

The Associative-Verbal Field of 'Qonaq' (Guest) in the Kazakh Language: Empirical Research

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Abstract—In Kazakh national consciousness, the concept of “konak – kut” (guest – for the good) is deeply rooted in the cultural code. The study explores whether this traditional notion has changed in modern society or retained its symbolic value. It focuses on how the word “guest” is represented in the linguistic consciousness of contemporary Kazakh youth. The research highlights links between language and consciousness, culture, nation, and society. Linguistic consciousness reflects a subjective worldview encoded through language. Studying these expressions reveals traits of collective and national identity. In a globalizing world, understanding how youth relate to traditional values is especially important. This interdisciplinary study uses linguistic material collected from fluent Kazakh speakers aged 17 to 25, offering insight into the ethno-cultural awareness of Kazakh youth. A free associative experiment was conducted to examine how young people perceive the word konak (guest), which carries idio-ethnic meaning. The stimulus word triggered 173 associations. These were analyzed to construct the associative-verbal field of “konak.” At the center of the field lies the word dastarkan, reflecting a strong link between youth consciousness and Kazakh hospitality traditions. The study also examined syntagmatic, paradigmatic, and phrasal relations within the field. In conclusion, the associative-verbal field of konak is richly structured, and Kazakh youth continue to maintain a strong connection to their cultural heritage through language, despite the impact of modern social changes.

Index Terms—linguistic consciousness, associative experiment, associative-verbal field, guest, stimulus

I. INTRODUCTION

A word and its meaning are considered in close connection with objective reality, the surrounding world, and the information stored in human consciousness. Ualiuly (2011) observes that “the structural content of the concept *қамшы* (whip) is quite complex, because the word naming this concept functions simultaneously as a unit of the linguistic sign system and as a unit of the ethnocultural system; therefore, a concept located at the intersection of linguistic and cultural signs can first be examined as a linguistic unit from both historical and contemporary perspectives”. Before identifying the ethnocultural information underlying a word or phrase, one must determine which concept the linguistic unit designates, that is, analyse the word’s meaning. From the denotative meaning of a lexical unit, further shades of meaning branch out. Thus, in addition to its nominative function, a hereditary function becomes apparent, and the unit’s links with the national worldview, with social etiquette, and with customary practice are revealed. Through the semantic structure of a word the national linguistic picture of the world is disclosed.

Within Kazakh linguistics, studies of this kind aim to characterise the national worldview through language. For example, Talgatqyzy et al. (2024), by examining the concept *мүйе* (camel), analyse not only its physical and biological features but also its semantic field as represented in historical records, literature, oral folklore, and religious texts. They likewise emphasise that *қонақжайлық* (hospitality) is highly valued in Kazakh culture: *қонақ куту* (receiving a guest) is regarded as a sacred duty and an honourable practice, and welcoming a guest with special respect and generosity demonstrates unity and mutual support (Talgatqyzy et al., 2024, p. 269).

The word *қонақ* (guest) is one of the lexical units that typify the Kazakh ethnocultural worldview. In Kazakh usage it conveys several meanings:

1. *Жолаушылап бара жатып, біреудің үйіне қонуға түскен бейтаныс адам* (lit. ‘a stranger who stops at someone’s house for the night while travelling’);
2. *Үйге арнайы шақырылған сыйлы адам(дар)* (lit. ‘an invited honoured guest’);
3. figuratively, a philosophical notion that *әрбір адам өмірге мәңгілік емес* ‘every human life is transient’ (Sozdikqor.kz, 2025).

The motivation of *қонақ* is connected with the verb *қон* ‘to spend the night’, which reflects nomadic culture. Kaidar (2013) explains: “One of the most distinctive Kazakh traditions is hospitality. For centuries, welcoming an uninvited traveller considered *құдайы қонақ* (uninvited traveller who is treated as ‘God’s guest’ in Kazakh tradition) and sending him off contented has been regarded as a moral obligation passed down through generations” (Kaidar, 2013, p. 593).

This statement shows a rule of etiquette rooted in nomadic life: even an unknown traveller must be welcomed with generosity. The first dictionary definition of *қонақ* is therefore directly linked to traditional society. Today, however, the second definition ‘an invited honoured guest’ is used more often. The number of people who host strangers overnight has clearly declined owing to changes such as the shift from nomadism to a settled way of life, socio-economic development, expansion of service industries, and new forms of interpersonal relations. Such changes are consistent with historical development: as society progresses, ways of life move from one stage to another; word meanings may broaden or narrow, their frequency may rise or fall, and lexemes may pass into active or passive layers of the vocabulary. Nevertheless, nationally specific customs associated with *қонақ* lavish hospitality, laying a *дастарқан* (festive table), offering great respect have been preserved to the present day.

In figurative usage, *қонақ* also conveys the idea that human life is finite. Illustrative lines include *Қарап тұрсам, дүние шолақ екен, Адамдар бір-біріне қонақ екен* (lit. ‘When I look, life is short; people are guests to one another’); and Abai’s reflection *Біріңе-бірің қонақ екенсің, өзің дүниеге де қонақ екенсің* (lit. ‘You are a guest to each other, and you are also a guest in this world’) in his 34th Word. The figurative meaning arising from the notion that a guest stays only for a limited time is widely used in contemporary Kazakh to convey vivid philosophical thought.

Identifying the images associated with *қонақ* in the linguistic consciousness of Kazakh youth and mapping the structure of its associative-verbal field constitute the main objectives of the present study. Such analysis is closely related to current issues in ethnopsycholinguistics concerning how language, cognition, and culture interact in shaping individual and collective identity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term *қонақ* (guest) is connected with the oldest layers of the Turkic worldview, has deep historical roots, and is closely intertwined with spiritual culture and values. In Mahmud al-Kashgari’s dictionary a proverb is cited: *Ұма келсе, құт келер, – қонақ келсе, құт келер* (lit. ‘If *Ұма* arrives, blessing arrives – if a guest arrives, blessing arrives’; *Ұма* ‘guest’; meaning that a visitor brings prosperity and must be welcomed without disturbing him). The work also quotes the bayt: *Сорлы қонақ мұқтаж болып келсе егер, Сарылтпа оны, бар асыңды тездеп бер!* (lit. ‘If a poor guest comes in need, do not distress him, quickly give all your food’; Qashqari, 2006, pp. 121-122). These passages show that the idea *қонақ – құт* ‘guest equals blessing’ is shared by Turkic peoples and that identical norms of etiquette for hosting guests were formed.

The word *қонақ* occupies an essential place in the content structure of the concept “hospitality”. Whenever hospitality is mentioned, images of the Kazakh tradition of receiving guests and the linguistic units that encode it immediately come to mind. The ethnocultural semantics of *қонақ* in Kazakh linguistics is discussed in the works of Kaidar (2013) and in the “Culture-representative sub-corpus” (Kazakh National Corpus, 2020), where *қонақ* and *қонақжайлық* (hospitality) are explained as inseparable, semantically linked notions.

Kazakh contains numerous terms for different kinds of guests, revealing multiple facets of the guest’s status in society. By thematic-semantic criterion the names are grouped as follows.

1. By invitation or purpose of arrival: *құдайы қонақ* (lit. ‘God’s guest’; uninvited traveller who must be honoured), *арнайы қонақ* (formally invited guest), *ерулікті қонақ* (guest reciprocated with a return feast), *қыдырма қонақ* (wandering guest), *бірсоқпа қонақ* (guest who stops once), *көлденең қонақ* (random passer-by guest), *шақырусыз қонақ* (guest without invitation), *қылғыма қонақ* (importunate guest).
2. By worth or reputation: *құтты қонақ* (auspicious guest), *ардақты қонақ* (honoured guest), *қадірлі қонақ* (respected guest), *арсыз қонақ* (shameless guest), *жақсы қонақ* (good guest), *жайлы қонақ* (agreeable guest), *жайсыз қонақ* (disagreeable guest), *жағымды қонақ* (pleasant guest), *жағымсыз қонақ* (unpleasant guest).
3. By mode of arrival: *жаяу қонақ* (guest on foot), *атты қонақ* (guest on horseback), *итті қонақ* (guest accompanied by a dog).
4. By social status: *қатын қонақ* (female guest), *қайырышы қонақ* (beggar guest). These lexical units reflect Kazakh hospitality culture, attitudes toward visitors, rules of interaction, and the guest’s social role in traditional life while uncovering deep semantic layers of the word *қонақ*.

To express positive attitudes toward a guest or host, Kazakh employs proverbs and idioms such as *Құтты қонақ келсе, қой егіз табады* (lit. ‘If a blessed guest arrives, the ewe bears twins’), *Қонақ қадірлі болса, қазан тез қайнайды* (lit. ‘If the guest is valued, the pot boils quickly’), *қолы ашық* (lit. ‘open-handed’; generous), *қонағын атқарды* (lit. ‘saw the guest off with honour’). For negative evaluations: *Қонағын сыйламаған не баласын ұрар, не үйін сытырар*

(lit. ‘One who shows no honour to a guest will beat his child or sweep his house’), *Құтсыз қонақ келсе, қораға қасқыр шабады* (lit. ‘If an ill-omened guest arrives, a wolf attacks the corral’), *Жағымсыз қонақ жатар уақытта келер* (lit. ‘An unpleasant guest comes at bedtime’), *Қонағым, өз үйіңді де ойлай отыр* (lit. ‘My guest, think also of your own home’), *қолы тар* (lit. ‘tight-handed’; stingy) (Kazakh National Corpus, 2020). Such stable units play an important role in interpreting the national-cultural specificity of the guest concept.

Scholarly works on the word *қонақ* and its associated notions treat the “hospitality” concept. The cognitive space of *қонақжайлық* in Kazakh is divided by Zhilkubayeva (2016) into several frames reflecting steppe norms, for example *Бөлінбеген енші* ‘undivided share’, *Табақ тарту* ‘serving the dish’. Analysing hospitality from a linguocultural viewpoint, Onalbayeva et al. (2024) argue that despite modern forces globalisation, urbanisation, socio-economic change the key principles remain: generosity, respect for guests, care and mutual assistance continue as vital components of social interaction. They describe hospitality as a complex, dynamic system embodying spiritual and material values that has retained its relevance (Onalbayeva et al., 2024, pp. 1135-1136). Using a free-association method, the authors surveyed 109 respondents aged 20-70 in Almaty: 90 % Kazakh, 10 % Russian, Uyghur, Uzbek, Turkish, German. Among the reactions were *дастарқан* (lit. ‘festive table’) 7, *бай дастарқан* (lit. ‘abundant festive table’) 2, *тағам* (lit. ‘food’) 10, *туыс* (lit. ‘relative’) 5, *сүйіспеншілік* (lit. ‘affection’) 8, *бақыт* (lit. ‘happiness’) 8, *береке* (lit. ‘prosperity’) 5 (Onalbayeva et al., 2024, p. 1130). The presence of the same linguistic images in the responses of Kazakh youth to the stimulus *қонақ* indicates preservation of national identity, a point discussed further in Results and Discussion.

Samsitova (2011) compares the hospitality concept *қунақсыллық* in Bashkir and Kazakh, analysing shared language use. In Bashkir the cultural concept is represented by *қунақ* ‘guest’, derived from the Turkic verb *кун* ‘to stay overnight’. The scholar notes that the idea of an uninvited guest carries no negative connotation in Turkic languages; rather, it means *Allah’s guest*, who receives special honour (Samsitova, 2011, p. 4). Proverbs common to both nations include *Қонақ аз отырып, көп сынап* (lit. ‘A guest who stays briefly will criticise much’).

Ibraimova and Dosymbekova (2023) examine norms of greeting, honouring, thanking and bidding farewell to guests in Kazakh and Chinese linguocultures, finding similarities rooted in respect between young and old, seniors and juniors.

In her dissertation, Zhabayeva (2004) compares Kazakh, Russian, and English material words, idioms, proverbs describing the national-cultural distinctiveness of the “hospitality” concept. She points out that Kazakhs convey special courtesy with imperative verbs such as *Тәрлетіңіз!* (lit. ‘Please move to the honoured place’), and that terms like *қонақасы* (guest feast), *қонақаяқ* (special dish for guests), *қонаққәде* (guest gift ritual), *қонақ хақы* (guest’s right) have no exact Russian or English equivalents; in English culture *guest* usually refers only to an invited person (Zhabayeva, 2004).

Russian and Tatar fixed expressions on hospitality are analysed axiologically by Yunusova (2009). The study links perceptions of hospitality to tradition, myth and religion. A common value in Russian and Tatar phrases is recognition of the importance of human relationships and mutual respect between guest and host: *Коры табына қунақ утыртмайлар* (Tatar: lit. ‘They do not seat a guest at an unspread table’), *В чем гостю воля, в том ему и честь* (Russian: lit. ‘Whatever the guest wishes is his honour’). Traits opposed to hospitality selfishness, standoffishness, stinginess are censured in both cultures, e.g. Tatar *Яман уз өенә узе қунақ* (lit. ‘A bad man is a guest in his own house’), *Саран белән төшкәнче, юмарт ярлыға төш* (lit. ‘Better to marry a generous pauper than a stingy rich man’); Russian *Зазвал гостей, глодать костей* (lit. ‘Invited guests, then gnaws bones’), *У него замок висит* (lit. ‘He has a lock hanging [on his door]’; i.e. he is inhospitable) (Yunusova, 2009).

The hospitality/guest concept has been compared across languages — in Russian–English idioms (Garipova, 2010), Russian–French proverbs (Zakharova, 2011), Russian–Chinese phrases (Zhang & Sayakhova, 2017), and Russian–Tajik materials (Tozaeva, 2022).

Investigating the Russian semantic field of *гость* (guest), Tall (2011) compares lexicographic and psycholinguistic definitions, noting differences. In Tall’s view, the psycholinguistic meaning (Sternin’s term) reveals the true sense of a word in linguistic consciousness and includes important cultural components not always detected by traditional semantic analysis (Tall, 2011).

Kambaraliev and Daba (2018) analyse the Kyrgyz concept *қонақ* (*конок*). Although dictionary definitions of *қонақ* and its synonym *мейман* are similar, association data show that *қонақ* occurs more often; the researchers place it at the core of the field and *мейман* in the near periphery. They argue that *қонақ* implies a visitor who stays overnight, whereas *мейман* leaves after the meal. In contemporary Kyrgyz culture the cognitive feature of *қонақ* overnight stay is gradually “lost” (in V. I. Karasik’s terms). Kyrgyz recognises four guest types: *чакырылган конок* (invited guest), *қудайы конок* (God’s guest), *чакырылбаган конок* (uninvited guest), *милдеттүү конок* (obligatory guest).

Thus, the words *қонақ* and hospitality represent universal moral values promoting virtue and conveying each nation’s worldview.

International research confirms that young people’s perception of the *гость* / *қонақ* concept is shaped by global sociocultural change. Olya et al. (2020) show that some urban Kazakhstani youth see traditional hospitality as limiting personal autonomy amid rising individualism, whereas Onalbayeva et al. (2024) demonstrate through free-association data featuring nucleus images such as «дастарқан» (festive table) and «құт-береке» (blessing-prosperity; a paired notion with no single-word English equivalent) that *қонақжайлық* still embodies respect, generosity and warmth as an emotional-ritual code of identity. Our earlier empirical work (Akhmetova et al., 2025) extends this line of inquiry,

showing that even sacred domestic lexemes like «бесік» (cradle), «садақ» (bow) and «үршік» (spindle) form dense associative networks that anchor enduring cultural values in the linguistic consciousness of Kazakh youth. At the same time, Yapıcı (2018) finds that contemporary youth re-frame hospitality practices to fit urban demographics and lifestyle demands, highlighting the guest concept's flexibility. Collectively, these studies portray *қонақ* as a dynamic construct whose symbolic core persists while its social expression adapts to modern contexts.

III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The principal psycholinguistic method employed to reveal the images present in the linguistic consciousness of Kazakh youth was the free-association experiment. The survey-based experiment was carried out in written form from September 2024 to February 2025; personal data were kept confidential, and the results were used only in aggregated form for scientific purposes. Participants were 634 Kazakh students (317 female, 317 male) aged 17-25, studying in Kazakh-medium groups at L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. The material was processed in R-Studio, and numerical indicators were obtained. In total, 173 reactions were recorded. Reaction frequencies were calculated; the ten most frequent words were prioritised, and the field was divided into a nucleus and a near periphery. Reactions are presented in the article as *дастарқан* (lit. 'festive table'; traditional Kazakh table lavishly laid for guests) 63 (9.72 %). Here *дастарқан* is the reaction word; 63 is its frequency; 9.72 % is the share of this association within the field.

The linguistic units in the associative-verbal field were then analysed from ethnolinguistic, cognitive, and gender perspectives, and the paradigmatic, syntagmatic, and phrasal links between the stimulus word and its associates were identified. Componential analysis was applied to describe the semantic structure of the word and its constituents; communicative-semantic analysis and grouping by shared features were used to examine usages. To interpret the meanings of the stimulus *қонақ* (lit. 'guest'; culturally, any person received with honour and generosity in a Kazakh home) and the reactions obtained, lexicographic resources (sozdikqor.kz) and literary databases (qazcorpus.kz, adebiportal.kz) were consulted.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the associative-verbal field *Қонақ* showed that, in the linguistic consciousness of the surveyed Kazakh youth, the stimulus word elicited 173 reactions: *дастарқан* (lit. 'festive table'; traditional table lavishly laid for guests) 63 (9.72 %); *береке* (lit. 'prosperity, abundance') 53 (8.18 %); *құт* (lit. 'blessing') 53 (8.18 %); *адам* (lit. 'person') 20 (3.09 %); *туыс / туысқан* (lit. 'relative') 20 (3.09 %); *тамақ* (lit. 'food') 18 (2.78 %); *той* (lit. 'celebration, feast') 18 (2.78 %); *құдайы қонақ* (uninvited traveller treated as "God's guest") 15 (2.31 %); *үй* (lit. 'house') 13 (2.01 %); *күту* (lit. 'to host / to await') 12 (1.85 %); *құт-береке* (lit. 'blessing-prosperity') 12 (1.85 %); *сыйлы адам* (lit. 'honoured person') 12 (1.85 %); *қуаныш* (lit. 'joy') 11 (1.70 %); *тәр* (lit. 'honoured place in a Kazakh home') 10 (1.54 %); *қонақ* (lit. 'guest') 10 (1.54 %); *ас* (lit. 'meal') 9 (1.39 %); *құрмет* (lit. 'respect') 9 (1.39 %); *мейман* (lit. 'guest') 8 (1.23 %); *сыйлы* (lit. 'honoured') 8 (1.23 %); *ет* (lit. 'meat') 7 (1.08 %); *ырыс* (lit. 'well-being, plenty') 7 (1.08 %); *құтты* (lit. 'auspicious') 7 (1.08 %); *құдайы* (lit. 'of God; sacred') 7 (1.08 %); *мереке* (lit. 'holiday') 6 (0.93 %); *үй жинау* (lit. 'house cleaning') 6 (0.93 %); *жақындар* (lit. 'close ones') 5 (0.77 %); *жиын* (lit. 'gathering') 5 (0.77 %); *сыйлау* (lit. 'to honour') 5 (0.77 %); *қонақжайлық* (lit. 'hospitality') 5 (0.77 %); *үйге келген адам* (lit. 'person who came to the house') 5 (0.77 %); *дайындық* (lit. 'preparation') 4 (0.62 %); *дос* (lit. 'friend') 4 (0.62 %); *көрші* (lit. 'neighbour') 4 (0.62 %); *сарқыт* (lit. 'food sent home with a guest') 4 (0.62 %); *сый* (lit. 'gift') 4 (0.62 %); *үстел* (lit. 'table') 4 (0.62 %); *ақша* (lit. 'money') 3 (0.46 %); *бешбармақ* (national meat-and-noodle dish) 3 (0.46 %); *бөтен адам* (lit. 'stranger') 3 (0.46 %); *жақын адам* (lit. 'close person') 3 (0.46 %); *көрпе* (lit. 'quilt') 3 (0.46 %); *мейрам* (lit. 'feast day') 3 (0.46 %); *несібе* (lit. 'allotted share; sustenance') 3 (0.46 %); *шақыру* (lit. 'invitation') 3 (0.46 %); *құрметті адам* (lit. 'respected person') 3 (0.46 %); *ас беру* (lit. 'to serve a memorial meal') 2 (0.31 %); *бақыт* (lit. 'happiness') 2 (0.31 %); *гость* (Russian 'guest') 2 (0.31 %); *жұмыс* (lit. 'work') 2 (0.31 %); *келу* (lit. 'arrival') 2 (0.31 %); *киелі адам* (lit. 'sacred person') 2 (0.31 %); *кісі* (lit. 'person, visitor') 2 (0.31 %); *күлкі* (lit. 'laughter') 2 (0.31 %); *көктем* (lit. 'spring') 2 (0.31 %); *көңіл* (lit. 'mood, feeling') 2 (0.31 %); *нағашы* (lit. 'maternal relative') 2 (0.31 %); *сыйласу* (lit. 'exchange of respect') 2 (0.31 %); *сыйлық* (lit. 'present') 2 (0.31 %); *таныс* (lit. 'acquaintance') 2 (0.31 %); *қонақасы* (lit. 'guest feast') 2 (0.31 %); *құрметтеу / құрмет көрсету* (lit. 'to show respect') 2 (0.31 %).

The set of single-occurrence responses 1 (0.15 %) consists of 112 items: *алыстағы ағайындар* (lit. 'relatives from afar'); *арқа-жарқа әңгіме* (lit. 'heartly conversation'); *асар* (traditional collective labour to help a neighbour); *асығу* (lit. 'to hurry'); *аяқ асты келген адам* (lit. 'person who arrived unexpectedly'); *ағамның келуі* (lit. 'my elder brother's visit'); *бауырым* (lit. 'my brother'); *дәстүр* (lit. 'tradition'); *ел* (lit. 'people; homeland'); *жайлылық* (lit. 'comfort'); *жақсы* (lit. 'good'); *жақын* (lit. 'close'); *жақындық* (lit. 'closeness'); *жезде* (lit. 'brother-in-law'); *жиналу* (lit. 'gathering'); *жинау* (lit. 'to tidy up'); *жол жүру* (lit. 'travelling'); *жолаушы* (lit. 'traveller'); *зал комнатасы* (Russian + Kazakh 'hall room'); *келген адам* (lit. 'arrived person'); *киелі* (lit. 'sacred'); *киелі жан* (lit. 'sacred soul'); *қрасавчик* (Russian 'handsome guy'); *күтпеген адам* (lit. 'unexpected person'); *күтуші* (lit. 'host / caretaker'); *күшті адамдар* (lit. 'strong people'); *кәмпит* (lit. 'candy'); *көңіл-күй* (lit. 'mood'); *манты* (Central-Asian dumplings); *машина* (lit. 'car'); *Проблема үй жинау керек* (Russian + Kazakh 'problem: need to clean the house'); *стол* (Russian 'table'); *сырт* (lit. 'outside'); *такси* (lit. 'taxi'); *тамақ беру* (lit. 'to serve food'); *туған күн* (lit. 'birthday'); *тәр орын* (lit. 'honoured

seating place’); *шай* (lit. ‘tea’); *шай беру* (lit. ‘to serve tea’); *шай ишу* (lit. ‘to drink tea’); *шалдар тобы* (lit. ‘group of old men’); *шаңыраққа береке әкелетін* (lit. ‘bringing prosperity to the household’); *шу* (lit. ‘noise’); *шулы* (lit. ‘noisy’); *шығып* (lit. ‘going out’); *қапылыс* (lit. ‘sudden rush’); *қиындық* (lit. ‘difficulty’); *қой* (lit. ‘sheep’); *қолға су құю* (lit. ‘to pour water over hands’ guest-honouring ritual); *қыз* (lit. ‘girl’); *құда* (lit. ‘match-relative’); *құман* (lit. ‘ewer’); *құтты қонақ* (lit. ‘auspicious guest’); *үйге алыстан келген адам* (lit. ‘person who came from far to the house’); *үйге келген бір кісі* (lit. ‘one person who came home’); *үйге келген қонақ* (lit. ‘guest who arrived at home’); *үйге келетін бөтен адамдар* (lit. ‘strangers who come to the house’); *үйге шақыратын адамдар* (lit. ‘people who invite to the house’); *үйдің адамы емес* (lit. ‘not a household member’); *үйдің берекесі* (lit. ‘household prosperity’); *үлкендер* (lit. ‘elders’); *үстел жаю* (lit. ‘to lay the table’); *әңгімелесу* (lit. ‘conversation’); *5 қонақ* (lit. ‘five guests’); *адам шақыру* (lit. ‘to invite people’); *ас дайындау* (lit. ‘to prepare food’); *ас ишу* (lit. ‘to eat food’); *асылған ет* (lit. ‘boiled meat’); *ағайын* (lit. ‘relatives’); *ақ дастарқан* (lit. ‘white festive table’; symbol of hospitality); *босаға* (lit. ‘threshold’); *бөгде адам* (lit. ‘outsider’); *бөтен үйден келген сыйлы адам* (lit. ‘honoured person from another house’); *дайындалу* (lit. ‘to get ready’); *демалыс* (lit. ‘rest, holiday’); *дөңгелек үстел* (lit. ‘round table’); *есік* (lit. ‘door’); *ет асу* (lit. ‘to cook meat’); *жылу* (lit. ‘warmth’); *жұрт* (lit. ‘people, company’), and other conceptually related items referring to hospitality, kinship, and domestic traditions.

Although participants were asked to supply a single-word association, the answers include both individual words and multi-word phrases.

According to the lexical-grammatical relations between stimulus and reactions, three types of links were identified within the associative field of *қонақ* (lit. ‘guest’).

1. Syntagmatic links – syntactic relations between the stimulus and a response that can form a word-group or a predicate. Examples: *Қонақ – күту* (lit. ‘to host’), *сыйлы* (lit. ‘honoured’), *құтты* (lit. ‘auspicious’), *шақыру* (lit. ‘invitation’), *құдайы* (uninvited traveller honoured as “God’s guest”), *ас беру* (lit. ‘to serve a memorial meal’), *сыйласу* (lit. ‘exchange of respect’), *дайындалу* (lit. ‘preparation’), *ет асу* (lit. ‘to boil meat’), *көп* (lit. ‘many’), *тамақ беру* (lit. ‘to give food’), *тамақ жасау* (lit. ‘to cook’). Such pairs illustrate grammatical patterns like *қонақты күту* (lit. ‘to host a guest’), *қонақ шақыру* (lit. ‘to invite a guest’), *қонаққа тамақ беру* (lit. ‘to give food to a guest’).
2. Paradigmatic links – relations among words of the same grammatical class. Examples: *Қонақ – дастарқан* (lit. ‘festive table’), *тамақ* (lit. ‘food’), *той* (lit. ‘celebration’), *адам* (lit. ‘person’), *туыс* (lit. ‘relative’), *төр* (lit. ‘honoured place’), *қонақ* (lit. ‘guest’), *ас* (lit. ‘meal’), *мейман* (lit. ‘guest’), *мереке* (lit. ‘holiday’), *жиын* (lit. ‘gathering’), *көрші* (lit. ‘neighbour’), *сарқыт* (lit. ‘food sent home with a guest’). These designate who the guest is, to whom the term applies, or objects used to honour a guest.
3. Phrasal links arise between the stimulus and reactions that express a more complete thought: *Қонақ – Бөтен үйден келген сыйлы адам* (lit. ‘honoured person from another household’); *Үйге алыстан келген адам* (lit. ‘person who came from afar’); *Үйге келген бір кісі* (lit. ‘one person who came to the house’); *Үйге келетін сыйлы адамдар* (lit. ‘honoured people who come to the house’); *Проблема үй жинау керек* (lit. ‘problem: need to clean the house’). The first sentences describe the guest’s nature, whereas the last conveys the respondent’s subjective concern about the stimulus.

These link types show that mental images in an individual’s linguistic consciousness are tied to specific lexical-grammatical devices. Language and mind “form a unity; living together they complement each other, language is the direct reality of thought and consciousness” (Mambetova, 2011, p. 120). A person’s thinking, worldview, cultural experience and communicative style influence linguistic consciousness; therefore, each respondent’s mind determines which linguistic unit to choose when writing associations. Lexical items and grammatical constructions in the field reveal the content of that consciousness: special respect for a guest is reflected through *қонақты күту* (lit. ‘hosting a guest’), *сыйлы адам* (lit. ‘honoured person’), *қуаныш* (lit. ‘joy’), *төр* (lit. ‘honoured place’), *құрмет* (lit. ‘respect’). As Diagram 1 shows, the highest-frequency units are preserved as single words in the linguistic consciousness of the youth.

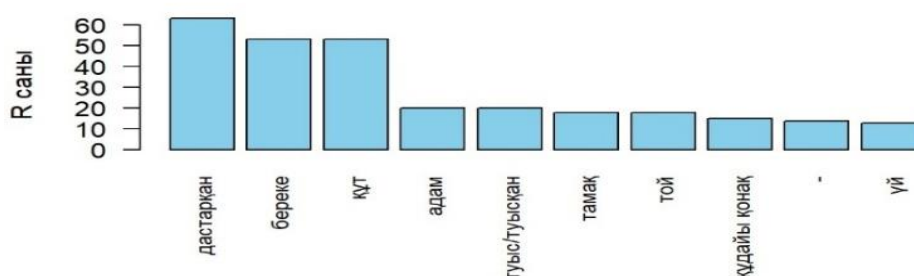


Figure 1. Reactions to the Stimulus Word *Қонақ* (Guest)

Note: The vertical bars represent the number of responses (R) for each associative word related to the stimulus *қонақ* (guest). The words along the x-axis include: *дастарқан*, *береке* (blessing), *құт* (prosperity), *адам* (person), *туыс/туысқан* (relative), *тамақ* (food), *той* (celebration), *құдайы қонақ* (honored guest), ' (no response), and *үй* (home). The height of each bar reflects the frequency with which the word was mentioned by participants.

Қонақ associative-verbal field analysis showed that its nucleus is formed by the reaction *дастарқан* (lit. ‘festive table’; a cloth or oil-cloth spread on the floor or on a table when eating), recorded in 63 responses. In Kazakh the word is used both literally and figuratively. In its nominative sense *дастарқан* denotes the thick cloth itself; etymologically it comes from Persian *dastar* ‘napkin’. Varieties include sets for a small family, for entertaining guests, for tea or for meat (Sozdikqor.kz, 2025). Figuratively, *дастарқан* symbolises abundance, blessing, hospitality, open-heartedness, generosity, unity. Whether at celebrations or funerals, a *дастарқан* is laid to show honour. The term thus conveys goodwill, gratitude and a gathering of kin, which Zhanabekova (2011) analyses these symbolic meanings in depth. Ethnographers such as Arutiunov and Shakhanova note that sharing a *дастарқан* constitutes not merely eating but a culturally codified system tied to ritual practice (as cited in Zhanabekova, 2011). One respondent even wrote *ақ дастарқан* (lit. ‘white festive table’; spotless cloth offered with pure intentions) 0.15 %. Hence, for Kazakh youth *дастарқан* is a sacred, meaningful concept; its association with *қонақ* demonstrates preservation of a deep cultural code.

With *дастарқан* are closely linked reactions naming food, meals and preparatory actions: *тамақ* (lit. ‘food’), *ас* (lit. ‘meal’), *ет* (lit. ‘meat’), *сарқым* (lit. ‘food sent home with a guest’), *үстел* (lit. ‘table’), *бешбармақ* (national meat-and-noodle dish), *қонақасы* (lit. ‘guest feast’), *ас дайындау* (lit. ‘to prepare food’), *ас ишу* (lit. ‘to eat food’), *асылған ет* (lit. ‘boiled meat’), *ет асу* (lit. ‘to boil meat’), *кәмпит* (lit. ‘candy’), *манты* (central-Asian dumplings). These pairs link “object to object” (*дастарқан – тамақ, ас, ет*) or “object to action” (*дастарқан – ас дайындау*) in whole–part relations, showing that in youth consciousness the word *қонақ* evokes the festive table, various foods and their preparation, all firmly tied to the tradition of entertaining guests.

Near the nucleus lie *береке* (lit. ‘prosperity’), *құт* (lit. ‘blessing’), *адам* (lit. ‘person’), *туыс / туысқан* (lit. ‘relative’), *той* (lit. ‘celebration’), *құдайы қонақ* (uninvited guest honoured as “God’s guest”), and *үй* (lit. ‘house’). The associations *қонақ – береке / құт* imply that a guest brings plenty and good fortune. Related items *құт-береке* (lit. ‘blessing-prosperity’), *ырыс* (lit. ‘well-being’), *бақыт* (lit. ‘happiness’), *құтты* (lit. ‘auspicious’) confirm that the Turkic idea “guest equals blessing” survives in the ethnocultural consciousness of Kazakh youth.

The reaction *адам* connects semantically with other single-word or phrasal answers describing the person: *кісі* (lit. ‘visitor’), *сыйлы адам* (lit. ‘honoured person’), *үйге келген адам* (lit. ‘person who came to the house’), *бөтен адам* (lit. ‘stranger’), *жақын адам* (lit. ‘close person’), *құрметті адам* (lit. ‘respected person’), *киелі адам* (lit. ‘sacred person’), *үйге алыстан келген адам* (lit. ‘person who came from afar’). Thus, in youth consciousness *қонақ* is revealed through diverse human qualities, answering “Who is the guest?” and “What kind of person is he?”

Қонақ – туыс/туысқан (guest – relative) is one of the ten most frequent reactions. The proverb *Жақыныңды жаттай сыйла, жат көңілінен түңілсін* (lit. ‘Honour your kin as if they were strangers so that strangers may lose their reluctance’) is reflected in Kazakh youths’ ethnocultural consciousness. Within the field, the stimulus *қонақ* links semantically with *жақындар* (lit. ‘close ones’), *нағашы* (lit. ‘maternal relative’), *алыстағы ағайындар* (lit. ‘relatives from afar’), *ағамның келуі* (lit. ‘my elder brother’s visit’), *бауырым* (lit. ‘my brother’), *жақын* (lit. ‘close’), *жезде* (lit. ‘brother-in-law’) and *тума-туыс* (lit. ‘kin, relatives’), all expressing the respect shown among kin in Kazakh custom. Honouring and entertaining relatives is an inseparable part of Kazakh hospitality; the *қонақ – туыс/туысқан* pairing in youth consciousness therefore mirrors cultural-social relations and a collective way of life centred on extended family.

As noted above, the association *қонақ – тамақ* (guest – food) evokes the *дастарқан* (festive table) and dishes offered to guests (*ет* ‘meat’, *бешбармақ* ‘national meat dish’, *кәмпит* ‘candy’, etc.). Beyond its material meaning, food embodies national identity and cultural value. Yapici, discussing food and identity in Central Asia, argues that communal eating is a vital element of hospitality: such gatherings display generosity and respect and preserve ancient traditions, affirming household status and community cohesion (Yapici, 2018). In Kazakh culture every visitor must taste something from the household table; plentiful, varied dishes signify honour, explaining why *тамақ* appears in the youths’ answers.

In the linguistic consciousness of young respondents *қонақ* is also associated with *той* (lit. ‘celebration, feast’). In Kazakh culture the meanings of *қонақ* and *той* are closely linked: *той* names the gathering or festivity, while those invited are called *қонақ*. Thus, mentioning *той* together with *қонақ* is natural, for a *той* is an event where kin and friends assemble, hospitality etiquette is observed, and social bonds are strengthened. The word *той* designates the important occasion that prompts invitations, and *қонақ* denotes its principal participant. We therefore regard the *той* reaction as a response grounded in tradition and lived experience. Other answers in the field *жиын* (lit. ‘gathering’), *той-думан* (lit. ‘festive revelry’), *туған күн* (lit. ‘birthday’), *шақыру қағазы* (lit. ‘invitation card’) link logically with *той*, further elaborating the mental image of celebration held by Kazakh youth.

What does the reaction *құдайы қонақ* (uninvited traveller treated as “God’s guest”) signify within the *Қонақ* associative-verbal field? As noted earlier, Kazakh (and other Turkic) tradition distinguishes several guest types, one of which is *құдайы қонақ*. The encyclopaedia *Қазақтың этнографиялық категориялар, ұғымдар мен атаулары* defines this as *ат арылтып алыстан келе жатып үйге түскен, шаңырақ иесіне ешбір таныстығы, туыстығы жоқ бейтаныс жолаушы* (lit. ‘a stranger travelling from afar who stops at a house without any acquaintance or kinship to the host’) (Sozdikqor.kz, 2025). In today’s life especially in cities such guests are rare, yet the term persists in the linguistic consciousness of Kazakh youth.

Among the frequent reactions is *үй* (lit. ‘house, dwelling’). With respect to the stimulus *қонақ* this word carries two senses: (1) the dwelling where guests are received, and (2) *қонақ үй* (lit. ‘guest house’, hotel) where travellers stay while away from home. The presence of *қонақ үй* in modern linguistic consciousness reflects urbanisation, globalisation, and

service-sector growth, indicating that people increasingly choose commercial accommodation rather than a relative's or friend's home evidence of social change influencing linguistic consciousness.

For comparison we can cite Tall's (2011) study of the Russian associative field for *гость* (guest). Drawing on the associative dictionary compiled by Karaulov et al. (2002), Tall lists the following psycholinguistic features of Russian hospitality: most guests are close friends; they arrive on foot; hosts welcome them gladly; uninvited guests are disliked; visits occur in the evening; a guest brings a gift, cake, or flowers; the table is laid and food offered; before arrival the house is tidied, crystal is set out, festive clothes are worn; guests may be received in the kitchen; hosts and guests chat and exchange news (Tall, 2011, p. 9).

Similarities were discovered between meanings in the Kazakh *Қонақ* field and those found in Russian associations. Typical examples include welcoming a guest with open arms and joy, honouring and hosting the guest, laying a *дәстарқан* (lit. 'festive table') and offering varied dishes, tidying the house in advance, guests arriving with presents, and spending relaxed time in conversation. Yet each culture also has its own distinctions. In the Kazakh data the reaction *қонақ – дос* (lit. 'guest – friend') does occur, but the guest is associated far more often with kinship terms. A further Kazakh-specific feature is the reaction *көрші* (lit. 'neighbour'). While the basic meaning is "people living in the adjacent house," its culture-representative sense is broader. In traditional Kazakh society the neighbouring household and village hold special moral weight: relations rest on harmony and mutual respect. Even without blood ties such neighbours are called *құдайы көрші* (lit. 'God-given neighbour') and are treated with particular honour. The notion of *көрші ақысы* (lit. 'the neighbour's due') embraces norms such as avoiding harm, giving help in hardship, assisting with guests and everyday tasks (Kazakh National Corpus, 2020). Its presence among the associations shows that the concept of the neighbour remains active in young people's ethnocultural consciousness.

Whether a guest is invited or not, only a few responses convey negative overtones e.g. *Проблема, үй жинау керек* (lit. 'problem: need to clean the house'), *қатылыс* (lit. 'rush'), *қиындық* (lit. 'difficulty') whereas reactions with positive meaning (*береке* 'prosperity', *құт* 'blessing', *құдайы қонақ* 'God's guest', *сыйлы адам* 'honoured person', *қуаныш* 'joy', *құтты* 'auspicious', *ырыс* 'well-being', *құрметті* 'respected', *киелі адам* 'sacred person', etc.) dominate the field. The word *қонақ* also evokes travel: rather than a pedestrian, the mental image is "someone who has journeyed from afar" as shown by associations such as *жолаушылап алыстан келген ағайындар* (lit. 'relatives who travelled from far away'), *жол жүру* (lit. 'travelling'), *машина* (lit. 'car'), *такси* (lit. 'taxi'). No responses mention time of day, yet *қонақ – көктем* (lit. 'guest – spring') appeared in two questionnaires.

In the Russian field the guest is linked with bringing *подарок, торт, цветы* ('a present, cake, flowers'). By contrast, along with *сыйлық* (lit. 'gift') the Kazakh field contains *сарқыт* (lit. 'food taken home from the host's table') 4×. *Сарқыт* is an ethnographic term with idiographic semantics: "food dried curds, cheese, sweets, etc. brought home from a guest meal so that children or elders may taste the *дәстарқан* fare; also, food left by guests or elders and eaten in the belief that their good qualities will be transferred" (Sozdikqor.kz, 2025). Because this custom is still practised, the word is firmly fixed in the linguistic consciousness of Kazakh youth.

In Russian hospitality the host may set out crystal dishes and dress in festive clothes, whereas in Kazakh youths' associations only *ыдыс* (lit. 'dish'), *ыдыс-аяқ* (lit. 'tableware') and *құман* (lit. 'ewer') appeared (3 responses in total); not a single respondent mentioned festive clothing. We assume that the idea of crockery surfaces only three times because, as a part-for-whole element, it is already incorporated into the semantic structure of *дәстарқан* (festive table). While Russian respondents picture receiving guests in the kitchen, Kazakh youth associate *қонақ* with *тәр* (lit. 'honoured place in the house') 10, *тәр орын* (lit. 'seat of honour') 1 and *зал комнатасы* (Rus.+Kaz. 'parlour room') 1, confirming awareness of the custom of seating a guest in the most respected spot. In Kazakh tradition *тәр* denotes "the place of highest honour where esteemed guests or elders sit" (Sozdikqor.kz, 2025).

Another feature of the Kazakh field is the mention of core national dishes for guests: *ас* (lit. 'meal') 9, *ет* (lit. 'meat') 7, *беишбармақ* (national meat-and-noodle dish) 3, *ас беру* (lit. 'to serve a memorial meal') 2, *асылған ет* (lit. 'boiled meat') 1. These associations convey the cultural specificity of entertaining guests with traditional food.

Regarding gender, the nucleus word *дәстарқан* appears mostly in women's answers (43), whereas most men associate *қонақ* with *береке* (lit. 'prosperity') 25 (see Diagram 2). Thus, in female linguistic consciousness the guest is pictured through the practical setting of hospitality, whereas in male consciousness the guest's symbolic meaning bringing abundance prevails.

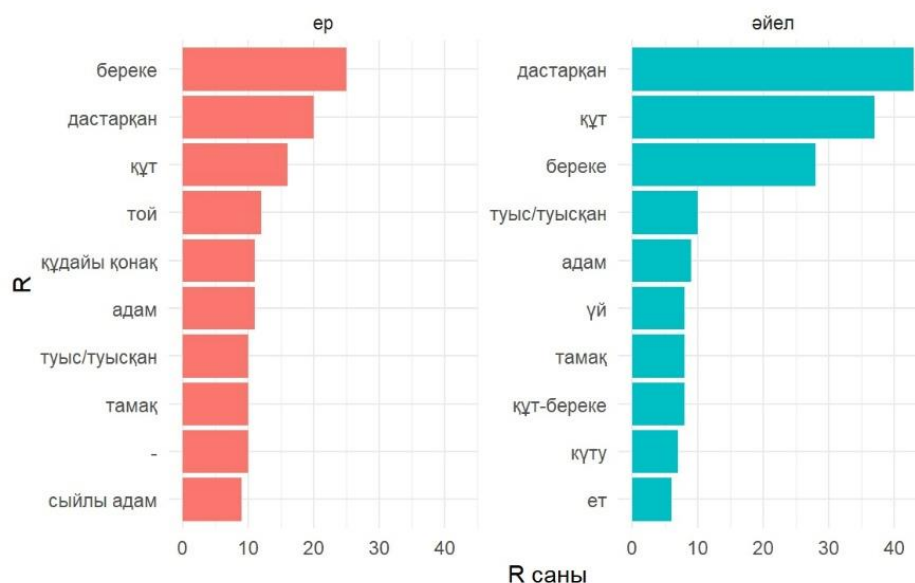


Figure 2. Male and Female Reactions to the Stimulus Word Қонақ (Guest)

Note: The horizontal bars represent the number of responses (R) given by male (ер) and female (әйел) participants to the stimulus қонақ (guest). The associative words on the y-axis for men include: береке (blessing), дастарқан, құт (prosperity), той (celebration), құдайы қонақ (honored guest), адам (person), туыс/туысқан (relative), тамақ (food), – (no response), and сыйлы адам (respected person). For women, the associative words include: дастарқан, құт (prosperity), береке (blessing), туыс/туысқан (relative), адам (person), үй (home), тамақ (food), құт-береке (blessing and prosperity), күту (welcoming), and ет (meat). The length of each bar indicates how frequently that word was mentioned by respondents of each gender.

Beyond дастарқан (lit. ‘festive table’) and береке (lit. ‘prosperity’), men and women share several associations: құт (lit. ‘blessing’), туыс / туысқан (lit. ‘relative’), адам (lit. ‘person’), тамақ (lit. ‘food’). These answers clearly show the social, everyday and cultural importance of the guest concept across Kazakh society.

Proverbs such as Әйелдің бір көркі – дастарқан (lit. ‘A woman’s beauty includes her festive table’) and Бата тілеген әйел үйге келген қонаққа дастарқан жаяды (lit. ‘A woman who seeks blessing spreads the table for a guest’) together with experiment reactions күту (lit. ‘to host’), үй (lit. ‘house’), ет (lit. ‘meat’) reflect the woman’s role in a Kazakh household: laying the table and preparing food for guests.

Among men the word дастарқан appears 20 times, but less often than among women (43). By contrast, той (lit. ‘celebration’) occurs more in men’s answers (men – 12; women – 6), as do құдайы қонақ (uninvited “God’s guest”: men – 11; women – 4) and сыйлы адам (lit. ‘honoured person’: men – 9; women – 3). In male consciousness the guest is linked to special events, guest type and guest status.

The conclusion is that men’s linguistic consciousness foregrounds traditional notions of spiritual or social significance, whereas women’s responses emphasise concrete, material aspects of everyday culture. In other words, women’s images relate to daily household practice, while men’s relate to more abstract cultural values. Fourteen respondents did not supply an answer (or wrote illegibly); ten of them were men. These findings illustrate the interplay of national-cultural awareness and gendered world-views. Overall, the study is noteworthy for its naturalness, since it deals not with “the real world” or scholarly explanations but with the everyday perceptions and understandings of ordinary people (Bernárdez, 2010, pp. 24-25).

V. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the associative-verbal field Қонақ (guest) revealed several semantic structures and cultural interpretations present in the linguistic consciousness of Kazakh youth:

- The concept қонақ is perceived not only figuratively as a құт-береке әкелуші (lit. ‘bringer of blessing and prosperity’) but also as an honoured, respected person.
- A guest is understood in close connection with traditional culture: showing respect, preparing in advance, laying a дастарқан (lit. ‘festive table’), serving national dishes, seating in the төр (lit. ‘place of honour’), engaging in conversation, creating a cheerful atmosphere, and offering сарқыт (lit. ‘portion of food taken home by the guest’).
- In youth consciousness the guest is classified into various social groups such as құдайы қонақ (uninvited “God’s guest”), тума-туыс (lit. ‘blood relatives’), бөгде адам (lit. ‘stranger’), көрші (lit. ‘neighbour’).
- Lexico-grammatical links between the stimulus and reactions operate on syntagmatic, paradigmatic and phrasal levels.
- Gender differences appear: for men the guest holds more symbolic meaning, whereas for women the associations are rooted in everyday household practice.
- Although some cognitive parallels with Russian culture emerged, clear intercultural distinctions remain.

- The field is dominated by positively charged units.

In sum, the linguistic units found in the *Қонақ* field supplement dictionary definitions, uncover deep layers in the semantic structure of the word, and through logical-semantic links with other items convey key information about traditional culture and national values preserved in the minds of Kazakh youth. These results can inform the compilation of an associative dictionary, comparative studies of linguistic consciousness, and research on the cultural-linguistic profiles of different social groups.

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