EMOTION, ETHNICITY, AND LANGUAGE: AN ASSOCIATIVE STUDY OF A NATIONAL CONCEPT

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the concept of qoŋyr as a culturally marked linguistic phenomenon in Kazakh linguoculture, a term which frequently appears to express culturally specific emotions and ethnicity in Kazakh poetry, music, folklore, and everyday discourse, making it a core component of national symbolic thought. Using the semantic differential method, data were collected from 108 native Kazakh speakers via an online survey. Participants assessed the associative strength of qoŋyr with various concepts across 16 thematic fields (e.g., nature, emotions, moral traits). Statistical analysis using Jamovi revealed key associations with words such as küz (autumn), topyraq (soil), dombra (musical instrument), momyn (meek), and Qazaq (Kazakh), indicating its deep integration in national cognition. The findings demonstrate that the concept qoŋyr in Kazakh linguoculture functions not merely as a color term, but as a culturally rich conceptual symbol embodying values such as modesty, harmony, spiritual depth, and connection to nature. The experimental results also revealed strong semantic links between qoŋyr and such domains as nature (soil, breeze, autumn), emotions (sadness, nostalgia), personality traits (meekness, simplicity), and national identity (Kazakh, dombra). This study represents a step toward a deeper understanding of language as a tool for preserving and transmitting cultural meanings. The results also have deep implications for ethnolinguistic research, intercultural communication, and Kazakh language education.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the field of humanities has increasingly embraced interdisciplinary perspectives, leading to a reconceptualization of language as more than just a communicative tool (Siregar, 2025). Scholars now emphasize its role as a mirror of national consciousness, mentality, and cultural worldview (Allan et al., 2017; Hartono et al., 2021; Prikhodko, 2013; Tektigul et al., 2023). Within the language paradigm, special significance is attributed to the study of concepts–mental structures that integrate both linguistic and cultural knowledge (Danesi, 2017; Karasik, 2002). From a linguistic standpoint, a concept is recognized as a fundamental unit of consciousness that encapsulates the cumulative results of human experience, emotional perception, and cultural legacy (Khujamberdiyeva, 2024; Ruzibaeva, 2021). As such, concepts represent points of intersection between language, cognition, and culture. A salient example of such a culturally embedded concept in Kazakh linguoculture is the term *qoŋyr*. Although it originally denotes a soft, earthy shade of brown, its semantic scope in the Kazakh worldview extends far beyond chromatic designation. It embodies national memory, ethnic identity, and the values of a traditional nomadic lifestyle shaped by environmental conditions and historical experience. The word evokes a spectrum of emotional states–calmness, gentle melancholy, balance, nostalgia, and spiritual connection to nature–which are deeply embedded in the Kazakh linguistic and cultural fabric.

The term *qoŋyr* frequently appears in fixed expressions such as *qoŋyr* kesh ("tranquil evening"), *qoŋyr* kuz ("quiet autumn"), *qoŋyr* un ("gentle voice"), and *qoŋyr* zhel ("soft breeze"), illustrating how language encodes culturally specific emotions and associations. Its semantic richness is reflected in Kazakh poetry, music, folklore, and everyday discourse, making it a core component of national symbolic thought. The conceptual study of *qoŋyr* is motivated by a broader interest in understanding how ethnocultural factors influence perception and cognition. Since language serves as both a product and a medium of culture, analyzing key concepts can illuminate the dynamic relationship between individual consciousness and collective identity. Conceptual analysis also facilitates the reconstruction of the national linguistic worldview, contributing to fields such as cognitive linguistic and cultural anthropology.

Despite existing research on color terminology in Kazakh (Abdramanova, 2017; Aitova, 2006; Akasheva et al., 2025), the word *qoŋyr* has not been extensively investigated as a distinct, multifaceted concept. These studies have largely approached it through poetic, symbolic, or lexical frameworks, recommending cognitive paradigms for a more nuanced and data-driven exploration of its associative field (Ruzibaeva, 2021). However, despite such advances, the concept of *qoŋyr* has rarely been the focus of quantitative or experimental linguistic inquiry. Most existing works remain descriptive or symbolic in nature. This creates a research gap, which the present study seeks to address through a statistically grounded associative analysis. This gap was also addressed by applying experimental and statistical methods–most notably the semantic differential technique–to examine the strength of associative links between *qoŋyr* and a variety of culturally relevant concepts (e.g., nature, personality traits, emotions, time, animals, numbers, and music). This methodology allows for an objective quantification of collective perceptions and offers a detailed cognitive map of *qoŋyr* in the minds of Kazakh speakers, thereby revealing its semantic dominants and underlying cultural significance.

A distinctive feature of this research is that it goes beyond traditional linguistic interpretation, incorporating elements of psycholinguistics, ethnolinguistics, and statistical analysis. This enables both qualitative and quantitative assessment of the significance of the *qoŋyr* concept in Kazakh national consciousness. The theoretical underpinning of the research is grounded in the principles of cognitive linguistics (Fowler, 2022; Karasik, 2002; Medvedeva et al., 2011), conceptual analysis (Likhachev, 1991; Wierzbicka, 1992), and ethnolinguistics (Toshpo'latova, 2024), which view concepts as intersections of language, culture, and thought. As a result, the study identified the strongest associative connections, highlighting the deep embeddedness of this word in various layers of Kazakh linguoculture.

The concept of *qoŋyr* emerges as a distinct linguocultural marker of the Kazakh nation, reflecting its mentality, worldview, and core values. Its study is not only of academic interest but also of cultural significance, allowing modern researchers to access the deepest layers of national consciousness through the lens of a seemingly simple word. This study also aims to integrate psycholinguistic and ethnolinguistic approaches with quantitative analysis in order to reveal how a single lexical unit reflects a broader system of cultural meanings and values. The main objective of this study, therefore, was to examine the associative field and conceptual significance of the word *qoŋyr* in Kazakh linguoculture using experimental-statistical methods. Accordingly, the

study was guided by the following research questions: (1) What conceptual domains are most strongly associated with *qoŋyr* in the minds of native Kazakh speakers? (2) How does *qoŋyr* function as a linguocultural marker in the context of Kazakh national identity?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study of the concept *qoŋyr* requires an interdisciplinary approach that spans cognitive linguistics, ethnolinguistics, semiotics, linguoculturology, and the philosophy of language. Although *qoŋyr* may appear to be a commonplace and neutral color term, in the Kazakh linguistic, it plays a special role: it serves as an ethnocultural marker, an archetypal symbol, and a means of expressing national perceptions of the world. Makukhina (2025) conducted age-based associative testing for color terms in Kazakh, while Aitova (2006) explored high-association lexemes to identify their role in cultural cognition and language education. In recent years, several empirical studies have employed associative experiments and semantic differential techniques to investigate conceptual structures in Turkic and other languages (Akasheva et al., 2025; Khussainova et al., 2024; Nabidullin & Kokanova, 2023; Pansat & Khalikova, 2023). These studies provide valuable methodological frameworks and demonstrate how experimental tools can reveal deeper meanings behind culturally significant words.

In linguistics, significant insights into this concept have come from studies focused on the semantics of color terms. These studies reveal that, in Turkic languages, color designations often convey not only visual characteristics but also complex associative, axiological, and emotional meanings. In Kazakh, the word *qoŋyr* is associated with warmth, softness, stability, and naturalness. It lacks sharpness or extremes– instead, it symbolizes moderation and harmony, aligning with the philosophy of the nomad, for whom stability and adaptation to the natural cycle are essential for survival.

Historical and ethnographic analysis (Tleuberdiev et al., 2014) shows that *qoŋyr* is deeply embedded in the structure of traditional Kazakh culture. It appears in proverbs, sayings, folklore texts, and especially in poetic and musical works (Iskakova et al., 2022; Yermekbayeva & Alimkhan, 2024). In traditional songs, for example, *qoŋyr* äuen (melody) conveys shades of melancholy and inner tranquility, while in the titles of küy compositions such as *qoŋyr* küy or *qoŋyr* qaz, it emphasizes a connection with nature, nostalgia, and spiritual depth. Folkloric analysis

confirms that *qoŋyr* functions not merely as a color descriptor but as an indicator of a particular state of the world and of humans within it (Akhmetov, 2015; Golda et al., 2022).

In the context of cognitive linguistics, *qoŋyr* is of interest as an image-laden, emotionally charged, and value-oriented element of the Kazakh conceptual sphere (Ruzibaeva, 2021). Its semantic fields encompass categories such as time (kesh, küz), space (zher, tau), sensations (sağynysh, tynystyq), personality traits (momyn, qarapayım), social identity (Qazaq, tektilik), and even the sacred (qasiet, ruq). This multidimensionality makes *qoŋyr* an archetypal notion at the core of national consciousness. From a linguo-culturological perspective, studying the concept *qoŋyr* allows the identification of stable cultural codes that reflect the Kazakh way of perceiving and organizing the world (Dave, 1996). For instance, the concept is closely linked to traditional categories such as qarapayımdylyq (simplicity), tektilik (nobility), and qudaidyn maly (sacred animal), each of which reveals deep meanings of national ethics and aesthetics. In these contexts, *qoŋyr* represents not merely modesty as a social norm, but a lifestyle founded on reverence for nature, elders, the land, silence, and balance.

Special attention in literature is given to the metaphorical potential of lexical items (Akhmetov, 2015; Erbulatova et al., 2022). In the current context, metaphors based on *qoŋyr* are widespread in both literary texts and colloquial speech: *qoŋyr* dauys (gentle voice), *qoŋyr* küz (autumn of life), *qoŋyr* tirshilik (peaceful existence). In these expressions, *qoŋyr* functions as a means of semiotic transformation from a physical phenomenon (color) into a socio-cultural and philosophical category (Hidaka, 2024; Mekhrojovna & Tolibjonovna, 2025). This transformation is possible due to the deep rootedness of *qoŋyr* in the collective unconscious of the Kazakh people. Additionally, the significance of *qoŋyr* is also seen in the formation of gender and age-based associations. In folk poetry and songs, this color is most frequently associated with the image of a mother, grandmother, or elder – symbols of femininity, maturity, warmth, and care. It is also linked with old age as a period of wisdom, tranquility, and reconciliation (Iskakova et al., 2022). Thus, *qoŋyr* symbolizes not so much a physical characteristic as a comprehensive life philosophy based on serenity, constancy, and deep acceptance of existence.

Psycholinguistic research (Aitova, 2006) emphasizes the importance of words with high associative saturation for the development of national self-awareness. In this context, the concept

of *qoŋyr* can be used in language education as a tool for introducing learners to their native culture through language. By analyzing metaphors and fixed expressions involving this word, students grasp not only vocabulary but also the value structure of their heritage. This is particularly important in the context of globalization, where preserving national identity becomes a key goal of education. Ethnolinguistic analysis (Toshpo'latova, 2024) shows that the perception of *qoŋyr* is not arbitrary: it is rooted in stable forms of cultural memory transmitted across generations. These memory forms may be verbal (proverbs, folklore) or nonverbal (melodies, rituals, customs). Even in the architecture and interior design of traditional Kazakh dwellings (kiiz üi), *qoŋyr* tones prevail, symbolizing comfort, protection, and stability. In this regard, *qoŋyr* may be described as a cultural quantum– simultaneously visual, auditory, emotional, and semantic.

While these contributions have deepened our understanding of cultural meanings, they primarily adopt a descriptive or interpretive approach. Few studies apply empirical or experimental methods to investigate the cognitive structure of such concepts among native speakers. This creates an opportunity to apply associative and statistical techniques to capture the living semantic field of *qoŋyr* in modern usage.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study draws upon three frameworks:

- Cognitive linguistics (Ismatullaeva, 2022; Lakoff & Johnson, 2008): which emphasizes conceptual metaphors and embodied meaning;
- Ethnolinguistics (Karasik, 2002; Toshpo'latova, 2024) which explores how language encodes cultural identity;
- Semantic differential method (Osgood, 1964): used here to quantify participants' emotional and cultural evaluations of the word *qoŋyr*.

This combination of cultural, cognitive, and quantitative approaches allows for a deeper understanding of how *qoŋyr* operates not only as a word, but as a cultural and emotional symbol in Kazakh linguoculture.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study utilized a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative analysis with cognitive-linguistic interpretation. It aimed to identify the semantic and cultural dimensions of the concept *qoŋyr* through statistical measurement and conceptual mapping. The central research hypothesis assumed that *qoŋyr* is perceived by native speakers as a culturally saturated concept with high associative potential.

3.2. Sampling and Population

The research involved 108 native speakers of Kazakh, with an average age of 20–21 years. Participants came from various professional backgrounds including education, journalism, psychology, IT, and engineering. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, ensuring demographic diversity.

3.3. Instrument and Procedure

The data collection tool was an online questionnaire developed in Google Forms, which presented participants with a list of 60 words across 16 semantic domains. Respondents were instructed to rate the degree of association between each word and the concept *qoŋyr* using a 10-point semantic differential scale (1 = no association, 10 = strong association). There were no restrictions on age, gender, or social status for participation.

3.4. Data Analysis

The collected data was processed and analyzed using the Jamovi software. Descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation, standard error) were calculated for each concept. Graphs and tables were used to visualize the strength of associations. The statistical results provided an empirical basis for interpreting the cultural and emotional resonance of *qoŋyr* in the Kazakh mindset.

4. RESULTS

This experimental study involved the evaluation of associative strength between the concept *qoŋyr* and various culturally significant thematic categories namely nature-related concepts, natural phenomena, birds, animals, seasons, time of day, personality traits, emotions, parts of the human body, age categories, numbers, artistic forms, musical instruments, lifestyle-related concepts, moral traits, and national identity. The results in this section present the descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation, and standard error) for each of these 16 thematic groups based on the responses of 108 native Kazakh speakers. The following subsections reveal lexical-associative connections of these 16 thematic categories.

4.1. Nature-Related Concepts

The strongest association between *qoŋyr* and natural concepts was found with the word soil

(topyraq): mean = 7.25, SD = 3.13. This was followed by tree (ağaş, mean = 5.44, SD = 3.14) and mountain (tau, mean = 5.00, SD = 3.12). In contrast, the word leaf had the weakest association with *qoŋyr* (mean = 3.02, SD = 2.82) (see Figure 1).
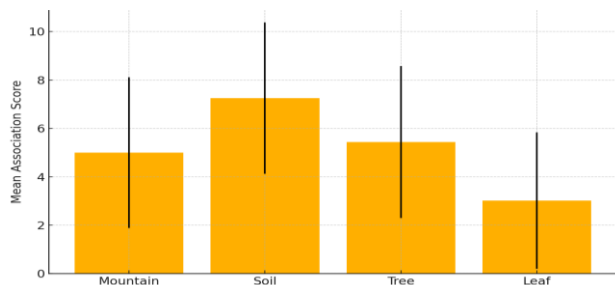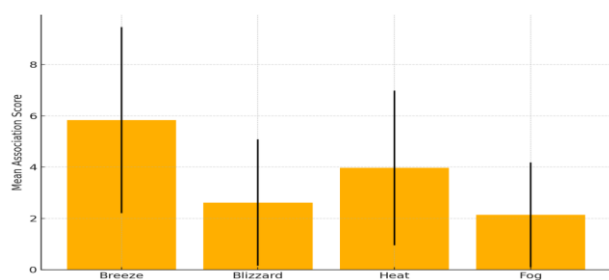

Figure 1: Descriptive Statistics for Nature-Related Concepts.

These associations align with the instinctive perceptions of color. According to Turkologist Kormushin (2001), the ancient Turkic term jayyz, now preserved only in Turkish, was used in old texts as a stable color epithet for earth or the color of horses. He suggests that *qoŋyr* may have etymologically derived from this root meaning.

4.2. Natural Phenomena

In Kazakh, *qoŋyr* is often used as an attribute describing nature, time, and environmental features (e.g., *qoŋyr* zhel – gentle breeze, *qoŋyr* kuz – mild autumn, *qoŋyr* kesh – tranquil evening). The phrase *qoŋyr* zhel refers to a soft and even wind. This understanding is reflected in the results, with breeze receiving the highest association (mean = 5.84, SD = 3.63). The other terms showed weaker associations: heat (mean = 3.97), blizzard (mean = 2.62), and fog (mean = 2.14) (see Figure 2).
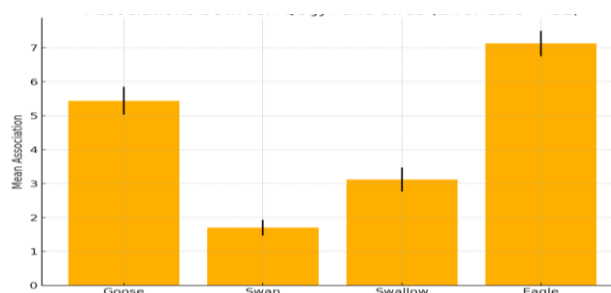

Figure 2: Descriptive Statistics for Natural Phenomena.

4.3. Birds

From descriptive statistics, we observe that the response "qyran" (golden eagle) shows the strongest associative connection: mean – 7.13, SD – 3.30. The golden eagle, soaring high in the sky and depicted on the national flag of Kazakhstan, is held in special regard by the Kazakh people. In the worldview of the nation, the eagle symbolizes noble qualities such as power and vigilance, bravery and agility, determination and generosity, magnanimity and nobility. In second place is the response "qaz" (goose): mean – 5.44, SD – 3.50. One of the waterfowl species inhabiting rivers and lakes in Kazakhstan is the wild goose of brown color, commonly referred to as the "*qoŋyr* qaz" (brown goose).

Furthermore, there exists a popular traditional kui (instrumental composition) titled "*qoŋyr* qaz" which is based on a legend about this noble bird. Therefore, the relatively high association between "қаз" and the color brown is not coincidental. Meanwhile, the responses "qarlugash" (swallow) – mean 3.12, SD 2.69 – and "aqqu" (swan) – mean 1.70, SD 1.70 – show a very weak degree of association with the word *qoŋyr* Figure 3. The results of the experiment also suggest that all these characteristics are closely linked to the color *qoŋyr* (brown), which resonates deeply with the Kazakh spirit.

Figure 3: Descriptive Statistics for Bird-Related Concepts

4.5. Animals

When associating the word *qoŋyr* (brown) with animal-related concepts, respondents gave the highest rating to the response "ayu" (bear): mean – 7.45, SD – 3.29 (see Figure 4). This may reflect a color-based perception associated with the natural appearance of the bear. The second and third highest responses were "bugy" (deer) – mean 7.29, SD – 2.98, and "elik" (roe deer) – mean 6.59, SD – 3.04. In Kazakh tradition, herbivorous and non-predatory wild animals are commonly referred to as *qoŋyr* aŋ (brown game animals). According to mythological beliefs, animals such as deer, argali (mountain sheep), roe deer, and mountain goats are considered sacred. It was believed that the spirit of a deceased person could reincarnate into one of these animals, and thus they were regarded as sacred beings or "God's creatures." Out of reverence, even hunters and marksmen refrained from harming them (Akhmetov, 2015).

Referring to the etymology of the word *qoŋyr,* there appears a folk line "Qoy suyedi balasyn «*qoŋyrym*» dep" ("The sheep adores its offspring, calling it '*qoŋyr*'") and notes the semantic proximity of the words *qoŋyr*, *qozy* (lamb), and *qoshaqan* (young sheep). This connection helps explain why the gentleness of the sheep has become associated with the meaning of *qoŋyr* as "meek" or "docile." According to our survey, however, the sheep (qoy) ranked last in terms of its associative connection with the word *qoŋyr*: mean – 6.22, SD – 3.37 Figure 4
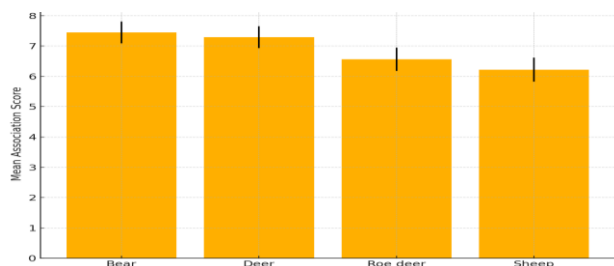
Figure 4: Descriptive Statistics for Animal-Related Concepts.

4.6. Seasons

The word *qoŋyr* (brown) is associated with temporal concepts such as seasons, periods, months, and weeks, indicating a direct connection with nature (Kenesbaev, 1977). In the autumn season, natural phenomena become particularly distinct: as leaves turn yellow and fall to the ground, they form what resembles a brown carpet; fruits and vegetables that ripen in autumn often display shades of brown. Thus, the various tones of brown contribute to the cozy and serene atmosphere of autumnal nature. The expression *qoŋyr kuz* ("brown autumn") itself refers to the early phase of autumn – mild, dry, and calm, without cold or rainfall– distinguishing it from the harsher late autumn (qara kuz). This may explain why autumn is most strongly associated with the color brown in the human mind.
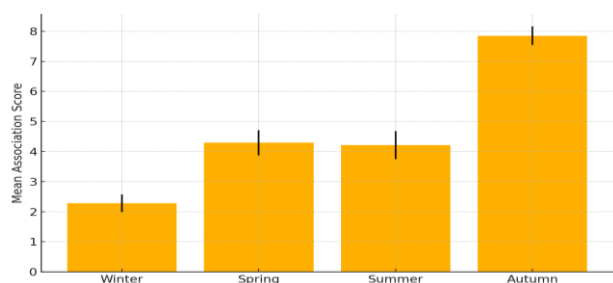

Figure 5: Descriptive Statistics for Season-Related Concepts.

In our survey as well, respondents rated the connection between the word *qoŋyr* and the concept

of time highest for the response "kuz" (autumn): mean – 7.85, SD – 2.98. The associative impact of the remaining three options was significantly lower. Specifically, the response to "koktem" (spring) had a mean of 4.29, SD – 3.20; to "zhaz" (summer) – it was mean 4.21, SD – 3.39; and to "qys" (winter) – it was mean 2.28, SD – 2.19 Figure 5.

4.7. Time of Day

According to the Phraseological Dictionary of the Kazakh Language (Kenesbaev, 1977), the moment when dusk begins to fall– when the evening shadows slowly appear– is referred to as *qoŋyr* кеш ("brown evening"). This phrase evokes an image of a calm and peaceful evening: the sun has just set, twilight is descending, and a gentle, cool breeze is blowing. Therefore, it is natural that, when analyzing the association of the word *qoŋyr* with temporal concepts, the response "кesh" (evening) holds the strongest associative meaning. This is clearly reflected in the data: mean – 6.93, SD – 3.35.

In contrast, other time-related responses demonstrated much weaker associations with the word *qoŋyr*: "tun" (night), when darkness fully sets in, had a mean of 3.75, SD – 3.37; "tus" (noon), the peak of daylight, showed a mean of 3.32, SD – 2.81; and "taŋ" (dawn), the time of sunrise, had the weakest result: mean – 2.37, SD – 2.17 Figure 6. Respondents thus perceived these three temporal references as having very low associative relevance to the word *qoŋyr*.
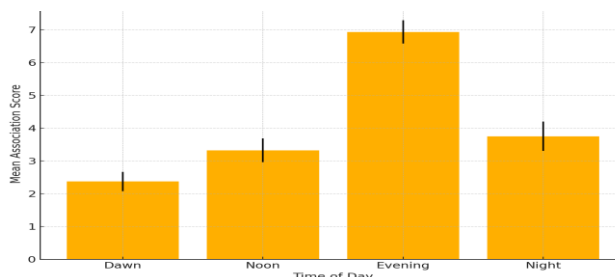

Figure 6: Descriptive Statistics for Time-of-Day Concepts.

4.8. Personality Traits

As previously noted, there is a scholarly view that the words *qoŋyr* (brown) and qozy (lamb) are semantically related in the context of etymology (Kenesbaev, 1977). From this perspective, the gentle and docile nature of the sheep may have contributed to the word *qoŋyr* being associated with meekness. This connection is also evident in the participants' evaluations: when associating *qoŋyr* with personality traits, the response "momyn" (meek/gentle) received the highest score – mean 7.17, SD 3.34. The

meaning of *qoŋyr* as "meek," reflecting Kazakh identity, seems to reinforce the idea that this color is emotionally and culturally close to the Kazakh spirit.

The second most selected response was "batyl" (brave): mean 4.34, SD 3.44, followed by the response for "shiraq" (agile/energetic): mean 2.65, SD 2.62. The weakest associative response was "qorqaq" (cowardly): mean: 2.61, SD: 2.45 Figure 7. This distribution of answers highlights a clear contrast between opposing character traits. Accordingly, responses expressing traits contrary to meekness received the lowest scores.
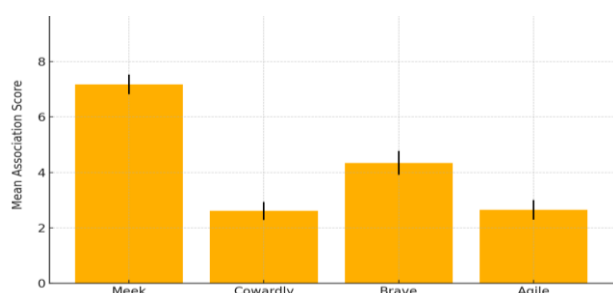

Figure 7: Descriptive Statistics for Personality Trait Associations.

4.9. Emotions

The various shades of the color *qoŋyr* (brown) often evoke negative emotions and are associated in human consciousness with feelings such as sorrow and grief, melancholy and despair, longing and nostalgia. For instance, in literary works, the frequent use of the color brown in descriptions may be linked to the presence of tragic events. In such contexts, *qoŋyr* serves as a complex and multifaceted symbol: beyond expressing sadness, it can also convey a sense of nostalgia for the past, exhaustion, emptiness, and abandonment. Through these emotional associations, the color brown can immerse readers in deep reflection and emotional resonance.
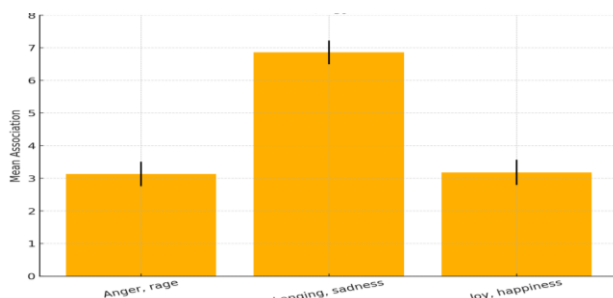

Figure 8: Descriptive Statistics for Emotion-Related Concepts.

The influence of *qoŋyr* on emotional states – particularly its association with sadness and longing – is further supported by the results of our survey:

respondents gave the highest score to this association, with a mean of 6.86 and a standard deviation of 3.39. The response to "ashu, yza" (anger, rage) ranked second (mean – 3.13, SD – 2.93), while the opposing concepts – "quanysh, baqyt" (joy, happiness)– were perceived as having a very weak association with the color brown (mean – 3.18, SD – 2.93) Figure 8.

4.10. Parts of the Human Body

Globally, approximately 79% of the human population has brown eyes. The majority of the Kazakh ethnic group also shares this trait. Such facts likely influence the strong associative link between the word *qoŋyr* (brown) and the concept of eyes. This connection is supported by the results of our experiment: when asked to associate *qoŋyr* with human body parts, respondents rated the response "koz" (eye) the highest–mean of 7.41, SD of 3.45.

The Abak symbol system (Koshymova & Nogaibayeva, 2024) analyzes the concept of *qoŋyr* through the lens of the notions of "center" and "navel." That is, *qoŋyr* is linked to the human navel as a symbolic point of origin. In the current study, too, the response "кіндік" (navel) showed the second-highest level of associative strength after "eye": mean – 4.98, SD – 3.67. Other responses, such as "maŋday" (forehead) – mean 4.79, SD – 3.53, and "auyz" (mouth) – mean 2.71, SD – 2.65, demonstrated the lowest levels of associative relevance with the word *qoŋyr* Figure 9.
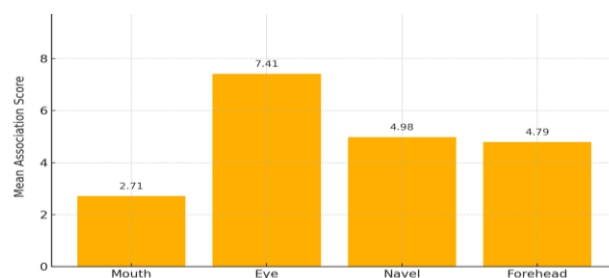

Figure 9: Descriptive Statistics for Body-Part-Related Concepts.

4.11. Age Categories

The current associative experiment aimed at identifying the meaning of the word *qoŋyr* (brown) and associated it with age categories. Responses such as "between 50 and 70 years old" and "middle-aged married couples" (orta zhas) were commonly reported. The highest-rated association was with the category "old age," which received a mean score of 6.54 and a standard deviation of 3.40. This result demonstrates that in the Kazakh worldview, the color *qoŋyr* is closely linked with elderly individuals.

In our experiment, the category "middle age, maturity" showed a moderate associative connection with the word *qoŋyr*: mean – 5.82, SD – 3.39. The association with "youth" (zhigittik zhas) yielded a lower result: mean – 4.34, SD – 3.11. The weakest association was observed with "childhood" (balalyq): mean – 3.28, SD – 3.27 Figure 10.
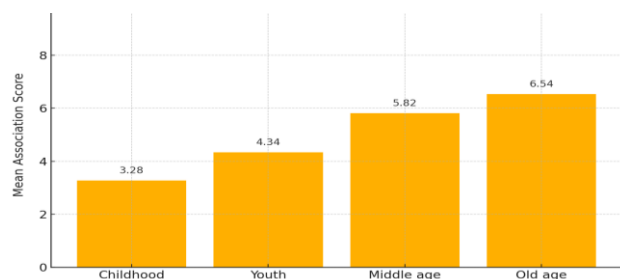

Figure 10: Descriptive Statistics for Age-Related Concepts.

4.12. Numbers

The numbers 3, 7, 9, and 40 presented in this question are considered sacred in the traditional worldview of the Kazakh people. According to the responses in the current study, the number "qyryq" (forty) received the highest rating: mean – 6.07, SD – 3.48. The significance of the number forty in Kazakh customs and beliefs is linked to human creation and spiritual understanding. The study suggests that the phonetic and syllabic similarity between the words *qoŋyr* (brown) and "qyryq" (forty) may have also influenced respondents' perception, enhancing the degree of associative meaning between them.

The second highest rating was given to the number "zheti" (seven): mean – 5.10, SD – 3.62, closely followed by "togyz" (nine): mean – 5.08, SD – 3.37. The weakest associative connection was observed for the number "ush" (three): mean – 3.84, SD – 3.51 Figure 11.
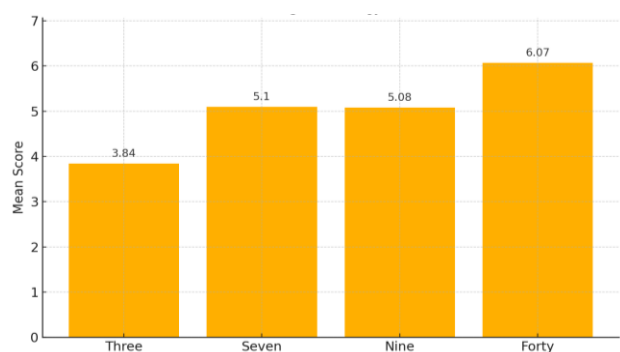

Figure 11: Descriptive Statistics for Number Associations.

4.13. Artistic Forms

Summarizing the results of descriptive statistics:

"an-kuy" (music) received a mean score of 6.20, SD – 3.56; "musinshilik" (sculpture) – mean 6.13, SD – 3.56; "ақындық" (poetry) – mean 6.13, SD – 3.38; and "sawletshilik" (architecture) – mean 4.90, SD – 3.53 Figure 12. As we can see, among the art-related concepts, the strongest association with the word *qoŋyr* (brown) was observed for "an-kuy". In general, the expression *qoŋyr* ән refers to a song performed in a soft, steady, and calm tone–reflecting the emotional character of the term.

The strong association with "musinshilik" (sculpture) may be attributed to the natural brown shades of materials commonly used in sculpting. Additionally, the qualities essential to sculpture–patience, endurance, and steadiness–are traditionally linked to the symbolic meanings of the word *qoŋyr* in Kazakh cultural understanding. Emotional states such as melancholy and introspection, which are often associated with the color brown, tend to be most deeply experienced by poets, writers, scholars, and public intellectuals. These emotional connotations may explain the relatively high associative rating for the concept of "poetry."
Conversely, the weakest association among the responses was observed with "sawletshilik" (architecture), as reflected in the participants' evaluations Figure 12.
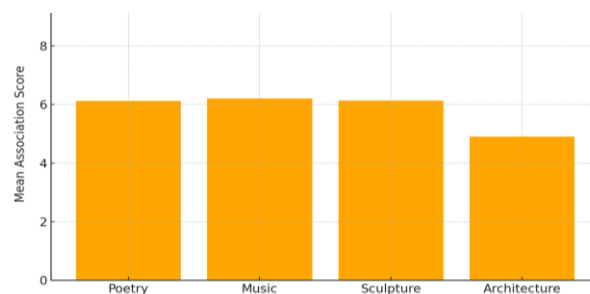

Figure 12: Descriptive Statistics for Art-Related Associations.

4.14. Musical Instruments

The entire essence of the Kazakh individual is closely linked to the word *qoŋyr* (brown)–a native color that reflects national identity (Kenesbaev, 1977). The Kazakh temperament, the vast open steppe, the nomadic way of life, traditional instruments, and the very sound they produce are all *qoŋyr*. National musical instruments such as the dombra, kobyz, and sazsyrnay, whether stringed, plucked, wind, or percussion, produce melodies and rhythms that are soothing to the ear and resonate with the soul. These musical expressions reflect the worldview, lifestyle, and spirit of the Kazakh people and have been passed down from generation to

generation–largely due to the enduring emotional power of the *qoŋyr* tone.

In terms of the association of *qoŋyr* with musical instruments, the response "dombyra" (dombra) showed the strongest effect: mean – 7.67, SD – 3.11 Figure 13. In his study *qoŋyr undi dombyra* ("The Brown-Toned Dombra"), a prior study explores the dombra's timbre and emphasizes that its *qoŋyr* sound reflects a primordial harmony that resonates with the very origins of musical tone in the universe. Among the traditional instruments deeply rooted in Kazakh culture and natural environment, the шаңқобыз (jaw harp) also demonstrated a strong associative connection: mean – 6.80, SD – 3.35. The responses for "zhetigen" and "dabyl" (drum) were slightly lower, with means of 5.97 (SD – 3.21) and 5.50 (SD – 3.29), respectively Figure 13.
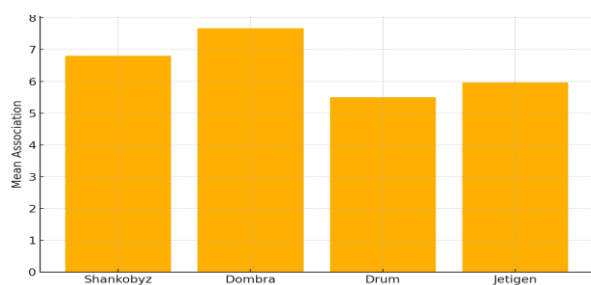

Figure 13: Descriptive Statistics for Musical Instrument Associations.

4.15. Lifestyle-Related Concepts

Among the concepts related to livelihood and daily life, the response "baylyq" (wealth) showed the weakest associative impact: mean – 3.70, SD – 3.16. The response "kedeylik" (poverty) was slightly higher: mean – 4.59, SD – 3.30 Figure 14. In Kazakh cultural understanding–as well as in the broader human perception–the color *qoŋyr* (brown) is firmly established as a symbol of simplicity. The results of our survey further confirm this association: the response "qarapayymdylyq" (simplicity) received the highest rating among the concepts of daily life, with a mean of 7.63 and a standard deviation of 3.35.
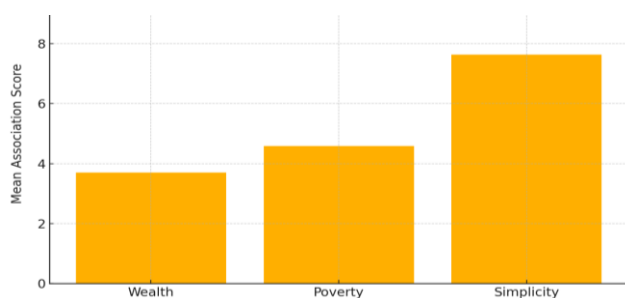

Figure 14: Descriptive Statistics for Lifestyle Concepts.

4.16. Moral Traits

According to the descriptive statistics, the associations between the word *qoŋyr* (brown) and negative character traits are generally weak: "zhalqawlyq" (laziness) had a mean score of 3.55, SD – 3.08; "тәкаппарлық" (arrogance)–a direct opposite of simplicity–scored 3.45, SD – 3.37; and "nadandyq" (ignorance) received a mean of 3.40, SD – 3.08 Figure 15. These results reinforce our view that *qoŋyr* possesses primarily positive connotations, showing little to no connection with negative meanings.

For the Kazakh people–who value bloodline purity and adhere to the principle of the seven ancestors–the concept of "tektilik" (nobility of lineage) is among the highest virtues. In our survey, this notion showed a strong association with *qoŋyr*: mean – 6.71, SD – 3.69. National values such as nobility and the symbolic meaning of *qoŋyr* complement each other, as both concepts align closely with the essence of Kazakh identity.
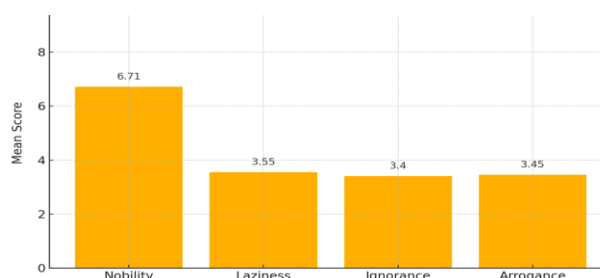

Figure 15: Descriptive Statistics for Moral Value Associations.

4.17. National Identity

When examining the degree of association between the color *qoŋyr* (brown) and specific ethnic groups, the weakest associations were observed with "Russian" (mean – 2.13, SD – 2.36) and "Chinese" (mean – 2.62, SD – 2.62) Figure 16. The association with the "German" nationality was slightly higher (mean – 3.14, SD – 2.82), which may be linked to the brown-colored uniforms worn by German soldiers during wartime. During that period, the color brown even became a symbol of Nazism due to its association with the uniforms of the Nazi regime.

Each nation has a color symbolically tied to its historical experiences, worldview, customs, and culture. For the nomadic Kazakh people, the color qoŋyr carries strong associative meaning, reflecting the vast steppe and natural surroundings. In the final question of our experiment, when respondents were asked to associate the word *qoŋyr* with a nationality, the highest score was given to the response "Kazakh": mean – 7.29, SD – 3.41.
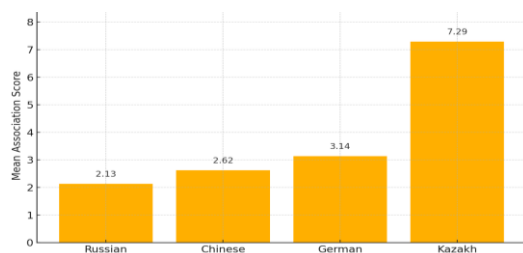
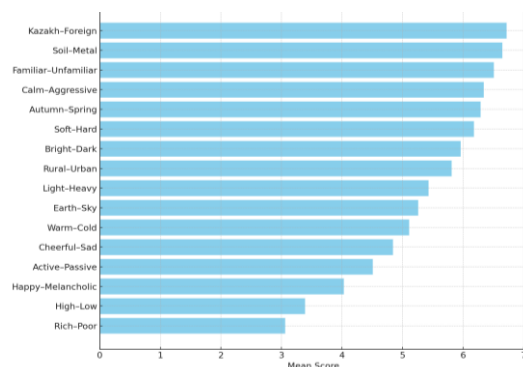*Figure 16: Descriptive Statistics for Ethnic Identity Associations.*

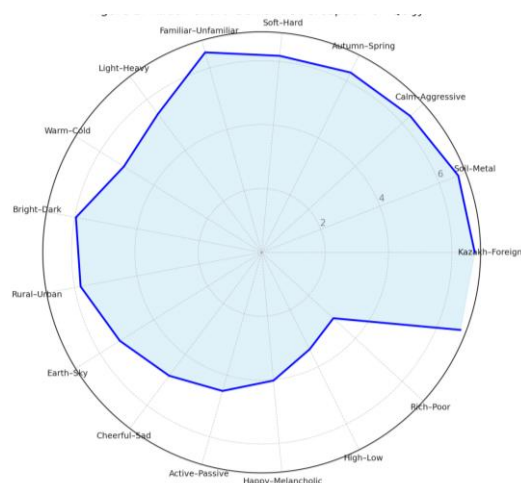*Figure 17: Bar Chart: Semantic Associations with the Word Qoŋyr.*

The results of the semantic differential experiment are visually summarized in Figure 17 and Table 1, which presents the mean scores for 16 bipolar adjective pairs. The horizontal bar chart illustrates clear trends in the perception of the concept *qoŋyr*. The strongest associations are found with the attributes Kazakh, Soil, Calm, Autumn, and Familiar, highlighting the concept's deep-rooted connection to national identity, natural surroundings, and emotional tranquility. In contrast, dimensions such as Rich–Poor and High–Low show much lower scores, reflecting *qoŋyr*'s cultural simplicity and humble symbolic tone.

The visual data Figure 17 clearly indicate that the concept *qoŋyr* is predominantly associated with cultural and emotional domains. The strongest associations emerged in adjective pairs such as "Kazakh–Foreign" (M = 6.72), "Soil–Metal" (M = 6.65), "Calm–Aggressive" (M = 6.34), and "Autumn–Spring" (M = 6.29). Table 1 sumamrizes the mean scores for 16 bipolar adjective pairs with their interpretations.

Table 1: *Adjective Pair.*

Adjective Pair	Mean	Interpretation
Kazakh – Foreign	6.72	Strongly perceived as a Kazakh-specific term; a symbol of national identity.
Soil – Metal	6.65	Evokes natural, organic connotations related to earth, land, and authenticity.
Calm – Aggressive	6.34	Perceived as peaceful, restrained, and contemplative.
Autumn – Spring	6.29	Emotionally tied to autumnal melancholy, maturity, and calmness.
Soft – Hard	6.18	Suggests emotional softness, tenderness, and subtlety.
Familiar – Unfamiliar	6.51	Associated with something warm, known, and culturally close.
Light – Heavy	5.43	Moderately linked to lightness, possibly gentle melancholy.
Warm – Cold	5.11	Tends toward warmth, though not strongly pronounced.
Bright – Dark	5.96	Clearly associated with darkness (күңгірт), both visually and emotionally.
Rural – Urban	5.81	Perceived as rural, traditional, and connected to steppe life.
Earth – Sky	5.26	Shows a mild association with the earthly, grounded aspect.
Cheerful – Sad	4.84	Slight leaning toward sadness, but not strongly melancholic.
Active – Passive	4.51	Nearly neutral, but slightly passive.
Happy – Melancholic	4.03	Mild inclination toward melancholic tone.
High – Low	3.39	Suggests modesty, humility, and groundedness.
Rich – Poor	3.06	Reflects simplicity and lack of materialism, but not in a negative sense.

These findings suggest that *qoŋyr* is perceived not as dynamic or materially marked, but as a linguo-cultural symbol of modesty, warmth, and contemplative depth in Kazakh culture. These semantic tendencies are further substantiated through two additional visualizations. The radar chart Figure 18 visually illustrates the multidimensional semantic structure of *qoŋyr*. The chart reveals that the concept is perceived in a balanced but culturally marked way, with prominent associations toward attributes such as Kazakh, Calm, Familiar, and Soft. These tendencies align with the introspective and culturally resonant qualities of the term. Likewise, Figure 19 complements this

interpretation with a heatmap representation of the same semantic data. The intensity of the color coding illustrates how consistently the respondents associate *qoŋyr* with naturalness, cultural embeddedness, and emotional warmth. In particular, darker zones along dimensions like Soil–Metal and Kazakh–Foreign visually reinforce the concept's symbolic grounding in Kazakh cultural experience. Together, these visual tools not only validate the quantitative findings but also provide intuitive insights into how *qoŋyr* functions as a linguocultural marker of identity, emotion, and worldview in Kazakh society.

Figure 18: Radar chart: Semantic Preception of Qoŋyr.
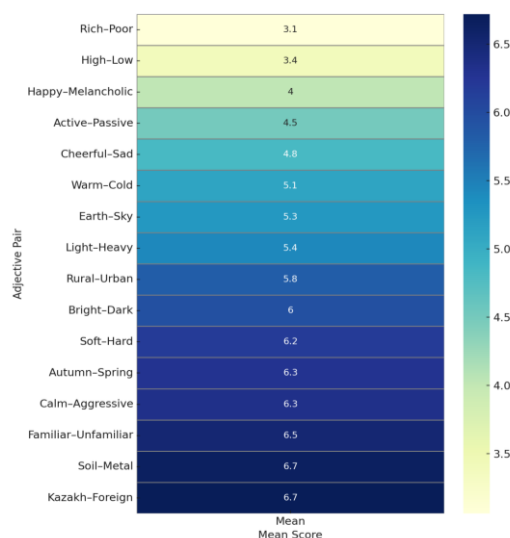
Figure 19: Heatmap of Semantic Associations for 'Qoŋyr.

Figure 19 complements this interpretation with a heatmap representation of the same semantic data. The intensity of the color coding illustrates how consistently the respondents associate *qoŋyr* with naturalness, cultural embeddedness, and emotional warmth. In particular, darker zones along dimensions like Soil–Metal and Kazakh–Foreign visually reinforce the concept's symbolic grounding in Kazakh cultural experience.

5. DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to determine, through statistical and associative methods, the role of the word *qoŋyr* as a national concept in the Kazakh linguistic consciousness. The results demonstrated that this term is closely connected to a wide range of cognitive domains, including nature, animals, time, emotions, art,

personality traits, ethnic identity, and spiritual values. These findings allow for comparative analysis within several scholarly frameworks. For instance, the summative visual data Figure 17 clearly indicate that the concept *qoŋyr* is predominantly associated with cultural and emotional domains. These findings point to *qoŋyr*'s symbolic connection to Kazakh ethnic identity, natural harmony, and a pastoral worldview. The semantic proximity to "soft," "familiar," and "earth" suggests that the concept is deeply rooted in traditional values and emotional modesty. Additionally, the relatively high scores for "Cheerful–Sad" (M = 4.84) and "Happy–Melancholic" (M = 4.03) confirm that *qoŋyr* carries a warm melancholy rather than overt sadness – a trait common in Kazakh oral poetry and music. This is consistent with Karasik's theory of linguocultural dominants, whereby certain key concepts embody a community's core worldview (Karasik & Kitanina, 2023). Lower associations with material or hierarchical categories such as "Rich–Poor" (M = 3.06) and "High–Low" (M = 3.39) further support the idea that *qoŋyr* is non-material, egalitarian, and existentially reflective rather than symbolizing social power or wealth.

These semantic tendencies are substantiated in the study's findings presented in radar chart Figure 18 and heatmap Figure 19. The radar chart visually illustrates the balanced, yet culturally tilted perception of *qoŋyr* across multiple axes. In particular, peaks on Kazakh, Calm, Soft, and Familiar dimensions reinforce the earlier interpretation. Similarly, the heatmap provides intensity-based visualization, where deep color zones around Soil–Metal and Kazakh–Foreign scales highlight the consistent emotional and cultural resonance of the concept. The heatmap further supports the interpretation of '*qoŋyr*' as a concept associated with warmth, cultural identity, and emotional depth. Stronger associations are concentrated in culturally rich and emotionally calm domains.

Together, these graphics strengthen the view of *qoŋyr* as a linguocultural marker of humility, emotion, and national identity in the Kazakh worldview. From a cross-cultural and cognitive perspective, these findings echo prior scholarly research. Kormushin (2001) traces the etymology of the Turkic root jayyz and links it to earthy associations that also emerge in the current study. Berlin and Kay's (1969) universal typology of color terms also situates brown as a stable semantic field – a view compatible with *qoŋyr*'s deep connections to autumn, evening, simplicity, and nature.

Wierzbicka (1992) and Lakoff and Johnson (2008) highlight how colors form part of metaphorical and cultural models. Within this framework, *qoŋyr*

expresses calmness, clarity, humility – features that are ingrained in Kazakh cognition and appear prominently in our data. In poetic language, expressions such as *qoŋyr* ün (mellow voice), *qoŋyr*äuen (soft melody), and *qoŋyr* küz (gentle autumn) illustrate the aesthetic role of the concept. Kazakh scholars such as Akhmetov (2015) and Koshymova and Nogaibayeva (2024) have identified *qoŋyr* as a marker of moral values and ancestral symbols. Our results – including strong associations with nobility, modesty, and old age – align closely with these interpretations.

To sum up, the concept of *qoŋyr* encapsulates a unique linguistic and cultural worldview. It reflects harmony, modesty, identity, and deep emotional resonance, making it a powerful linguocultural symbol in Kazakh society. This also suggests that the field of color conceptology, situated at the intersection of language and culture, continues to evolve with distinctive features in Kazakh linguistic research. *qoŋyr* is not merely a color term; it is a complex linguocultural concept that encapsulates national identity, worldview, and philosophical outlook.

6. CONCLUSION

This study confirmed that the concept *qoŋyr* in Kazakh linguoculture functions not merely as a color descriptor, but as a culturally rich and cognitively significant mental construct. The experimental results, based on associative evaluations by 108 native speakers, revealed strong semantic links between *qoŋyr* and such domains as nature (soil, breeze, autumn), emotions (sadness, nostalgia), personality traits (meekness, simplicity), and national identity (Kazakh, dombra). One important conclusion of the research is that *qoŋyr* in the Kazakh mindset is not a neutral color term, but an entire world of sensations, emotions, symbols, and cultural codes. This word embodies elements of national philosophy, perceptions of time and space, notions of beauty and harmony, and connections with nature and ancestors. In this sense, the concept of *qoŋyr* can be seen as a core around which much of the Kazakh ethnocultural semiosphere is organized. The current study of the associative perception of *qoŋyr* enriches our understanding of the lexical-semantic system of the Kazakh language and contributes to the development of cognitive linguistics, ethnolinguistics, and cultural anthropology. The findings are valuable not only for linguists, but also for sociologists, cultural researchers,

philosophers, and intercultural communication specialists. The data obtained can also be applied in teaching Kazakh as a native or foreign language, in the development of curricula, textbooks, dictionaries, and educational platforms aimed at conveying deep national meanings. This research may also serve as a foundation for further comparative linguocultural studies, where the *qoŋyr* concept is compared with similar notions in other languages and cultures.

Ultimately, this study represents a step toward a deeper understanding of language as a tool for preserving and transmitting cultural meanings. By analyzing how a single word can encompass an entire universe of associations, we move closer to understanding how collective consciousness operates, how cultural identity is formed and maintained, and how the past and present intertwine in the lexicon of everyday speech. The study reveals that *qoŋyr* represents a deep layer of Kazakh national consciousness–where language, emotion, history, and philosophy converge. This study contributes not only to linguistics and cognitive science but also to the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage in the modern world. These findings also support the view that *qoŋyr* represents an archetypal element of the Kazakh conceptual worldview. It expresses values such as harmony, humility, spiritual depth, and continuity with ancestral and natural cycles. The concept also reflects temporal experience (old age, evening), emotional nuance, and ethical ideals. Limitations of the study include the demographically narrow sample (predominantly younger participants) and its confinement to speakers fluent in Kazakh. The study focused only on associative judgments and did not explore discourse-based usage or diachronic shifts in meaning. Recommendations for future research include comparative studies of the *qoŋyr* concept across Turkic languages, gender-based or generational variation in interpretation, and multimodal research incorporating literary, musical, and visual representations. Applying discourse analysis to real-life usage could further enrich our understanding of this concept. Practical implications are significant in this study. The data may inform the development of culturally sensitive educational materials for Kazakh language instruction, the creation of cognitive-cultural dictionaries, and tools for intercultural competence training. Recognizing *qoŋyr* as a cultural code enables more nuanced approaches to ethnolinguistic identity and language teaching in multilingual contexts.

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