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Social Gender in a Language Without Grammatical Gender: Relational and Status Encoding in Kazakh Female Nominations

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***Abstract*—This article examines how Social Gender is organized in Kazakh in the absence of grammatical gender. The study is based on a lexicographically verified corpus of Kazakh female nominations, supplemented by a limited contrastive set of gender-neutral and male-linked kinship terms. The material includes basic female reference terms, kinship and affinal nominations, status-hierarchical designations, evaluative and address forms, socially conferred female roles, widowhood and step-relation terms, as well as analytic constructions marking age and social personhood. Methodologically, the analysis combines lexical-semantic, linguistic-anthropological, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic approaches within a framework that distinguishes Linguistic Gender, Natural Gender, and Social Gender. The results show that Kazakh female nominations form a structured lexico-pragmatic subsystem in which female reference intersects with relationality, hierarchy, evaluation, politeness, speaker dependence, and personhood-related distinctions. The analysis further demonstrates that this subsystem is not uniformly gender-differentiated: alongside female-specific nominations, Kazakh also employs selectively gender-neutral kinship terms and classificatory extensions, revealing where gender salience is strengthened, backgrounded, or redistributed. Social Gender in Kazakh is thus encoded not through grammatical agreement, but through a distributed system of relational, status-based, evaluative, politeness-based, speaker-dependent, and age/personhood-related nominations.**

***Index Terms*—Social Gender, Kazakh language, female nominations, kinship terminology, language without grammatical gender**

I. Introduction

Research on gender in language has moved beyond grammatical gender, understood as noun-class and agreement systems, toward broader forms of gender salience. Aikhenvald's distinction between Linguistic Gender, Natural Gender, and Social Gender makes it possible to analyze languages without grammatical gender as systems that redistribute gender-relevant distinctions across lexicon, pragmatics, kinship, and address (Aikhenvald, 2016a). Audring (2016) similarly treats gender as part of nominal classification, while Alvanoudi (2016) and Aikhenvald (2016b) show that gender meaning

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may emerge through cultural interpretation, social salience, humanness, and referential categorization rather than through agreement alone. This shift is essential for studying Kazakh because it separates the absence of grammatical gender from the broader presence of socially meaningful gender distinctions.

This perspective is crucial for Kazakh, where the absence of grammatical gender does not eliminate gender-relevant organization. Studies of kinship and address show that such terms are resources for social navigation, identity, family discourse, and interactional positioning (Wright, 2020; Khalilia et al., 2023; Suryanarayan & Khalil, 2021). Tatkenova (2018) further demonstrates that Kazakh relies on lexical rather than grammatical gender in address, with choices shaped by status, power, cultural norms, and communicative situation. Kazakh female nominations therefore require analysis as kin terms, social labels, and address forms at once, because a single nomination may simultaneously identify a referent, locate her within a kin network, and regulate the speaker's stance toward her. This is why the same Kazakh form must be interpreted through referent, speaker, addressee, hierarchy, and communicative setting rather than through translation equivalents alone.

Turkic and Kazakh scholarship also shows that kinship terminology is a central social lexicon rather than peripheral vocabulary. The Turkic kinship system is historically stable yet sensitive to contact (Taşbaş, 2019, 2021), while Kazakh-Russian and Kazakh-English comparisons reveal culturally dense distinctions and translation lacunae (Vakhitova et al., 2022; Rysbekqyzy, 2023). Gender-focused studies examine qyz and broader stereotypes in concepts, proverbs, and sayings (Shokym et al., 2022; Igissinova et al., 2024a; Mustagaliyeva et al., 2024; Igissinova et al., 2024b). However, female-related vocabulary has rarely been treated as an integrated lexico-pragmatic subsystem of relational, status-based, evaluative, politeness-based, speaker-dependent, and selectively neutralized Social Gender.

The Kazakh material is especially revealing because units such as äyel (woman; wife in relational use), qyz (girl; daughter; unmarried young woman), kelin (daughter-in-law), jeñge (elder brother's wife; respectful sister-in-law), ene (mother-in-law), qaryndas (younger sister from a male speaker's perspective), siñli (younger sister from a female speaker's perspective), äje (grandmother; respectful elderly woman), apa (elder sister; respectful address), apai (respectful female address), şeşei (respectful address to an older woman), kempir (old woman; often depreciative), bäibişe (senior wife), toqal (junior wife), kündes (co-wife or rival wife), qudağı (female co-parent-in-law), qudaşa (younger female co-relative by marriage), kindik şeşe (ritual godmother), jesir äyel (widow), äyel adam (adult female person), and qyz bala (girl child) position women within kinship, affinity, hierarchy, evaluation, politeness, ritual recognition, and social expectation.

At the same time, the Kazakh evidence reveals that the system is not uniformly gender-differentiated. Alongside female-specific nominations, there are also gender-neutral or only partially gender-differentiated kinship terms such as *jar* (spouse), *jien* (sister's child or maternal-line nephew/niece), *nemere* (grandchild or patrilineal descendant), *bauyr* (sibling; close kin), and, in specific affinal positions, *baldyz* (spouse's younger sibling). This selective neutralization is as important as explicit female marking, because it shows that gender salience in Kazakh is not evenly distributed but structurally patterned. The contrast between *qaryndas* (younger sister from a male speaker's perspective) and *siñli* (younger sister from a female speaker's perspective) is especially revealing, since the meaning depends not only on the referent but also on the speaker's position. Likewise, the asymmetry of affinal nominations used by husband and wife demonstrates that Social Gender in Kazakh is organized through differential distributions of sex, age, hierarchy, and perspective rather than through a single binary principle.

The aim of this article is to show how Social Gender is organized in Kazakh through female nominations in the absence of grammatical gender.

To achieve this aim, the article addresses the following research questions:

1. What semantic and pragmatic types of female nominations can be identified in Kazakh? 2. How do these nominations encode kinship, affinal relations, hierarchy, evaluation, politeness, and social personhood? 3. Which nominations are speaker-dependent, and how does speaker position affect their interpretation? 4. How are gender differentiation and selective neutralization distributed across the Kazakh kinship and nomination system, and what does this reveal about gender salience in a language without grammatical gender? 5. What does the Kazakh evidence contribute to the typology of languages without grammatical gender and to theories of Social Gender beyond agreement?

II. Literature Review

The literature review in this article is organized as an analytical systematization of studies that make it possible to examine Kazakh female nominations not as a simple set of words denoting the female sex, but as a lexico-pragmatic mechanism of social positioning. Such a task cannot be addressed through grammatical typology alone or through an exclusively ethnographic description of kinship. It requires the integration of three levels: the typological distinction between grammatical, natural, and social gender; the sociolinguistic understanding of kinship terms and forms of address as devices for indexing relations; and the Kazakh-Turkic tradition of analyzing concepts, paremias, phraseology, and ethnocultural vocabulary. This intersection provides the theoretical basis for analyzing a language without grammatical gender in which gender-relevant information is redistributed across lexicon, pragmatics, and social semantics.

The article's key term is Social Gender. Unlike grammatical gender, which is expressed through noun classes and agreement patterns, Social Gender describes the ways in which language encodes relations of sex, status, kinship, age, evaluation, and communicative position. Aikhenvald (2016a) shows that even languages without grammatical gender

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may encode socially meaningful distinctions through nominal classes, address forms, and lexical categories. Audring (2016) broadens this framework by treating gender as part of a general system of nominal classification, where the central issue is not merely the presence of formal agreement but also the distinctions a language makes systematically salient. Alvanoudi (2016) emphasizes that gender meaning emerges at the intersection of linguistic form, cultural knowledge, and social interpretation. This point is particularly important for Kazakh, because female nominations often denote not an autonomous "woman in general," but a concrete position within kinship, marriage, age, etiquette, and hierarchy.

A. Social Gender Beyond Grammatical Gender: A Typological Framework

Typological research increasingly asks not whether a language has grammatical gender, but where gender salience is distributed. Evidence from Manambu, Nungon, and Nakh-Daghestanian languages shows that gender-relevant categories may involve humanness, sociality, kinship, and semantic classification (Aikhenvald, 2016b; Sarvasy, 2016; Forker, 2016). Studies of nominal classification and gender complexity further show uneven interaction between formal and semantic features, contact, migration, and evolutionary pathways (Allassonnière-Tang et al., 2021a; Allassonnière-Tang et al., 2021b; Basirat et al., 2021; Shcherbakova & Allassonnière-Tang, 2024). Research on inference, stereotype, and sociopragmatics adds that linguistic forms activate gendered meanings through the interaction of cue, norm, and context (Cameron, 2005; Steriopolo, 2021; Storme & Delaloye Saillen, 2024). In language, gender, and sexuality studies, this view is strengthened by work that treats gender as alignment among form, practice, ideology, discourse, and cognition (Alvanoudi, 2020; Angouri, 2021; Angouri & Baxter, 2021). For Kazakh, these studies justify a lexical-pragmatic analysis rather than a morphological one and make it possible to treat female nomination as a system of socially distributed meanings.

Table 1 summarizes the theoretical frameworks used to analyze Social Gender in Kazakh female nominations.

TABLE 1
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR ANALYZING SOCIAL GENDER IN A LANGUAGE WITHOUT GRAMMATICAL GENDER

Research framework	Key focus	Relevance for Kazakh female nominations
Gender typology	Distinction among grammatical gender, natural gender, and Social Gender	Allows Kazakh to be analyzed as a system without grammatical gender, but not without gender-relevant distinctions
Nominal classification	Relationship among form, semantics, sociality, and classificatory features	Shows that kinship, age, and status may perform a classificatory function
Sociolinguistics and pragmatics	Indexing of speaker position, addressee, distance, and respect	Explains forms of address, politeness, and the dependence of meaning on speaker position
Linguistic anthropology	Connection between linguistic nomination, cultural roles, and social expectations	Reveals female nominations as elements of the social organization of kinship and marriage
Kazakh-Turkic studies	Conceptosphere, kinship, paremias, and ethnocultural semantics	Specifies the local material and prevents a mechanical transfer of Western models

Table 1 supports an integrative approach: typology alone would reduce Kazakh to the absence of grammatical gender, whereas ethnography alone would obscure systematic linguistic encoding. The combined framework links typology, pragmatics, linguistic anthropology, and Kazakh-Turkic lexicology.

Figure 1 models these levels as a distributed system in which Social Gender connects with kinship, affinity, politeness, hierarchy, speaker perspective, and selective neutralization.

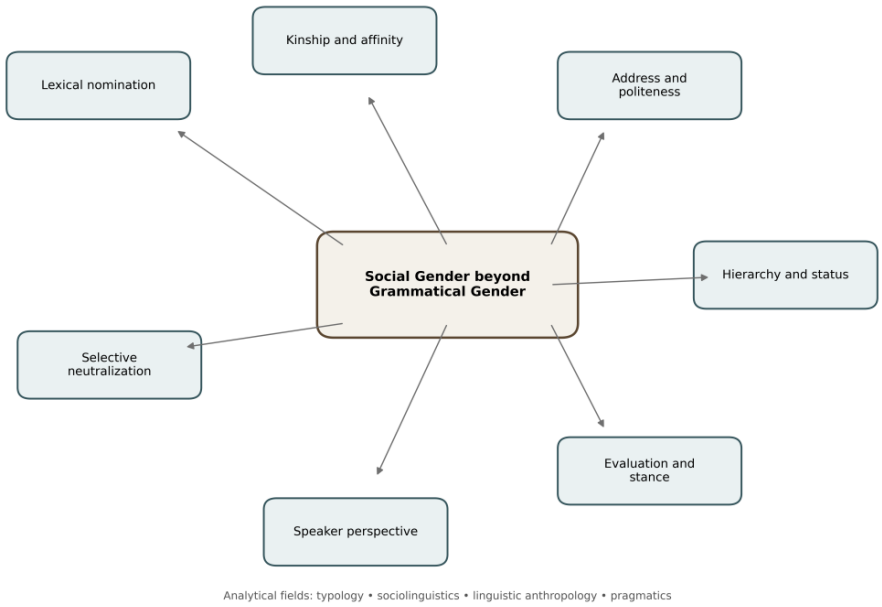

Figure 1. Conceptual Map of Distributed Social Gender Encoding

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Figure 1 shows that gender-relevant distinctions are not absent in Kazakh; rather, they are transferred to zones such as kinship, address, hierarchy, and speaker perspective. This explains why some nominations are explicitly female, others depend on the speaker's position, and others remain neutral until context requires specification.

B. Kinship, Address, and the Indexical Organization of Social Position

Kinship and address research is central because many Kazakh female nominations place the referent within kinship, affinity, and age hierarchy rather than denoting sex alone. Kinship terms function as resources for family discourse, social identity, and culturally specific relations (Wright, 2020; Khalilia et al., 2023; Suryanarayan & Khalil, 2021), while address forms organize closeness, distance, respect, evaluation, and formality (Fleming & Slotta, 2018; Jeong & Yu, 2021; Ollier et al., 2022; Schoenmakers et al., 2024). Ochs's (1992) account of gender indexicality is especially relevant to qaryndas (younger sister from a male speaker's perspective) and siñli (younger sister from a female speaker's perspective), and Tatkenova (2018) confirms that Kazakh address relies primarily on lexical rather than grammatical gender. Turkological and comparative studies further establish kinship vocabulary as historically stable, culturally dense, and difficult to translate directly (Taşbaş, 2019, 2021; Vakhitova et al., 2022; Rysbekqyzy, 2023). Accordingly, units such as kelin, jeñge, ene, qudaği, apa, apai, äpke, täte, şeşei, bike, bikeş, äje, and kempir must be analyzed as social indexes that distribute relation, respect, age, distance, status, and evaluation rather than as simple dictionary equivalents.

C. Kazakh-Turkic Gender Semantics: Concept, Stereotype, and Nomination

Kazakh-Turkic gender studies provide the empirical background but also reveal the remaining gap. Research on qyz, the concept "Woman," and the Turkic gender conceptosphere shows that female categories carry cultural expectations, age values, moral evaluation, and phraseological representations (Shokym et al., 2022; Sagidolda & Abdimaulen, 2023; Shokym et al., 2023). Studies of stereotypes and paremias demonstrate recurrent evaluative models in Turkic and Kazakh material (Bakytzhanova et al., 2023; Igissinova et al., 2024a; Mustagaliyeva et al., 2024; Igissinova et al., 2024b). TPLS publications on Kazakh proverbs and semantic typology also confirm the journal's relevance to Kazakh cultural semantics and gender-conceptual issues (Ramanova et al., 2024; Bakytzhanova et al., 2025), while work on ethnocultural names, prejudice, stereotype, and implicit evaluation shows that culturally salient vocabulary functions as both lexical unit and social index (Akhmetova et al., 2025; Deutschmann & Steinvall, 2020a, 2020b; Lindvall-Östling et al., 2020; Sunderland, 2020). These studies clarify the need to distinguish concept, stereotype, and nomination: concepts such as äyel and qyz may evoke broad cultural associations; stereotypes show which norms are stabilized in phraseology and discourse; and nominations such as kelin, jeñge, ene, bäibişe, toqal, kündes, qaryndas, and siñli encode concrete parameters of kinship, status, evaluation, politeness, and speaker position within actual utterances.

Table 2 positions the present article within these research lines by identifying both established findings and unresolved issues.

TABLE 2
RESEARCH LINES, LIMITATIONS, AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PRESENT ARTICLE

Research group	Established findings	Limitation for the topic of female nominations	Function of the present article
Typology of grammatical gender	The need to distinguish grammatical, natural, and Social Gender has been demonstrated	Limited attention has been paid to languages where gender is transferred to lexicon and pragmatics	Shows distributed encoding of Social Gender in Kazakh
Kinship and forms of address	The social, indexical, and pragmatic functions of kinship terms have been demonstrated	The Kazakh female subsystem has not been described as an integrated lexico-pragmatic architecture	Connects kinship, address, hierarchy, and speaker perspective
Kazakh-Turkic conceptology	Images of woman, *qyz* (girl; daughter), paremias, and gender stereotypes have been analyzed	Concepts and stereotypes are often examined separately from the microsystem of nominations	Transfers the analysis to specific nominative units
Lexicography and cultural semantics	The cultural density of key words and kinship terms has been confirmed	The connection between dictionary meaning and address pragmatics remains insufficiently developed	Uses lexicographic verification as the basis of analysis
Comparative and translation perspective	Lacunae and difficulties of direct equivalence have been identified	The internal reasons for non-equivalence are not always explained	Shows that non-equivalence is linked to relation, status, and evaluation

Table 2 shows that existing scholarship explains typological background, cultural images, and kinship density, but not the integrated microsystem of Kazakh female nominations. Typology accounts for the absence of agreement, conceptology explains cultural images, and kinship studies reveal social density, yet none of these lines alone describes how individual female nominations distribute relation, hierarchy, evaluation, politeness, and speaker perspective. The present article connects these lines through distributed encoding.

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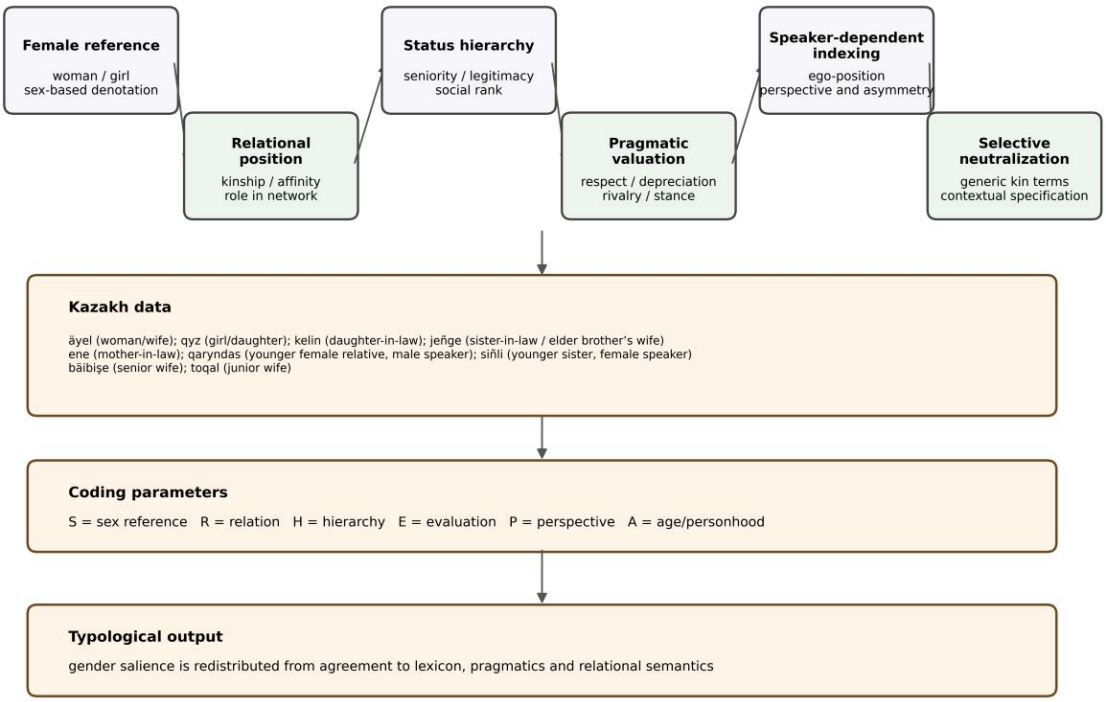

Figure 2. Architecture of Lexico-Pragmatic Encoding in Kazakh Female Nominations

Figure 2 presents the architecture through which female nomination in Kazakh moves from basic sex reference to relation, status, evaluation, speaker position, and selective neutralization. Some units, such as äyel (woman; wife in relational use) and qyz (girl; daughter), are close to basic reference but already include social framing; others, such as kelin, jeñge, abysyn, ene, and qudağı, define a woman through a kinship or marital network; and status-evaluative units such as bäibişe, toqal, kündes, kempir, and jesir äyel intensify hierarchy, rivalry, legitimacy, or social marking. The reviewed literature reveals a specific gap: Kazakh is seldom analyzed as an independent case of distributed Social Gender, and female nominations are usually treated either as illustrations of the concept "woman" or as isolated kinship items. Speaker-dependent contrasts, such as qaryndas and siñli, and neutral terms, such as jar, jien, nemere, and bauyr, show that gender salience may be activated, backgrounded, or redistributed. Selective neutralization is therefore not the absence of gender relevance, but a structured allocation of gender salience to positions where kinship, generation, side of kinship, and contextual specification become more decisive. Instead of assigning a binary "female / non-female" label, the article evaluates each nomination by direct reference, relational encoding, hierarchy/status, evaluation, speaker dependence, and age/personhood. This parameterization supports typological comparison, explains translation non-equivalence, and indicates what information should be reflected in dictionaries, translator's notes, and pedagogical explanations. For the subsequent empirical analysis, this means that each corpus item is treated as a bundle of functions rather than as a single semantic label: one nomination may be primarily relational, another evaluative, another speaker-dependent, and another partially neutral. Such a procedure preserves the internal heterogeneity of the material while keeping the analysis comparable with international typology.

III. Methodology

A. Corpus Design and Empirical Scope

The material consists of an analytically organized corpus of 33 Kazakh female or female-oriented lexemes and constructions, compiled through authorial collection, semantic grouping, lexicographic verification, and comparison with previous scholarship. A limited contrastive set of gender-neutral and male-linked kinship terms is used only to clarify asymmetry, selective neutralization, and the distribution of gender salience.

The core corpus includes: *äyel* (woman; wife in relational use), *äyel adam* (adult female person), *qyz* (girl; daughter; unmarried young woman), *qyz bala* (girl child), *ana* (mother), *şeşe* (mother; domestic maternal term), *ögei şeşe* (stepmother), *äje* (grandmother; respectful elderly woman), *apa* (elder sister; respectful address to an older woman), *apai* (respectful address to an older woman or teacher), *äpke* (elder sister), *kelin* (daughter-in-law; bride in the husband's family), *jeñge* (elder brother's wife; respectful sister-in-law), *abysyn* (wives of brothers in relation to one another), *ene* (mother-in-law), *qaiyn apa* (elder female in-law), *qaiyn siñli* (younger female in-law), *qaiynbike* (senior female in-law), *qudağı* (female co-parent-in-law), *qudağai* (variant of female co-parent-in-law), *qudaşa* (younger female co-relative by marriage), *qaryndas* (younger sister from a male speaker's perspective), *siñli* (younger sister from a female speaker's perspective), *şeşei* (respectful address to an older woman), *täte* (aunt/older female address), *bike* (lady; respectful female title), *bikeş* (young lady; polite address to a young woman), *kempir* (old woman; often depreciative), *bäibişe* (senior wife;

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respected mistress of the household), *toqal* (junior wife), *kündes* (co-wife or rival wife), *kindik şeşe* (ritual godmother, literally "umbilical mother"), and *jesir äyel* (widow).

The contrastive set includes: *jar* (spouse), *baldyz* (spouse's younger sibling), *jien* (sister's child or maternal-line nephew/niece), *nemere* (grandchild or patrilineal descendant), *bauyr* (sibling; close kin), *nağaşy* (maternal-side relative), *qaiyn ağa* (elder male in-law), *qaiyn ini* (younger male in-law), *qaiyn ata* (father-in-law), *qaiyn ene* (mother-in-law from the husband's side), *jezde* (elder sister's husband), *küieu bala* (son-in-law), and *baja* (men married to sisters; co-brothers-in-law). These units are not treated as part of the female subsystem proper; rather, they are used comparatively to show where the system remains gender-neutral, where it differentiates by sex and age, and how speaker perspective shapes the choice of terms.

B. Lexicographic Sources and Verification

All core items were checked against academic and specialized lexicographic sources summarized in Table 3. The main basis was Qazaq ädebi tiliniñ sözdigi [Dictionary of the Kazakh Literary Language], supplemented by Qazaqtyñ etnografiyalyq kategoriyalar, ūğymdar men ataularynyñ dästürli jüyesi [Traditional system of Kazakh ethnographic categories, concepts, and names], Qazaq dästürli mädenietiniñ enciklopedialyq sözdigi [Encyclopedic dictionary of traditional Kazakh culture], Qazaq tiliniñ aimaqtyq sözdigi [Regional Dictionary of the Kazakh Language], Mamyrbekova's dictionary of Arabic and Persian words in Kazakh, and the online resource Sozdikqor.

Lexicographic verification distinguishes authorial interpretation from attested meaning and identifies whether a dictionary definition encodes sex reference, kinship role, affinal status, age, social evaluation, or pragmatic function.

TABLE 3
LEXICOGRAPHIC BASIS OF THE CORPUS

Source	Type of source	Representative lexemes	Function in the analysis
Qazaq ädebi tiliniñ sözdigi (vols. 2, 6, 7, 10)	academic explanatory dictionary	*äyel* (woman; wife), *ana* (mother), *apa* (elder sister/address), *äje* (grandmother), *qyz* (girl; daughter), *kelin* (daughter-in-law), *jar* (spouse)	primary semantic and usage verification
Qazaqtyñ etnografiyalyq kategoriyalar, ūğymdar men ataularynyñ dästürli jüyesi (vol. 1)	ethnographic encyclopedia	*ana* (mother), *apa* (elder sister/address), *apai* (respectful female address), *äje* (grandmother), *äpke* (elder sister)	ethnocultural and relational clarification
Qazaqtyñ etnografiyalyq kategoriyalar, ūğymdar men ataularynyñ dästürli jüyesi (vol. 2)	ethnographic encyclopedia	*jar* (spouse), *jeñge* (elder brother's wife / respectful sister-in-law)	culturally embedded relational roles
Qazaq tiliniñ aimaqtyq sözdigi	regional dictionary	*äpke* (elder sister)	regional and usage variation
Mamyrbekova 2017	specialized semantic dictionary	*äyel* (woman; wife)	additional historical-semantic layer
Sozdikqor	online lexical resource	core corpus; meanings and usage notes	cross-checking meanings and usage notes
Authorial corpus and analytical notes	curated research dataset	extended set, including *qudaği* (female co-parent-in-law), *qudaşa* (younger female co-relative by marriage), *qaiynbike* (senior female in-law), *kündes* (co-wife/rival wife), etc.	semantic grouping and comparative interpretation

The unit of analysis is the nomination: a lexical item or stable analytic construction denoting a woman, girl, female kin position, affinal role, socially marked status, or female-related address form, including äyel adam, qyz bala, jesir äyel, and ögei şeşe.

Units were included in the core corpus if they met at least one of the following criteria:

1) they directly refer to women or girls;
2) they encode female kinship or affinal position;
3) they express female-related hierarchy, legitimacy, widowhood, or social role;
4) they carry evaluative or politeness-related meaning tied to female reference;
5) their interpretation depends on speaker position;
6) they mark age- or personhood-related stages of female categorization.

Contrastive terms were added only where they were necessary to interpret affinal asymmetry and gender-neutral kinship terminology.

C. Analytical Parameters

Each unit was coded by the following parameters:

1. S = direct female reference
2. R = relational encoding
3. H = hierarchy/status encoding
4. E = evaluative encoding
5. P = speaker-dependent encoding
6. A = age/personhood marking

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The working formula is: $\mathbf{N_i = \{S, R, H, E, P, A\}}$

The formula does not imply equal salience of all parameters; it identifies dominant combinations through which Social Gender is distributed.

D. Transliteration and Procedure

All Kazakh items are given in Latin transliteration with English glosses at first mention. The transliteration uses ä, ö, ü, ū, y, i, ğ, q, ñ, ş, and j consistently.

The analysis proceeds in five steps:

1. lexical-semantic decomposition of each unit;
2. identification of relational position within kinship or affinity;
3. analysis of hierarchy, legitimacy, evaluation, and address function;
4. examination of speaker dependence and asymmetry;
5. typological interpretation within the framework of Linguistic Gender, Natural Gender, and Social Gender.

IV. Results

A. Corpus-Level Analytical Profile of Kazakh Female Nominations

The corpus shows that Kazakh female nominations form a structured lexico-pragmatic subsystem in which direct female reference co-occurs with relational position, hierarchy/status, evaluation, politeness, speaker perspective, and age/personhood marking. Table 4 presents the corpus-level profile of selected units and shows three recurrent patterns: female reference is rarely isolated; relational encoding is dominant; and the subsystem includes kinship terms, status designations, address forms, and personhood constructions.

Table 4
Analytical Profile of Selected Kazakh Female Nominations

Nomination	S	R	H	E	P	A	Dominant encoding type
äyel (woman; wife in relational use)	+	+	–	–	–	–	referential-relational
qyz (girl; daughter; unmarried young woman)	+	–	–	–	–	+	referential-age
ana / *şeşe* (mother; domestic maternal term)	+	+	+	+	–	–	maternal-relational
apa (elder sister; respectful address)	+	+	+	±	–	–	kinship-address
apai (respectful female address)	+	–	+	+	–	–	address-honorific
äpke (elder sister)	+	+	+	–	–	–	senior-female-kin
kelin (daughter-in-law; bride in husband's family)	+	+	+	–	–	–	relational-status
jeñge (elder brother's wife; respectful sister-in-law)	+	+	+	+	–	–	relational-address
abysyn (wives of brothers in relation to one another)	+	+	+	–	+	–	relational-speaker-linked
ene (mother-in-law)	+	+	+	–	–	–	relational-hierarchical
qaiyn apa / *qaiyn siñli* (elder and younger female in-law)	+	+	+	–	+	+	affinal-relational
qudağı / *qudağai* / *qudaşa* (female co-parent-in-law / variant / younger female co-relative)	+	+	+	–	–	±	affinal-classificatory
äje (grandmother; respectful elderly woman)	+	+	+	+	–	+	kin-status-evaluative
kempir (old woman; often depreciative)	+	–	–	+	–	+	evaluative-age
bike / *bikeş* (lady; young lady)	+	–	+	+	–	+	polite-evaluative
qaryndas (younger sister from male speaker's perspective)	+	+	–	–	+	+	speaker-dependent relational
siñli (younger sister from female speaker's perspective)	+	+	–	–	+	+	speaker-dependent relational
bäibişe (senior wife; respected mistress of household)	+	+	+	+	–	–	status-hierarchical
toqal / *kündes* (junior wife / co-wife or rival wife)	+	+	+	+	–	–	status-evaluative
ögei şeşe (stepmother)	+	+	+	+	–	–	marked maternal status
kindik şeşe (ritual godmother; "umbilical mother")	+	+	+	+	–	–	ritual-relational
jesir äyel (widow)	+	+	+	+	–	–	widowhood-status
äyel adam (adult female person)	+	–	–	–	–	+	personhood-marking
qyz bala (girl child)	+	–	–	–	–	+	age-personhood

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Table 4 confirms that female meaning in Kazakh is usually combined with relational, hierarchical, evaluative, politeness-based, age-related, or speaker-dependent parameters rather than encoded as simple sex reference.

B. Basic Female Reference, Relationality, and Status-Hierarchical Organization

At the referential core of the subsystem, the lexemes *äyel* and *qyz* already display semantic embedding in social structure. The lexeme *äyel* denotes 'woman', yet in ordinary usage it also functions as 'wife' in relation to a man, which places the referent within a marital frame rather than leaving her at the level of biological sex reference. The lexeme *qyz* may denote a girl, a daughter, or an unmarried young woman; in *qyz bala* the age-related component is foregrounded, whereas *äyel adam* activates adult and socially recognized female personhood. The opposition *ana / şeşe* shows an additional internal differentiation of maternal nomination: the former tends toward a more general or elevated register, while the latter is more closely associated with domestic and interactional proximity. The basic lexical layer of female reference thus participates in social categorization from the outset.

The dominant mechanism identified in the corpus is relational encoding. Units such as *kelin*, *jeñge*, *abysyn*, *ene*, *qaiyn apa*, *qaiyn siñli*, *qaiynbike*, *qudağı*, *qudağai*, and *qudaşa* identify a female referent through her position within kinship and affinity rather than through autonomous referential status. Their semantics does not primarily answer the question of who the woman is in isolation; rather, it specifies how she is located within a socially structured network. The relational mechanism extends beyond consanguineal and affinal roles to socially conferred positions such as *kindik şeşe*, where female nomination encodes ritualized and institutionally recognized motherhood. Across this segment of the corpus, Social Gender is organized as a form of positionality within kinship, affinal continuity, and socially ratified relational roles.

Relational encoding recurrently converges with hierarchy. A substantial segment of the corpus includes units in which female nomination is inseparable from seniority, legitimacy, or ranked status. The opposition *bäibişe / toqal* lexicalizes unequal positions within a hierarchically ordered marital domain; *ene* encodes not only affinal relation but also generational precedence and intra-family authority; in specific contexts *äje* likewise combines kinship reference with age rank and respect. The lexeme *kündes*, though not a kinship term in the strict sense, belongs to the same stratified field because it names rivalry generated within a hierarchically and affectively charged relational structure. Status is therefore not an accessory semantic layer but a constitutive mechanism in the organization of Kazakh female nominations.

C. Evaluative, Politeness-Based, and Speaker-Dependent Organization

The subsystem also encodes pragmatic valuation. Äje and kempir may both designate an elderly woman, but äje conveys deference and warmth, whereas kempir may sound depreciative or distancing. Similar evaluative force appears in kündes and in nominations associated with honor, legitimacy, widowhood, secondary rank, or marked maternal status. This means that evaluation is not an occasional pragmatic effect; it is one of the mechanisms by which female reference is placed on culturally available scales of respect, depreciation, rivalry, and recognition.

Politeness is most visible in address forms. Apai, täte, şeşei, bike, and bikeş do not simply identify a female referent; they regulate respectful stance, distance, age sensitivity, familiarity, and culturally ratified interactional alignment. Their meanings depend on the social relationship between speaker and addressee, which confirms that politeness can function as a gender-relevant encoding zone in the absence of grammatical agreement.

D. Affinal Asymmetry, Selective Neutralization, and Age/Personhood Coding

Gender salience is distributed asymmetrically in affinal terminology. From the husband's perspective, older wife-side relatives are lexically differentiated by sex and status, while baldyz may neutralize sex among younger relatives. From the wife's perspective, husband-side relatives are differentiated more consistently by sex and age hierarchy: qaiyn ağa, qaiyn apa, qaiyn ini, qaiyn siñli, ene, and qaiyn ata.

Selective neutralization extends to wider kinship terms. Jar, jien, nemere, and bauyr may designate male or female referents, while nağaşy marks the maternal side without obligatory sex differentiation. When needed, specification is added through classificatory extension, as in nağaşy apa or nemere qaryndas.

Age/personhood coding is represented by äyel adam and qyz bala, where adam marks adult subjecthood and bala marks childhood. Together with qyz, these constructions show that female categorization is linked to maturity, social participation, and age-indexed recognition; Table 5 summarizes these mechanisms.

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TABLE 5
MAIN MECHANISMS OF SOCIAL GENDER ENCODING IN KAZAKH FEMALE NOMINATIONS

Encoded object	Linguistic means	Typical examples	Theoretical significance
Basic social reference	female reference with possible social embedding	*äyel* (woman; wife), *qyz* (girl; daughter)	sex reference is already socially embedded
Relational encoding	position in kinship/affinal network	*kelin* (daughter-in-law), *jeñge* (elder brother's wife / respectful sister-in-law), *abysyn* (wives of brothers in relation to one another), *qudağı* (female co-parent-in-law)	gender as relation rather than mere property
Status encoding	seniority, legitimacy, social rank	*bäibişe* (senior wife), *toqal* (junior wife), *ene* (mother-in-law)	gender as hierarchically organized category
Evaluative encoding	respect, depreciation, rivalry	*äje* (grandmother / respectful elderly woman), *kempir* (old woman; often depreciative), *kündes* (co-wife / rival wife)	gender as socially evaluated position
Politeness/address encoding	courtesy, respectful reference, age-sensitive address	*apai* (respectful female address), *täte* (aunt / older female address), *bike* (lady), *bikeş* (young lady), *şeşei* (respectful address to an older woman)	gender as socially regulated address
Speaker-dependent encoding	meaning depends on speaker position	*qaryndas* (younger sister from male speaker's perspective), *siñli* (younger sister from female speaker's perspective)	gender as indexical relational category
Affinal asymmetry	differential salience of sex and age by perspective	*baldyz* (spouse's younger sibling), *qaiynbike* (senior female in-law), *qaiyn apa* (elder female in-law), *qaiyn siñli* (younger female in-law)	selective neutralization vs differentiation
Gender-neutral/classificatory extension	neutral kin roles and derived specification	*jar* (spouse), *jien* (maternal-line nephew/niece), *nemere* (grandchild), *bauyr* (sibling / close kin), *nağaşy apa* (maternal-side older female relative)	selective non-marking within the kinship system
Age/personhood coding	age stage and social personhood	*äyel adam* (adult female person), *qyz bala* (girl child)	link between gender and personhood

Table 5 consolidates the main result: in Kazakh, Social Gender is encoded through a distributed lexical-pragmatic architecture dominated by relational encoding and supported by hierarchy, evaluation, politeness, speaker perspective, selective neutralization, and personhood marking.

V. DISCUSSION

The study set out to determine how Social Gender is organized in Kazakh female nominations without grammatical gender. The findings show that direct female reference is regularly combined with relation, hierarchy, evaluation, politeness, speaker perspective, and age/personhood, supporting an interpretation of gender as a distributed category relocated from agreement to lexicon, kinship structure, and pragmatics. This directly answers the central question of how a formally genderless grammar can still sustain a complex gender-relevant system of categorization and shows why such systems must be analyzed beyond agreement morphology. The Kazakh evidence also demonstrates that gender salience may be strongest precisely where social relations require fine-grained positional distinctions.

The most salient finding is the dominance of relational encoding: the female referent is identified through descent, marriage, seniority, and socially recognized role rather than isolated sex reference. This confirms that kinship terms are dense social categories and resources for interactional positioning (Wright, 2020; Khalilia et al., 2023; Suryanarayan & Khalil, 2021), while also extending Turkological observations on the centrality and stability of kinship vocabulary (Taşbaş, 2019, 2021). The same tendency recurs across affinal terms, ritual nominations, address forms, and basic female reference, which makes relationality a system-level organizing principle rather than a feature of several isolated examples.

A second finding is the uneven distribution of gender salience. Qaryndas / siñli, affinal asymmetry, and neutral terms such as jar, jien, and nemere show patterned differentiation, perspective-sensitive indexing, and selective non-marking. Typologically, this supports approaches that separate grammatical gender from broader gender-related organization (Aikhenvald, 2016a; Audring, 2016; Alvanoudi, 2016) and extends Tatkenova's (2018) observation about lexical gender in Kazakh address to kinship, hierarchy, evaluation, and personhood coding. The recurrence of the same parameters across tables and examples also strengthens the internal coherence of the model.

The practical significance of the article lies in typology, Turkology, sociolinguistics, lexicography, translation, and language pedagogy. Units such as kelin, jeñge, bäibişe, toqal, qaryndas, and siñli cannot be adequately rendered by simplified equivalents such as "woman," "wife," "sister," or "elderly woman" because they encode relational and pragmatic structure. For lexicographic and pedagogical work, this means that entries and explanations should record seniority, affinal side, speaker perspective, politeness, evaluative force, and social status rather than relying on a single nearest English equivalent.

Further research should compare the female subsystem with male and generic kinship nominations, test the model on larger corpus and ethnographic data, and examine regional, generational, and genre-based variation. Comparative work with other Turkic and typologically unrelated languages without grammatical gender would help distinguish specifically Kazakh patterns from broader cross-linguistic mechanisms of Social Gender beyond agreement and refine the typology of how languages redistribute socially salient distinctions across lexicon and pragmatics. Such work would also make it

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possible to evaluate whether relationality, speaker perspective, and selective neutralization operate as recurrent strategies across languages without grammatical gender or as features shaped by Kazakh social organization.

VI. Conclusion

This article has shown that Social Gender in Kazakh is not encoded through grammatical agreement, but through a distributed lexical-pragmatic system of female nominations combining reference, kinship and affinal position, hierarchy, evaluation, politeness, speaker perspective, and age/personhood marking. The findings confirm that the absence of grammatical gender does not entail the absence of gender-relevant linguistic organization.

The dominant mechanism is relational encoding: kelin, jeñge, abysyn, ene, qudaği, and qaiynbike identify women through socially organized kinship and affinity, while bäibişe, toqal, äje, kempir, and jesir äyel demonstrate the importance of hierarchy, legitimacy, evaluation, and marked status. These units show that female reference is inseparable from family structure, marital position, seniority, and culturally recognized roles.

Gender salience is distributed unevenly. The contrast qaryndas / siñli, affinal asymmetry, and neutral terms such as jar, jien, and nemere show interaction among explicit differentiation, speaker-dependent indexing, and selective neutralization. Thus, non-marking is not absence of meaning; it is part of a patterned system in which gender becomes relevant only in selected relational positions.

Finally, äyel adam and qyz bala show that female nomination is linked to age and social personhood. Kazakh therefore contributes to the typology of languages without grammatical gender by demonstrating that gender-relevant distinctions may be organized through relationality, hierarchy, evaluation, speaker perspective, and personhood rather than through grammatical agreement alone. This supports a broader view of Social Gender as a distributed lexico-pragmatic category.

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