. G. Seidullayeva and Y. Yemberdiev were responsible for research planning, verification of the collected metadata, and validation of the analysis.

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