

Semantic Evolution of the Word *Qatyn* in the Kazakh Language: Identifying the Causes of Negative Connotation

Sherubay Kurmanbaiuly

National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Republic of Kazakhstan;
Nemat Kelimbetov Center for Turkology, Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan

Marlen Adilov*

Nemat Kelimbetov Center for Turkology, Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan

Gaukhar Alimbek

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan

Akzhibek N. Akhmet

Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan

Abstract—This article investigates the semantic evolution of the lexeme *qatyn* in Kazakh from an originally respectful designation for a married woman to a socially marked, often pejorative label. Drawing on historical dictionaries, early Kazakh texts, Old Turkic inscriptions, and contemporary media discourse, the study combines methods of historical lexicology, etymological analysis, and sociolinguistic interpretation. The analysis systematizes competing etymologies that derive *qatyn* from Old Turkic *qatun* and from internal Turkic word-formation, and relates them to cultural models of marriage, kinship, and social hierarchy. Particular attention is paid to the role of Soviet-era language policy, purism, and ideological regulation of public discourse in shifting the evaluative profile of the word, as well as to the continuing coexistence of respectful and pejorative uses in present-day Kazakh. The paper argues that the semantic degradation of *qatyn* is not the result of purely internal linguistic change, but reflects broader transformations in gender ideology, urbanization, and the reconfiguration of Kazakh–Russian bilingual practices. By tracing micro-level changes in collocations, phraseology, and genre distribution, the article demonstrates how a key element of the Kazakh kinship lexicon has become a site where issues of linguistic correctness, national identity, and gendered respectability are negotiated.

Index Terms—semantic change, Kazakh language, Turkic languages, etymology, language ideology

I. INTRODUCTION

In modern Kazakh, the word *äiel* (a borrowing from Arabic) is used far more actively than the native term *qatyn*, which has been noticeably displaced from everyday usage. Moreover, today the word *qatyn* is often perceived as coarse or even abusive. It is possible that this stereotype was formed during the Soviet period under the influence of the Russian word *baba* in its derogatory sense.

In her study of the semantics of kinship-related terms, Pokrovskaya (1961) notes that in a number of Turkic languages—particularly Kazakh, Khakas, and Altai—the word *qatun* (“wife”, “woman”) has acquired a negative connotation. At the same time, she emphasizes that in Old Turkic monuments and in modern Turkish this lexeme is used with a positive meaning.

Similar tendencies are observed in other Turkic languages. A comprehensive study of Tuvan proverbs and sayings shows that gendered paroemias overwhelmingly reproduce androcentric stereotypes and asymmetrical expectations towards men and women, thereby reinforcing a hierarchical model of gender relations (Egorova et al., 2020). The fact that in Tuvan paremias, as in Kazakh, pejorative shades cluster around certain female designations suggests that the negative re-evaluation of lexemes referring to women is part of a wider Turkic pattern rather than a uniquely Kazakh development.

Syzdykova (1995) points out that in Kazakh the word *qatyn* was displaced from active usage by the Arabic-derived word *äiel* (“wife”, “woman”), and that *qatyn* is currently regarded as semantically obsolete, that is, it belongs to the category of semantic archaisms.

* Corresponding Author. Email: marlenadilov88@gmail.com

Representatives of the Kazakh intelligentsia emphasize that *äiel* is a borrowed word that does not carry a positive semantic load and entered common usage relatively recently, whereas *qatyn* has lost its ancient meaning. Thus, Akhmet Toqtabai argues that *qatyn* denotes “the assistant of the khagan, the support of the people, and in a broader sense, the mother of the people.” In turn, Qarzhabay Sartqozha explains that among the ancient Turks the principal wife of the khagan was called *qatyn*, while her attendants were referred to as *qalaš*; it is from this usage that the modern expression *qatyn-qalaš* originates.

Tursyn Zhurtbai adds that in contemporary literary usage the word *äiel* is traced to the Arabic *kūñ* (“female slave”), that is, a person deprived of free will, working without remuneration and regarded as someone’s property. According to him, during the Soviet period of egalitarian policy, some Kazakh female activists who had not absorbed traditional upbringing and customs declared: “We are not *qatyn*, who possess property; we are *äiel*, like peasants without possessions,” thereby introducing a class-based connotation into the terminology. Since that time, the term *äiel* has become established as the standard literary designation (Sagyndykuly, 2021).

Thus, the arguments advanced by scholars appear logical and worthy of attention. Their perspectives on the evolution and usage of the terms *qatyn* and *äiel* highlight the multidimensional nature of linguistic change and the crucial importance of historical context.

Recent gender-linguistic research on Turkic languages has shown that lexemes denoting women and gender roles form a dense cultural and evaluative conceptosphere and play a key role in encoding social expectations about femininity and masculinity (Shokym et al., 2023; Bakytzhanova et al., 2023). Against this broader background, the present paper focuses on the diachronic semantic trajectory of a single lexeme, *qatyn*, in Kazakh, thereby linking historical lexicology with contemporary debates on gender, language ideology, and linguistic correctness.

Against this background, recent Kazakh-language studies conceptualise gender stereotypes as a system of socially and culturally entrenched expectations which are lexicalised in everyday discourse and folkloric texts. Drawing on psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic data, Igissinova et al. (2024b) argue that gender stereotypes in Kazakh are encoded not only in lexemes referring to women and men, but also in evaluative collocations and metaphorical patterns which shape speakers’ interpretations of the “Kazakh woman” and related concepts.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

The study primarily employs comparative, contrastive, and componential methods of semantic analysis. First, we compiled an empirical base from several types of sources: Old Turkic runic inscriptions, medieval lexicographic monuments such as *Dīwān Luġāt al-Turk*, dictionaries of modern Turkic languages, explanatory and etymological dictionaries of Kazakh, works of Abai and other authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Soviet-era prose, and contemporary Kazakh-language media texts. All occurrences of the lexeme *qatyn* (and its phonetic variants) were extracted from these sources and recorded together with information about date, genre, and type of discourse (religious, literary, colloquial, journalistic, etc.).

Given that the research focuses on word origin, etymological literature on Turkic and Persian was subjected to a detailed, critical review. Each proposed etymology for *qatyn* was examined individually, with phonetic and morphological analyses of the relevant forms, comparison with cognate items in other Turkic languages, and evaluation of their semantic development in historical context. On this basis, we systematized and grouped the hypotheses of previous scholars, identifying which of them are supported by data from Old Turkic inscriptions, medieval dictionaries, and modern dialectal and literary usage.

In analyzing the semantic development of *qatyn*, contextual and discourse-based methods were applied. All collected examples were coded according to their evaluative load (positive, neutral, or negative), typical collocations (e.g., *qatyn patsha*, *jas qatyn*, *qarataiyġan qatyn*), and syntagmatic environment (narrative description, proverb, invective, domestic dialogue, etc.). Particular attention was paid to passages from Abai’s poetry and the texts of Alash intellectuals, where *qatyn* functions as a key element of the kinship and ethical lexicon, as well as to Soviet-era fiction and contemporary media, where the word begins to acquire familiar, colloquial, and sometimes pejorative connotations. This multi-layered comparison makes it possible to link micro-changes in meaning and usage to broader sociolinguistic shifts in language policy, gender ideology, and Kazakh–Russian bilingual practices.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Etymology of the Word *Qatyn*

According to the English etymologist Clauson (1972), the term *qatyn* derives from the Old Sogdian words *xwt’y* “king, khan” and *xwt’yn* “the khan’s wife, queen,” a hypothesis he substantiates with a high degree of reliability. In Kazakh explanatory dictionaries of Arabic and Persian loanwords, *qatyn* is likewise classified as a lexeme of Persian origin. A similar conclusion is presented in dictionaries compiled by Rüstemov and Oñdasynov, as well as in contemporary works by Mamyrbekova (2017), where *qatyn* is interpreted as a borrowing from Persian.

At the same time, given its ancient and stable usage in Kazakh, it seems methodologically reasonable to search for the root of this word within the native lexical system rather than attributing it entirely to foreign origin. Below, several hypotheses and arguments are presented.

1. Derivation from *qatyn* as (“connection, relationship”).

The word *qatyn* may be related to the lexeme *qatyn* as, meaning “the union of two lineages through a woman’s marriage.” This idea was voiced by M. Ādilov (with reference to a 2008 lecture by Professor Zhantas Zhaqypov), who noted that *qatyn* could plausibly derive from *qatynas* in the sense of “the one who establishes a bond between two families”.

2. Derivation from the verb *qat-* (“to join, to add”).

According to another viewpoint, *qatyn* is derived from the verb *qat-*, meaning “to join” or “to increase.” By marrying, a woman “connects” two clans and “increases” the human lineage by giving birth to children. The verb *qat-* is attested in modern Kazakh expressions (e.g., *sūt qatu* “to add milk”), although in the literary language it is less frequent than the synonymous *qos-*. Notably, in modern Oghuz languages, the word-formation model with *qat-* remains highly productive. This makes the hypothesis linking *qatyn* to *qat-* linguistically plausible. In a similar vein, the Kyrgyz Turkologist Useev (2012) argues that *kelin* (“bride, daughter-in-law”) derives from the verb *kel-* (“to come”), meaning “one who has come into the household”; by analogy, *qatyn* may be connected with *qat-* (“to join, to interact”) (p. 61). Moreover, in Old Turkic the verb *qat-* denoted sexual relations between spouses. In Mahmud al-Kashgari’s *Dīwān Luġāt al-Turk*, *qat-* (*qatyl-*) is glossed as “sexual intercourse between a man and a woman”: *er uraġutqa qatıldı* (“the man had sexual relations with a woman”) (Ercilasun & Akkoyunlu, 2015).

3. Connection with the noun *qat* (“layer, stratum”) and the adjective *qabat* (“multilayered”).

4. Some linguists assume that *qatyn* may derive from *qat* in the meaning “layer,” with the secondary meaning “spouse” developing metaphorically (“the person who is closest,” “the one who is beside”). Since *qat* can function both as a noun and as the base of the verb *qatu* (“to layer, to accumulate”), the semantic link between *qatyn* and *qat/ qatu* does not contradict linguistic patterns. According to a concept reflected in Islamic religious-canonical texts, a woman is created from a man’s rib, which resonates with Kazakh expressions such as *qabyrġammen aqyldasayn* (“I will consult with my rib”) and *keregemmen keġeseyn* (“I will consult with my support”). In this context, a semantic connection between *qat* (“layer, stratum”) and *qabyrġa* (“rib, wall”) can be established, based on shared notions of proximity, cohesion, and structural function within family and social hierarchies.

5. The interpretation as “the chief wife of the khagan”.

6. There is also an opinion that *qatyn* originally denoted the senior or principal wife of the khagan (ruler).

7. Association with the forms *qaġan* or *khan*.

8. A number of authoritative scholars in Turkic etymology, including Clauson (1972), consider *qatyn* to be etymologically related to the terms *qaġan* or *khan* (p. 602).

9. Derivation from the same root as *qaiyn* (“affinal relative”).

10. Given that many kinship terms in Turkic languages go back to the root *qa* (e.g., *qaġ* “father,” *qadaş* “kinsman,” *qarındaş* “sister”), it is reasonable to hypothesize a common indigenous root for *qatyn* and *qaiyn* (“relatives by marriage”). According to Gülensoy (2018), author of an etymological dictionary of Turkish, *qatyn* derives from *qaiyn* (including *qaiyn ata*, *qaiyn ana* “father-in-law, mother-in-law”) (p. 71). The antiquity of this form is indicated by toponyms (e.g., *Katon-Qaraġai*) and hydronyms (the *Katun* River in Siberia), which preserve the archaic form *qatyn/qadyn*, correlated with *qaiyn* (“birch”). In this case, *qatyn* and *qaiyn* may be regarded as homonymous forms originating from a single root; the meanings *qaiyn jurt* (“wife’s relatives”) and *qaiyn ata* (“wife’s father”) can be logically explained through historical phonetic and semantic shifts.

The alternation of the consonants *d* and *y* is especially evident in the pair *qatyn* – *qaiyn* and was noted by Mahmud al-Kashgari, who observed that the dialects of the *Yaġma*, *Toqsı*, *Kipchak*, *Yabaqu*, *Tatar*, *Qay*, and *Chomul* tribes interchange *d* and *y* in words such as *qadyn* (“relative, kin”) (Useev, 2012, pp. 57–66). In particular, Oghuz speech characteristically uses the form *qaiyn* instead of *qadyn* in the meaning “relatives by marriage” (Mamyrbekova, 2017, p. 173). This is evidenced by the proverb: *Kadaş temiş qaimadıq, qadyn temiş qaimyş* (“They paid no heed to brothers, but showed respect to affinal relatives”), where *qadyn* is equivalent to *qaiyn* (“relatives by marriage”).

Thus, on the basis of the arguments and scholarly views considered above, it can be argued that the word *qatyn* has a highly complex etymology. It may have emerged within the Old Turkic lexical system at the intersection of several lexico-semantic trajectories: from the verb *qat-* with its meanings “to bind, to join, to add,” from the noun *qat* (“layer, stratum”), from the possible meaning “lady, chief wife of the khagan,” and through shared roots linking it to *qaiyn* (“affinal kin”). This multivector origin of *qatyn* reflects the overall complexity of lexical evolution and kinship concepts in the Turkic languages.

B. The Meaning of the Word *Qatyn* in Old Turkic Written Monuments and Medieval Sources

An examination of Old Turkic written monuments and medieval artifacts shows that the word *qatun* was used exclusively with a positive meaning. In the Orkhon inscriptions, *qatun* is attested in the sense of “queen,” “princess,” or “empress.” In particular, the *Kül Tegin* monument contains the following line:

Türk budunuġ atı küsi yoq bolmazun tiyin, qaġım qaġanıġ, öġüm qatunuġ kötürmiş Teġri

(“So that the name and might of the Turkic people should not perish, Tengri exalted my father—the khagan—and my mother—the khatun”).

In the valuable eleventh-century monument *Dīwān Luġāt al-Turk* (“Compendium of the Turkic Languages”), the word *qatun* likewise does not refer to an “ordinary woman,” but denotes “lady,” “woman of noble origin,” or “daughter of a distinguished lineage.” This is evidenced, for example, by the proverb:

Qan işi bolsa, qatun işi qalır

("If there is a matter for the khan, the lady's matter is postponed").

A similar meaning is recorded in sources from the Khwarazmian and Golden Horde periods, where *hatun* denotes "lady, queen; the wife of a bey or mirza; a woman, the mistress of the household." In the Kipchak monument Codex Cumanicus, the word *qatun* is glossed as "a noble woman; a lady." In Mamluk–Kipchak materials, it carries the meaning "lady." In the Anatolian epic *The Book of Dede Korkut*, the variants *qadun/hatun* occur with the meanings "lady," "beautiful woman," and "mistress of the house".

These data, presented in the dictionaries accompanying the above-mentioned monuments, consistently confirm the high social status and honorific meaning of the word *qatun* in the Turkic languages of the medieval period.

C. The Meaning of the Word *Qatyn* in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

The Semantics of *Qatyn* in Abai's Works

An analysis of Abai's oeuvre and texts from the early twentieth century, that is, prior to the Soviet period, demonstrates that during this historical stage the word *qatyn* retained a clearly positive connotation.

Researchers note that in Abai's time the word *qatyn* belonged to the literary norm and was used frequently, whereas the word *äiel* was only beginning to establish itself as a literary designation. According to quantitative data, in Abai's texts *äiel* occurs eight times, *urğasy* ("female") four times, while *qatyn* appears forty-one times (Syzykova, 1995, p. 63). This distribution clearly indicates that *qatyn* functioned as the normative lexical item, whereas the Arabic-derived *äiel* was only gradually entering the vocabulary of the literary language.

In Abai's works, the lexeme *qatyn* is not used in a derogatory sense but rather in the meanings "wife", "spouse", and "lady." Syzykova (1995) emphasizes that those Kazakh words which are commonly used today in formal contexts (such as *zaiyp*, *jubai*) were not employed by Abai himself; instead, in the meanings "wife" and "spouse," he consistently used *jar* (39 occurrences) and *qatyn* (21 occurrences) (p. 64). Such examples demonstrate that at that time *qatyn* carried a positive semantic load, corresponding to "beloved wife" or "lady" and was by no means perceived as rude or offensive.

This positive evaluation is clearly illustrated in Abai's poetry. Consider, for example, the following poem, in which the favorable characterization of *qatyn* is explicit:

Ақыл керек, іс керек, мінез керек,
Ер ұялар іс қылмас қатын зерек.
Салақ, олақ, ойнасшы, керім-кербез,
Жыртаң-тыртаң қызылдан шығады ерек...
Қатының сені сүйсе, сен де оны сүй,
Қоржаң суық келеді кей сасық ми.
Ері ақылды, қатыны мінезді боп,
Тату болса, райыс үстіндегі үй.
Жоқ болса қатыныңның жат өсегі,
Болмаса мінезінің еш кесегі,
Майысқан, бейне гүлдей толықсыған,
Кем емес алтын тақтан жар төсегі...
Құрбыңның тәуір болса өз мінезі,
Абройлы қалжыңмен келсін сөзі.
Сен оған мойын бұрып сөз айтқанда
Қатыныңда болмасын оның көзі.

(English rendering:)

Wisdom is needed, deeds are needed, character too;
A wise wife will never shame her husband.
Slovenly, careless, playful, vain—
Gaudy and noisy, she stands apart.
If your wife loves you, love her in return;
Coldness and rudeness come from a rotten mind.
When the husband is wise and the wife well-tempered,
A harmonious home is like paradise beneath a dome.
If your wife has no чуж gossip,
If her character bears no flaw,
Graceful, like a flower in full bloom,
Her marital bed is no worse than a golden throne.
Let your friend be decent in character,
Let his words be marked by honorable wit;
But when you turn to speak with him,

Let your wife not cast her gaze upon him.

This poem vividly demonstrates that in Abai's ethical universe *qatyn* is associated not with vulgarity or aggression, but with a normative ideal of a morally upright, emotionally restrained married woman who guarantees the continuity and moral health of the household. The wife's modest behavior, loyalty, and self-control are presented as preconditions for male friendship and communal harmony. In other words, the lexeme *qatyn* here belongs to the positive, honorific layer of the kinship lexicon and indexes a culturally valued model of femininity rather than a coarse everyday label.

In Abai's poetic discourse, therefore, *qatyn* functions as a central and positively evaluated figure who embodies moral responsibility, restraint, and the well-being of the household. The following examples from his oeuvre further illustrate how this lexeme operates in everyday and family-related contexts.

In other poems by Abai, the lexeme *qatyn* likewise appears in consistently positive contexts:

1.

Біреу малма сапсиды салып иін
Салбыраңқы тартыпты жыртық киім.
Енесіне иіртіп шуда жібін
Жас қатындар жыртылған жамайды үйін.

("Someone kneads hides in a tanning solution,
Wearing loose, worn-out clothes.
Having the mother-in-law spin camel wool,
Young wives mend the torn yurt.")

2.

Махаббатсыз – дүние бос
Хайуанға оны қосыңдар.
Қызықтан өзге қалсаң бос
Қатының, балаң, досың бар.

("Without love, the world is empty–
Count it among beasts.
If you are deprived of joy,
You still have a wife, children, and friends.")

3.

Қайын бардық, қатын алдық,
Енші тиді аз ғана
Шаруа атандық,
Енді ойландық
Қала берді бозбала.

("We visited in-laws, took a wife,
Received but a small share.
We became householders,
Then reflected–
Youth was left behind.")

A comparison of modern editions of Abai's works with the St. Petersburg edition of 1909 reveals that the earlier version does not contain the spelling *qatyn*; instead, the form *hatyn* is used consistently (Kunanbaiuly, 1909). Apparently, later editors standardized this word in accordance with modern orthographic norms, replacing *hatyn* with *qatyn*. It is noteworthy that in Mürseit's manuscripts of 1907 containing Abai's texts, only the form *hatun/hatyn* occurs, corresponding to the usage found in Old Turkic written monuments.

To illustrate this, consider the comparison between modern editions and Mürseit's manuscripts. In contemporary publications one finds:

Тойдан да, топтан да, қатыннан да көңілі аз ба, көп пе жалығады
("From feasts, from gatherings, from women as well–
The soul grows weary, whether little or much.")

In Mürseit's 1907 manuscript:

Тойдан да топтан да хатүннан да көңіл аз ба көп пе жалығады (Petek, 2023, p. 41).

Similarly, in the eleventh Word of Edification in modern editions:

Құдайға жазып, жатпай-тұрмай салып жүріп басын, ауылын, қатын, баласын сатып жүр

“Appealing to God, without rest day or night,
He sells his property, his home, his wife, and his children.”)

In the manuscript version:

Һұдайға жазып жатпай тұрмай салып жүрүп басынауылын һатүн баласын сатып жүр (GK 36/1) (Petek, 2023).

Comparable discrepancies are also observed in the Fortieth Word, where *qatyn* appears as *hatun* (GK 42/4) (Petek, 2023). In the poetic texts of the 1907 manuscript, the forms *hatyn/hatun* occur consistently (Jas hatunlar, Oinashchy hatun, Eri aqyldy, hatuny minezdi bop, Shekpen tiger hatuny, etc.), which confirms that during Abai’s lifetime the more archaic form of the word was in active use.

A comparison of the manuscript and modern versions reveals not only a graphic substitution of *hatun* with *qatyn*, but also certain differences in poetic meter, including the addition of an extra syllable. For example, in the modern version the line *Qatyñny seni süyse, sen de ony süy* is one syllable longer than in Mürseit’s original text.

It is therefore evident that in Abai’s usage *qatyn/hatun* preserved its original positive meaning of “wife” or “lady,” closely aligned with its semantics in Old Turkic texts. This is further confirmed by Kazakh proverbs and sayings:

Eki qatyñ alypsıñ, bir päläge qalypsıñ.
 (“If you take two wives, you invite misfortune.”)

Qatyñ ötirik aitpaidy, qağys estidi.
 (“A woman does not lie; she simply misheard.”)

Qazaq baiysa qatyñ alady, sart baiysa tam soğady.
 (“When a Kazakh becomes wealthy, he takes a wife; when a Sart becomes wealthy, he builds a house.”)

Qatyñ alma, qaiyn al.
 (“Do not choose a wife—choose your in-laws.”)

Bala – belde, qatyñ – jolda.
 (“A child is at the waist, a wife is on the road.”)

Jaulıq kigeniñ bäre qatyñ emes, bōrik kigeniñ bäre batyr emes.
 (“Not everyone in a headscarf is a woman, and not everyone in a cap is a hero.”)

Khan jarlyğynan qatyñ jarlyğy küşti.
 (“A woman’s word is stronger than a khan’s decree.”)

Bir qatyñ syılaumen qatyñ, bir qatyñ qınaumen qatyñ. Nağyz sol qatyñ – är närseni oilaumen qatyñ.
 (“One wife is a wife through respect, another through suffering; a true wife is the one who thinks of everything.”)

Toğyz qatyñnyñ tolğagy qatar keldi.
 (“Nine wives went into labor at the same time.”)

Recent paremiological research based on 154 Kazakh proverbs and sayings demonstrates that *qatyn* has by no means disappeared from the linguistic picture of the world. In a large corpus of paremias, *qatyn* accounts for 24.02% of all female designations and is systematically opposed to other lexemes such as *kız*, *äiel* and *ana*, which confirms that the semantic evolution of *qatyn* should be analysed not only in isolation but also within the broader network of gendered terms in Kazakh paremiology (Igissinova et al., 2024a).

Taken together, these proverbs reveal a complex, far from one-dimensional image of the *qatyn* in traditional Kazakh culture. On the one hand, sayings such as “Bala – belde, qatyñ – jolda” underline the social vulnerability and mobility of a married woman, whose status depends on marital stability. On the other hand, expressions like “Khan jarlyğynan qatyñ jarlyğy küşti” and “Nağyz sol qatyñ – är närseni oilaumen qatyñ” foreground her agency, practical wisdom, and capacity to influence household and even communal decisions. In none of these cases does *qatyn* function as an insult; rather, it serves as a central term for a socially significant role that is evaluated through a spectrum of culturally specific expectations and norms.

Thus, examples from Abai and from early twentieth-century periodicals and publicistic texts show that *qatyn* still functioned as a socially central, largely positive designation for a married woman or lady of the household. In the following sections we trace how this evaluative profile is gradually reconfigured under the influence of Alash-era discourse, Soviet language policy, and contemporary media, leading to the coexistence of respectful and pejorative uses in present-day Kazakh.

D. The Meaning of the Word *Qatyn* in the Works of Alikhan Bökeykhan

The fact that Bökeykhan (2016) –the outstanding Kazakh thinker and leader of the national movement in the early twentieth century–actively used the word *qatyn* (while employing *äiel* only very rarely) indicates the continuity of this lexeme from the time of Abai. In Bökeykhan’s texts, *qatyn* occurs with comparable frequency and retains positive semantic nuances analogous to *hanım* (“lady”) or *aru* (“beauty”) as attested in Old Turkic. For example:

“Осы Дидро қатын патша Екінші Екатеринамен хат алысып, патша Дидродан көп ақыл алған” (Bökeykhan, 2016, p. 324).

(“Diderot corresponded with Empress Catherine II, who received much advice from him.”)

This passage clearly shows that *qatyn* patsha is understood as “a woman on the imperial throne,” carrying a positive, honorific connotation.

In Bökeykhan’s writings, *qatyn* is systematically used in contexts where today one would employ *äiel* (“woman”), both in formal and everyday usage: *qatyn* alu (“to marry”), *qatyn* bosatu (“to divorce”), *qatyn* qylu (“to take as a wife”), *qatyn* basu (“to have a wife”), *qatynyn* tartyp alu (“to take another man’s wife”), *qatyn* patsha (“empress”), *jükti qatyn* (“pregnant woman”). For example:

“Бақытжан, Садуақас қалың малсыз қатын аламыз деп сөйлеген күні, Жиһаншаһ ауырып сиезге бара алмаған еді. Қалың малсыз қатын аламын деп, шаңқай тал түсте жалтарып, мұсылман сиезін адастырғанмен жұрт ұстап отырған рәсім жоғала ма?”

(“...Before a tax was introduced on those who marry and those who divorce, what difference does it make if someone wishes to take a wife without paying bridewealth?”)

Another example reads:

“...Кім мықты болса, сол нашардың қатынын тартып алады: мисәлә, бір сарт бір қазақ қатынын неке қиғызып алып еді, осы қатынды бір қазақ болысы тартып алып, өзіне қатын қылып неке қиғызды”

(“...Whoever is stronger takes the weaker man’s wife away: for example, a Sart married a Kazakh woman according to the rites, but then a Kazakh volost administrator took this woman from him, married her, and made her his wife.”)

(Ghali Khan. The Muslim Congress. Qazaq, 1914) (Bökeykhan, 2016).

Such examples confirm that at the beginning of the twentieth century the word *qatyn* still preserved its traditional meaning and was not automatically perceived as negative. At the same time, Bökeykhan’s texts occasionally reveal usages with a shade of reproach or negligence, for instance: “Бұл қазақша жаман, олақ қатын істеген ірімшік, кесегімен жүрген қоспа болады” (“This poorly made Kazakh cheese, as if prepared by a clumsy woman, turns into a lumpy mixture”) (Bökeykhan, 2016).

In the works of Kudaiberdiuly (2003) of Semey, signs of an emerging negative coloration of *qatyn* become more noticeable:

Қарап жүріп қақтығып,

Қатынша сөзбен шаптығып...

(“Walking calmly, he suddenly collided,

Then rushed in with words like a woman...” (Kudaiberdiuly, 2003, p. 83);

Қаралы қатын, қыздары

Дауыс қып әнге салады...

(“A woman in mourning, her daughters–

They raise their voices and turn it into song...” (Kudaiberdiuly, 2003, p. 91).

Overall, in the language of the Alash movement figures, the words *qatyn* and *äiel* often occur in parallel. While *qatyn* had not yet become fully derogatory, its semantics were gradually shifting, as evidenced by contextual usage. In one of Bökeykhan’s articles, *qatyn* appears alongside *äiel* and *hanım*, suggesting that the author regarded them as largely synonymous, albeit with stylistic distinctions:

“Бекет батырдың қатыны артынан айдалған батырды қуып барып, қашуға көмек қылып, батыр қашып елге қайтыпты... Судя по преданию о Бекете, и казахская женщина достойна гордости” (Petek, 2023, p. 278).

In Bökeykhan’s works, *äiel* occurs significantly less frequently than *qatyn*, in contrast to later Soviet-era texts, where *äiel* gradually became established as the primary neutral term for “woman.” Consequently, an analysis of the linguistic practices of Alash leaders demonstrates the evolutionary nature of the semantic and connotational change of *qatyn*: in the early twentieth century it was still used in positive or neutral senses, while the parallel spread of *äiel* signals the beginning of a linguistic shift that would later become firmly entrenched.

E. The 1920s: The Period of the Establishment of Soviet Power

1. The Meaning of the Word *Qatyn* in the Works of Sabit Mukanov.

After the Alash period, the word *äiel* (“woman”), oriented toward the Russian equivalent *zhenshchina*, began to enter active usage. In Sabit Mukanov’s novel *Ömir mektebi* (School of Life), the lexeme *äiel* occurs more than five hundred times. Even a single-page excerpt vividly demonstrates the intensification of this word during the Soviet period:

“...– Then bring him here,” said one of the women sitting by the hearth. Though I did not want to go, a young man almost forced me, pushing me toward the hearth. Among the gathered women, an elderly one said: “Pour broth into a

bowl and add some liver, lungs, and intestines.” One of the women poured broth into a rather large black bowl with a chipped edge, added some meat, and I began to eat. “So, whose son are you, my dear?” asked the same elderly woman after I had eaten and returned the bowl. “I am Mukan’s son,” I replied. “Oh, my poor child,” said the woman compassionately, “so you are the orphan left by Mukan? Your name is Sabit, isn’t it?” “How does this woman know me when I do not know her at all?” I wondered inwardly and nodded again. “How do you know this boy?” someone asked her. “How could I not know?” the woman replied. “Wasn’t he born in our house?” (Muqanov, 1970).

In Mukanov’s prose, the word *qatyn* generally appears in the speech of village residents and is found primarily in dialogues reflecting colloquial or vernacular usage. While the author himself more often employs *äiel*, characters in everyday conversation tend to prefer *qatyn*. For example:

“What are you saying? Are you the only young man in the world? Has no one else taken a wife besides you? Or is your bride somehow better than the others? There is nothing special about her to make her stand out... Except that she was not sold for livestock. Tomorrow she will become, like us, an ordinary housewife. That is the parents’ custom. We will walk to the aul laughing and joking,” he said, taking my fiancée by the arm (Muqanov, 1970).

Thus, in the Soviet period beginning in the 1920s, literary norms reflect a marked expansion in the use of *äiel*, while *qatyn* increasingly shifts into the domain of colloquial speech, appearing mainly in dialogues and acquiring a familiar or even coarse *оттежок*.

2. The Word *Qatyn* in Printed Periodicals.

With the appearance of the newspaper *Azat äiel* (“Free Woman”) in 1925 and, from 1926, the journal *Äiel* teñdigi (“Women’s Equality”), the Arabic-derived word *äiel* (“woman”) gradually began to displace the native Kazakh word *qatyn*. This process started in the 1920s, that is, during the formation of Soviet power. Under the influence of Soviet ideology, educated circles began to view *qatyn* as demeaning, coarse, and offensive, while *äiel* was perceived as more polite and positively connoted, emphasizing the woman’s status as an equal member of society. As a result of this ideological shift, the borrowing *äiel* became firmly established in the lexicon and actively used in the literary language, whereas the indigenous word *qatyn* lost its core semantic value, became less frequent, and gradually acquired a negative coloring.

3. Contemporary Media on the Meaning of the Word *Qatyn*.

Although mass media regularly raise the issue of semantic changes in the word *qatyn*, and scholars and members of the intelligentsia frequently discuss this problem on social networks, to date no separate academic article in the Kazakh language has been published that is devoted specifically to this topic. On information portals one can find materials with headlines such as “Whom Do We Call *Qatyn*?”, “What Does the Word *Qatyn* Mean?”, “Is It Correct to Use *Qatyn* Instead of *Äiel*?”, “Rejoice If You Are Called *Qatyn*”, “*Qatyn* Is an Honorific Word”, and “Which Is More Appropriate: *Qatyn* or *Äiel*?”. Alongside folk etymologies, these publications primarily focus on the issue of the appropriateness of using *qatyn* in relation to *äiel*.

At the same time, most media publications popularize various folk interpretations of the origin of the word *qatyn*. Among them are claims that in the “ancient Kazakh language” it allegedly meant *qutym* (“my fortune”), with subsequent sound changes transforming *qutym* into *qatyn*, or that *qatyn* arose through the compounding of *qağan* and *tun* in the sense of “the khagan’s spouse,” later shortened to *qağantun* and then to *qatun*. However, such explanations lack a convincing scientific basis and more often belong to the category of unsubstantiated conjectures.

F. The Semantics of the Word *Qatyn* in Modern Turkic Languages

In most modern Turkic languages, the lexeme *qatyn* has largely preserved its basic meaning “woman, wife,” although in some idioms—particularly in Kyrgyz and several Siberian Turkic languages—it may, as in Kazakh, also carry negative connotations.

Within the Kipchak group:

- Kyrgyz: *qatyn* “woman, wife; sometimes ‘a bad wife’”;
- Karakalpak: *qatyn* “woman, wife”;
- Tatar: *hatyn* “woman,” *hatyn-qyz* “women, the female half,” *irle-hatynly* “spouses”;
- Bashkir: *qatyn* “woman,” *irle-qatynly* “spouses”;
- Karachay-Balkar: *qatyn* “woman, wife”;
- Kumyk: *qatyn* “woman.”

Within the Karluk subgroup:

- Uyghur: *hotun* “woman,” *hotun-qizlar* “women, girls”;
- Uzbek: *hotin* “woman, wife,” *hotin-qizlar* “women and girls,” *er-u hotun* “husband and wife.”

Within the Oghuz languages:

- Turkish: *kadın* “woman, wife, mistress of the household; mother; lady”;
- Azerbaijani: *gadin* “woman, married woman, lady”;
- Turkmen: *hatyn* “woman.”

Within the Siberian Turkic languages:

- Khakas: *hadyn* “woman, lady, mistress of the household; elderly woman,” *hat* “bad, old woman”;
- Altai: *qadyt* “woman, wife; sometimes ‘bad wife,’ ‘old witch’”;

- Tuvan: qada “elder sister, aunt,” qadai “woman, mistress; sometimes ‘bad wife’,” qat ie “mother-in-law”;
- Yakut (Sakha): hotun “woman, wife, lady; the ‘queen’ card in playing cards.”

Similar tendencies are observed in other Turkic languages. A comprehensive study of Tuvan proverbs and sayings shows that gendered paroemias overwhelmingly reproduce androcentric stereotypes and asymmetrical expectations towards men and women, thereby reinforcing a hierarchical model of gender relations (Egorova et al., 2020). The fact that in Tuvan paremias, as in Kazakh, pejorative shades cluster around certain female designations suggests that the negative re-evaluation of lexemes referring to women is part of a wider Turkic pattern rather than a uniquely Kazakh development.

It should be noted that in Turkish linguistics, studies specifically devoted to the historical evolution of the meaning of the word kadın (*qatyn*) have already been published. Among them are works such as Kadın sözcüğünün tarihsel süreç içerisinde değişen anlamları (Işık, 2018, p. 69) and Köktürk harfli Yenisey yazıtlarındaki kadını bildiren kelimelerin anlamına göre eski Türklerde kadın imajı (Useev, 2012), which analyze how the image of women was formed in Old Turkic monuments, particularly in the Yenisei inscriptions.

An examination of social media posts and Turkish-language articles devoted to this topic makes it possible to propose new hypotheses regarding the semantic evolution of *qatyn* in Kazakh. In the course of the present study, approximately ten existing etymological hypotheses concerning the origin of this word were systematized and analyzed individually. In addition, synonymous units—some of which have partially lost their original meanings—were identified and subjected to linguistic analysis in order to reveal their underlying bases.

IV. CONCLUSION

On the basis of written monuments and data from modern Turkic languages, it can be argued that in its earliest usage the lexeme *qatyn* carried a meaning close to the modern hanım (“lady”). In all sources examined, the word *qatyn* appears with a positive connotation. In the works of the great poet Abai, it is not used as a coarse term but as an expression corresponding to Old Turkic aru, hanım, jar, “a wise woman.” This is evidenced by Abai’s lines: Er uialar is qylmas *qatyn* zerek (“A wise wife will not commit a shameful deed”) and Qatıñy seni süyse, sen de ony süy (“If your wife loves you, love her in return”), which portray a respected and dignified female image.

A comparative analysis of Turkic languages shows that in some of them—primarily Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and certain Siberian languages—*qatyn* has acquired negative connotations, which may be explained by stronger influence from Russian, where a rough parallel exists in the word baba. In other languages, particularly the Oghuz and Karluk groups, which were less affected by Russian influence, the original “sacral” meaning of the word has been preserved to a much greater extent.

The pejoration of *qatyn* can also be viewed in light of cross-linguistic psycholinguistic evidence showing that gender-marked lexical items routinely trigger stereotypical inferences about social roles and personal traits. Jankowiak et al. (2024), for instance, demonstrate that even minimal differences in the gender marking of Polish and English sentences significantly affect readers’ expectations about the referent’s behaviour and attributes, which suggests that the diachronic re-interpretation of *qatyn* is likely to have had a tangible impact on how Kazakh speakers conceptualise female agency and status.

As the Arabic-derived word *äiel* (“woman”) spread actively, *qatyn* in Kazakh gradually lost its original positive nuances and came under the influence of Russian usage with its negative coloring associated with baba. The disapproval of notions such as “queen” or “empress” in Soviet discourse contributed to the association of *qatyn* with a derogatory meaning.

The analysis suggests that the Kazakh word *qatyn* entered Persian in the form hatun and later returned to Turkic languages (including Kazakh) in that same form. Thus, the lexeme exists simultaneously in two variants, reflecting differences in meaning and stylistic usage. The Persian form hatun is used in the sense of “the khan’s wife,” as in the Old Turkic period, while the more widespread form *qatyn* covers the semantics “woman, wife.” In Persian, the meanings “queen” and “princess” likewise point to the Old Turkic origin of this borrowing.

In Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and some other Turkic languages, the narrowing or negative reinterpretation of *qatyn* is likely connected with the active spread of *äiel* and with Soviet policies that regarded words associated with the pre-revolutionary era—such as bai, *qatyn*, and khan—as ideologically inappropriate. At the same time, the parallel existence of two near-synonyms (*äiel* and *qatyn*) often leads to one of them moving into the passive lexicon with a lower evaluative status. The influence of Russian, where zhenshchina and baba are clearly distinguished, further encouraged the selection of *qatyn* as an equivalent of baba with its negative connotations.

As a result, the indigenous word *qatyn* found itself in a disadvantaged position compared to the borrowed *äiel*. A similar process affected bai, which once carried an honorific meaning among Kazakhs but acquired a negative evaluation in the Soviet era. This tendency also extended to other native words associated with pre-communist realities (such as hanım, myrza, bek), which were replaced during the Soviet period by *äiel*, joldas (“comrade”), and azamat (“citizen”) in order to emphasize “equality” and “progressiveness.” In contrast, in Turkey—where such rigid ideological constraints did not operate—lexemes like bai and *qatyn* have continued to be used actively in their original positive meanings, without pejorative associations.

Thus, the evidence shows that prior to Soviet rule *qatyn* did not function as a systematically derogatory label; its wholesale reinterpretation as “offensive” is a relatively recent development that obscures its earlier positive and neutral meanings.

From a broader sociolinguistic perspective, the case of *qatyn* resonates with international research on gendered stereotypes and norms. A systematic review by Stewart et al. (2021) shows that interventions aimed at reshaping gender norms must simultaneously address entrenched linguistic patterns and the ideological frames that sustain them. In this sense, any attempt to re-evaluate the historical meanings of *qatyn* and to restore its earlier honorific connotations cannot be separated from wider efforts to challenge gender asymmetries in contemporary Kazakh society.

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Sherubai Kurmanbaiuly - Doctor of Philology, Professor, Academician of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan; Head of the Nemat Kelimbetov Center for Turkology, Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, 050002, Republic of Kazakhstan, E-mail: sherubaykurmanbaiuly@gmail.com, ORCID iD: 0000-0002-4587-4452.

Marlen Adilov* - PhD, Chief Researcher at the Nemat Kelimbetov Center for Turkology, Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, 050002, Republic of Kazakhstan, E-mail: marlenadilov88@gmail.com, ORCID iD: 0000-0001-9876-4516.

Gaukhar Alimbek - Associate Professor, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, 010000, Republic of Kazakhstan, E-mail: alimbek_gaukhar@mail.ru, ORCID iD: 0000-0002-8433-669X.

Akzhibek Nurlankyzy Akhmet - PhD, Research Associate, Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, 050002, Republic of Kazakhstan, E-mail: akjibekz@gmail.com, ORCID iD: 0000-0002-9464-0070.