Cultural Perspectives on 'Man' in Kazakh and English Comparative Phraseology

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Abstract This study aims to identify universal and culture-specific semantic components structuring the concept of 'man' in Kazakh and English phraseological units. The research is based on a corpus of 261 phraseological units (156 Kazakh and 105 English) extracted from major explanatory and phraseological dictionaries. Using componential and contrastive-semantic analysis, the study examines shared and language-specific conceptual features within the semantic field of 'man.' The results reveal 11 semantic components, with 7 components being shared between the two languages and 3 being unique to the Kazakh language, and finally 1 being unique to the English language. Even though the Kazakh and English languages belong to different language families and have different cultural backgrounds, the analysis demonstrates that the two languages exhibit similarities in concepts such as bravery, physical strength, and social responsibility, while cultural models of masculinity and individual identity highlight most of the differences.

Key words: phraseological units, semantic domain, cultural perspectives, componential analysis, contrastive phraseology

Introduction

Contemporary linguistic research shows that language is viewed not only as a means of communication, transmission, and expression of thought. It also serves as a medium for understanding human beings and for creating one's own image of the world. What we are examining is not the language as such, but language as the only means of revealing a conceptual framework beyond immediate perception. From this perspective, language is a tool for perceiving and understanding the world. It shapes our ideas, thoughts, and worldview (Sapir, 1929; Whorf, 1956; Boroditsky, 2011).

As social beings, humans constantly interact with the world around them. This interaction is determined by the context of time and space, which influences how we interpret our words. Therefore, linguists are increasingly writing and speaking about the idea that in the unified and indivisible triad of 'language-human-culture,' culture plays a central role.

This theoretical framework has been further elaborated in the intercultural approach, which analyzes and compares the speech behavior of representatives of different cultures in intercultural communication (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). It also contributes to the development of a new educational paradigm aimed at preparing individuals to function effectively in a multicultural world (Hofstede, 2001).

People often use synonymous or alternative phrasal expressions to convey ideas that reflect their cultural experiences and individual understanding. This process depends on an understanding of how language and cognition interact to shape conceptual knowledge, its representation, and its structure – all of which are essential components of modern phraseological research.

Though terms like 'phraseological units' and 'fixed expression' are widely used, it is not always straightforward to define them. Moon (1998) says that a 'fixed expression' is a very general but convenient term, under which she includes frozen collocations, grammatically non-standard collocations, proverbs, sayings, similes and idioms. She acknowledges that "the fixed expression, like an idiom, is unsatisfactory as a term, as

many fixed expressions of these types are not actually fixed," but concedes that she uses it "for simplicity's sake."
The 'fixed content unit' coined by Amosova (1963) is "a stable, conventionalized combination of words in which one or more elements are lexically bound."
According to Kunin (Kunin, as cited in Naciscione, 2010, p. 210), "a phraseological unit is a stable combination of words with a fully or partially figurative meaning."
In addition to these formal definitions, phraseological units represent an important linguistic phenomenon that offers an opportunity to examine the implications of the interrelationship between language, culture and cognition. They express elements of national identity, illustrate the cultural continuity, and are part of a national cultural code. Phraseological units also show how culture, both directly and indirectly, maintains a collective mindset, influencing how people view the world and society. At the phraseological level, we can see how a speaker's choice of expressions in different communicative contexts is influenced by knowledge gained during early cultural socialization.
In general, the linguistic features of phraseological units in terms of their expressive and stylistic functions can be roughly summed up as follows (Galperin, 1958):

- They function as fixed, customary word combinations with particular usage.
- The unity of meaning is preserved, so the combination conveys a coherent, single notion.

Besides these characteristics, phraseological units are used in accordance with various language functions and acquire different shades of meaning depending on the context. Culturally encoded connotations found in idioms and phraseological units can, during actual use, reflect characteristic features of people's mentality (Telia, 1996). Building on these culturally encoded features, phraseological units differ from individual words in their ability to convey the speaker's attitude, intention, and communicative purpose. This expressive function reflects the evaluative, motivational, and cumulative aspects of linguistic consciousness and emotional activity.
It is precisely because of this expressive depth that the cultural-discursive dimension of contemporary phraseology reveals many complex aspects. Thus, phraseological expressions are 'figurative formulas'; they are not mere puzzles to be quickly deciphered. Understanding them requires attention to linguistic subtlety which touches upon the very ecology of language.
However, despite extensive research on phraseological units within individual languages, comparative studies across languages remain limited. Semantic structure of the concept 'man' in the phraseological systems of both languages has not yet been systematically analyzed. This gap limits our understanding of how culturally embedded anthropocentric concepts are structured cross-linguistically. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by analyzing phraseological units expressing the concepts 'man' in Kazakh and English languages. It seeks to reveal the cultural values and social norms embedded in language through a comparative-contrastive approach.

Literature Review

A phraseological unit is a combination of two or more words that define their figurative or metaphorical meanings. In that way, people develop and introduce concepts, and by using words as pictures in their heads, they reveal both their mental and cultural aspects.
Most of the conceptual features of phraseological units stem from the difference between content and expression, which yields semantic richness and flexibility. One cannot determine the meaning of phraseological units solely by looking at the immediate micro-context; therefore, they may serve to denote complex phenomena and relationships in a brief and vivid way.

Research in this field in the West and the former Soviet Union differs not only in their theoretical bases but also in their methods of analysis. The main idea of the Soviet theories, in particular those of Vinogradov and Kunin, is that the authors formalized a classification system that served as the basis for phraseology as a separate linguistic discipline.

Vinogradov's structural-semantic model identified phraseological units according to their levels of semantic integrity and idiomaticity (Vinogradov, 1972).

The approach proposed by Amosova is based on the study of context and the role of fixed lexical environments in the formation of meaning (Amosova, 1963).

Kunin (1970) codified phraseology from a functional-stylistic perspective emphasizing such features as reproducibility, semantic unity, and the ability to perform nominative and communicative functions in a discourse. Later, the cultural-national approach represented by Telia (1996), related the phraseological meaning to collective cultural experience by claiming that they encode ethno-specific ways of conceptualizing experience.

Western linguistic traditions, in contrast, have historically been more fragmented, with phraseology treated primarily within idiom studies rather than as an independent subsystem. However, influenced by the rise of corpus linguistics, Western scholarship has adopted empirical, frequency-based descriptions of multiword expressions. Sinclair's (1991) 'idiom principle' was the first to argue that language users depend, to a great extent, on prefabricated patterns rather than on constructions which are freely generated. This idea was further developed in applied and lexicographic research by Cowie (1998) and Stubbs (2001).

More recent paradigms have adopted cognitive linguistic perspectives. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), idioms reflect conceptual metaphors and embodied schemas, meaning that phraseological units are not arbitrary but systematically driven by human conceptualization. Moreover, both functional and psycholinguistic approaches recognize that the use of formulaic language facilitates communication and cognitive processing.

Fillmore et al. (1988) and Goldberg (1995, 2006) support this idea by considering idioms as stored constructions, that is, form-meaning integrated into a network of linguistic patterns. This way, this model conceptualizes the distinctions between idioms, collocations, and grammatical constructions.

The functional and psycholinguistic studies provide another angle to this. Wray (2002) describes phraseological units as "formulaic sequences which enhance communicative fluency and reduce processing load," while Cacciari and Tabossi (1988) analyze how idioms are processed, pointing to differences between the literal and figurative processes of activation. These studies emphasize the cognitive and communicative advantages of phraseology and support and supplement the structural and semantic approaches.

These diverse traditions demonstrate that phraseological units are multi-faceted linguistic phenomena that are structurally stable, culturally grounded, cognitively motivated, and empirically observable in usage. Indeed, recent studies call for integrative models that combine the strengths of each tradition while avoiding its drawbacks.

Comparative Linguistics and its Implications

Phraseological units in any language serve as one of the most significant examples of social evaluation expressed by the speaker. Their assessment is directed either to positive or negative stereotypes and patterns recognized within a particular society or cultural-linguistic community. Thus, the components of the meanings of such units are evaluative. This idea of language as a means of evaluation is connected with attempts to understand universal human thought advanced by philosophy over a long period of time.

Contemporary scholars have focused their investigations on examining the mechanisms of linguistic conceptualization and categorization of the world. While fragments of a national linguistic worldview are specific, without focus on the relationship to culture, communication becomes totally impossible. The realization of the intersection of language and culture enabled scholars to identify the so-called 'key concepts' of national cultures, reflecting the most significant elements of national consciousness.

Such developments in modern linguistics have emerged alongside two major processes. On the one hand, they are linked to the active process of change within language as an object of study. On the other hand, they reflect changes in the methodology used to describe language. These shifts have led to new directions and perspectives in comparative-typological and contrastive linguistic studies.

The use of contrastive analysis in studying the phraseological systems of different languages has led to the emergence of a specialized area of phraseological theory – contrastive phraseology - which has recently attracted growing scholarly attention. The publications of Reichstein (1980) and Dobrovolskii (1988) are regarded as the first fundamental studies in this area. Today, there is no doubt that a comparative study of phraseology enriches the general theory of phraseology, deepens understanding of the processes involved in the formation of phraseological units, advances translation theory, and enhances the authenticity of language education.

A comparative study of the phraseological systems of multiple languages focuses on the issue of interlingual phraseological equivalence of specific units and how they correspond across linguistic systems. The comparison involves such types of phraseological expressions as fixed similes, binominal expressions, somatic phraseological units, proverbs and sayings, and many others. Among these types, human-related phraseological units have attracted some cross-linguistic attention. For example, English vs Uzbek idioms containing body-part components (Kasimova & Gafurjanova, 2025); English vs Indonesian body-part idioms (Sulaiman et al., 2025); and Anthropocentric idioms in Kazakh, Russian, and English (Aykenova et al., 2025), to name a few.

However, comparative studies remain relatively few as opposed to research that have been conducted for each language separately. While such studies provide valuable insights, there is a notable lack of investigation into phraseological units featuring the concept 'man' across different languages. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by analyzing Kazakh and English phraseological units.

On Phraseological Concepts

At different levels, any branch of science either introduces new terms or changes existing ones. From a philosophical point of view, a concept is a more general term for a notion or meaning, while notion and meaning are regarded as logical terms within the categories of thought. Accordingly, terms such as 'concept', 'notion', and 'meaning' are sometimes thought to be the same and at other times different, without denying their distinctive features. It means that human perception of the world and reality is not based solely on abstract notions but also on real experiences.

The formation of a concept is not dependent on abstract notions, but rather on the mental representations of things. They are not abstract logical concepts, but sensory-perceptual images derived from real-life experience. Such elements enrich the basic notion of a thing by providing mental data that deepen, specify, and broaden its conceptual content. Such an accumulation gradually develops a notion into a concept.

Cognitive-linguistic studies reveal that a concept is not a simple word or notion. Rather, it is a highly complex and hierarchically structured mental unit shaped by cultural, philosophical, and collective dimensions. For instance, Ismatullayeva (2023) examines the nature of concepts and analyzes how mental/cognitive structures and

linguistic forms relate, whereas Dalieva (2023) asserts that concepts contain 'a quantum of knowledge' which is derived from shared cultural and philosophical understandings.

Kolesov (2017) claims that the concept framework consists of two levels that correspond to the symbolic and evaluative aspects of the community's worldview. Gunina (2011) draws a distinction between meaning and concept, claiming that meaning exists only in language, while concepts are based on personal understanding and the cultural standards of society. Notably, it is essential to emphasize that not every notion or word is a concept. For a unit to be a concept, it must be complex and combine the following features:

- Linguistic evidence reflecting national cultural markers,
- Mental characteristics, and
- Collective philosophical and logical knowledge.

This definition provides a theoretical basis for studying phraseological units by demonstrating how they transmit cognitive structures and cultural knowledge to language users.

Since concepts are associated with specific cultures, they constantly change in accordance with cultural practices, traditions, and national cognitive characteristics. They are characterized by a variety of images and their features, which are used as a source for frame structures. Different images collectively form our conceptual understanding of the world, and the entire process is realized through descriptions in phraseological expressions.

Conceptual information is often obtained from historical phraseological expressions. Accordingly, historical phraseological units are considered the sources of the nation's past and possess cognitive significance. Moreover, components of phraseological units that are related to the history of an ethnic group not only reflect the past but also reveal many other important facts.

Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative and quantitative research design that combines contrastive and semantic componential analyses. The objective is to identify shared and culture-specific semantic components of the concept 'man' in Kazakh and English phraseological systems.

The empirical material was collected through a systematic examination of major Kazakh and English explanatory and phraseological dictionaries. A total of 261 phraseological units were selected for analysis, including 156 units in Kazakh and 105 units in English. The selection criteria included:

- explicit presence of the lexemes denoting 'man' (e.g., er, erkek, adam in Kazakh; man in English),
- implicit reference to male identity or culturally recognized male roles, and
- figurative or phraseological stability.

Both idiomatic expressions and fixed phraseological collocations were included, while free word combinations were excluded.

After compiling phraseological units from lexicographic sources, their figurative meanings were identified. Each unit was then decomposed into minimal semantic components using componential analysis.

Componential analysis enabled the identification of core semantic features, including bravery, aggressiveness, social responsibility, maturity, physical strength, and others. Contrastive analysis was subsequently applied to determine the degree of overlap and divergence between the two linguistic systems.

The analysis was conducted manually to ensure interpretative accuracy. No automated semantic extraction tools were used.

Discussion and Findings

In culturally distinct languages, such as Kazakh and English, the same concept may carry different connotations, reflected in the figurative imagery of phraseological units. These connotations emerge because associative and imagery-based perceptions appear to be highly culture-specific; for this reason, cross-linguistic diversity becomes more evident in the expression of human-related concepts such as 'man.'

Phraseological units describing the concept 'man' express national identity and worldview-specific features in both languages. The conceptual structures of man's images in phraseology serve as indicators of a nation's mental and cultural framework, carrying distinctive ethno-symbolic meanings that provide insights into culturally significant perspectives on the national worldview.

Western cultures, particularly the English-speaking societies, approach this concept more philosophically, drawing on Aristotle's view that 'man is an animal possessing speech'. For them, "Man lives in a world of culture, not merely in the world of physics; and the world of culture consists of language, myth, art, religion, etc., which is the symbolic world. Hence, the study of man is to be based on a study of these symbols." (Radhakrishan and Raju, 1966, p.45).

Dictionaries further reflect these perspectives: The Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) defines 'man' as an adult male human being contrasted with woman, while the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) lists three different definitions of the concept 'man': an adult male human being; an adult who lives and identifies as male though they have been considered to have different sex at birth; a husband or male sexual partner.

The Kazakh Language Dictionary defines the concept 'man' as 1. Adamnyŋ erkek jynystylary, erkek; 2. Æieldiŋ jubaiy, küieu. In other words, for Kazakhs, this concept means: 1. Male humans; 2. Woman's spouse – husband (Zhanuzakov, 1999).

Phraseological units with the concept 'man' in the Kazakh language usually derive from two markers: *erkek* and *er*. The lexeme *erkek* generates expressions denoting male identity, behavior, and social roles: erkek basyŋmen, erkek atauly, erkeksız üi. The lexeme *er* forms a wide range of phraseological units that highlight valor, maturity, and moral character: er basyna kün tusa, er jetu, er jürek, er kezegı üşke deiın.

There are also phraseological units used in the Kazakh language which, even when they contain the lexeme *adam* (person, human), may specifically refer to men. This is closely tied to the national mentality and is likely due to the high social status of men in traditional Kazakh society, where men are viewed as the head of the household.

To examine whether such culturally marked tendencies are reflected more broadly across the phraseological systems of both languages, we conducted a systematic review of all available Kazakh and English dictionaries. We identified 261 phraseological units containing the concept 'man', both explicitly and implicitly, from major Kazakh and English dictionaries: 156 in Kazakh, and 105 in English.

Through componential semantic analyses, 11 components in both languages that manifest cultural, evaluative, and stereotypical contexts were identified. Of these 11 components, 7 are shared, 3 are specific to Kazakh, and 1 is specific to English.

Accordingly, the common features of the concept 'man' in these languages can be classified as follows:

Sexual characteristics: In both languages, a man is defined as a member of the male sex.

Physical characteristics: A man is associated with physical strength, stature, and male endurance in both languages. The characteristics that may be generally universal can be further specified or emphasized by cultural stereotypes.

Cultural stereotypes: Both languages encode aspects of courage, responsibility, and leadership. A man is traditionally perceived as strong, someone who protects his family. From this perspective, he represents common points of the two linguistic and cultural systems.

Within this classification, the concept ‘man’ incorporates the following shared semantic components:

‘Bravery’:

Kazakh: Zhuregınıŋ tügı bar; Zhürek zhutqan; Zhylan zhutqan; Közsız batyr; Kökzhal börı; Qasqyr zhürektı; Basyn bæigege tıgu; Ölımge bas tıgu; Arystandai aibatty, qabylandai qairatty; Zhalaŋ tös, zhündı balaq; Qas batyr, etc.

English: A man of courage; To be man enough; Steady as a rock; A man of iron; To bite the bullet, etc.

‘Aggressiveness’:

Kazakh: Azuy alty qarys; Qamşysynan qan sorğalağan; Qandy balaq, etc.

English: A man with a short fuse; A hot-headed man; To pick a fight, etc.

‘Well-off’

Kazakh: Dæuletı tasyğan; Murtyn balta şappaidy; Şaruasy tügel, etc.

English: A man of means; A man of deep pockets, etc.

‘Eloquence’:

Kazakh: Attyğa söz, ayaqtyğa zhol bermeu; Oraq auyz, ot tıldı, etc.

English: A man who can talk the hind legs off a donkey; a statesmanlike tongue; a Cicero; A man of eloquence, etc.

‘Flattery’:

Kazakh: Asty-üstıne tüsu; Qoiny-qonşyna kıru; Qurdai zhorğalau; Işıne kırıp, syrtyna şyğu, etc.

English: Lady killer; Smooth operator; A seducer with words, etc.

‘Physique’:

Kazakh: Ekı iyğy qaqpaqtai; Qapsağai denelı; Zıŋgıttei; Küş atasyn tanymas, ekı iyğyna ekı kısı mıngendei, etc.

English: A man of great stature; Herculean build; Ripped muscular man; Strong as an ox; Iron man, etc.

These shared components point to common features of male behavior. However, the underlying cultural models of what constitutes a man, differ noticeably between Kazakh and English. There is a greater emphasis on individual features in the English language, including independence, professional activity and personal virtues. Cultural contextualization is also different: Kazakh presents national and family aspects by means of collocations. In English it is more abstract and universal. Different means of respect and status reflect each language’s special cultural worldview.

Distinctive features of the concept ‘man’ are:

Age characteristics: In English the concept is restricted to adulthood. In Kazakh, on the contrary, it is tied to their social roles. In other words, the concept ‘man’ in Kazakh and English also has a considerable number of differences due to cultural and social peculiarities.

Social role: In Kazakh culture, the image of a man is commonly associated with the family and kinship: son, brother, uncle, cousin, father, son-in-law, father-in-law, head of the family. These associations reflect ethnocultural and traditional understanding of male responsibility. In contrast, in English the concept ‘man’ doesn’t spell out any social roles. It emphasizes personal identity and identifies things like independence, professional engagement, and personal virtues.

Cultural context: Kazakh expresses national and family values through specific collocations and contexts. English tends to strip away the extra layers, so ‘man’ feels more neutral, less tied to tradition or family, and more open-ended.

In Kazakh such features can be found in phraseological units meaning:

‘Skillful’: Ağaştan tüiın tüiu; Bes aspap; Temırden tüime tüiu; Ismer, etc.

‘Maturity’: Oi toqtatty; Es kırdı; Qara taban boldy; Zhıgıt ağasy boldy; Naiza ustady; Murtyna ustara tidı, etc.

In English:

‘A man of account’: Half man; To be a utility man, etc.

'Selfish': To look after the inner man; Every man for himself, etc.
The socio-historical conditions of each language also shape the conceptualization of men. It includes a wide range of negative attributes, including:
'Obstinacy':
Kazakh: Ker ezü; Qiyaŋqy mınez; Qyŋyr moiyn; Syŋar zhaq / Syŋar ezu, and etc.
English: As stubborn as a mule; Pig-headed man; All thumbs; A hard man to budge; An old stick-in-the-mud, etc.
'Incompetent':
Kazakh: Atsa – myltyğy, şapsa – qylyşy tarşy bolu, and etc.
English: A good for nothing; A man who can't find his own elbow; A big baby of a man, etc.
'Servility':
Kazakh: Qolzhaulyq bolu; Qolşoqpar, etc.
English: A yes-man; At someone's beck and call; His master's man, etc.
These examples demonstrate that, in both languages, negative phraseological units express a common social assessment, namely, weakness, cowardice, irresponsibility, deceit, and dependence. They are not expressed by only a single lexeme; rather, it is explored through phraseological units, proverbs, sayings, and collocations.
These qualitative observations are supported by quantitative data, as shown in Table 1, which presents the distribution of semantic components across 261 phraseological units in the corpus, highlighting both shared and culture-specific features. As can be seen from the table, most shared components are represented in both languages, even though their relative frequency differs. This quantitative overview underlines the patterns identified qualitatively, providing a clear picture of how cultural and linguistic factors shape the conceptualization of 'man' in the two languages.

Semantic Component	Kazakh PUs (%)	English PUs (%)	Total (n)
Bravery	28,8	26,3	70
Aggressiveness	6,4	8,4	18
Wealth	7,7	6,3	18
Eloquence	5,1	10,5	18
Flattery	6,4	7,4	17
Physical traits	11,5	15,8	33
Skillfulness	7,7	0	12
Maturity	9,0	0	14
Social role/kinship	5,1	0	8
English specific traits	0	9,5	9
Negative traits	18,6	15,8	44

Table 1: Distribution of semantic components across 261 Kazakh and English phraseological units

Conclusion
The present research has examined the conceptual structure of 'man' in Kazakh and English phraseological units through semantic componential and contrastive analyses and tried to reveal both shared and language-specific patterns. The study identified 11 semantic components, of which seven are shared components and four are language-specific ones.
Despite coming from different language families and cultural backgrounds, both languages view 'man' as an adult male linked to physical strength, bravery,

endurance, and responsibility. These shared elements show universal human experiences and social expectations.

However, findings also demonstrate that the cultural imprint of the concept 'man' in the two linguistic systems is significantly different. In Kazakh the concepts *er* and *erkek* are important because they are closely connected with the traditional social structures of the family and depicts man as a defender of the family, the head of the household. He is the one who carries communal responsibility. In contrast, in English the concept 'man' is more individualistic, socially neutral, and less culturally marked. Rather than focusing on the roles in the family, the English phraseological units highlight personal achievements and general human behavior.

The comparative analysis of the Kazakh and English phraseological units confirms the complex interaction between language, cognition, and culture. In this regard, the findings have several important implications. Theoretically, the study contributes to contrastive phraseology by demonstrating how componential semantic analysis can reveal cultural elements embedded in language. Methodologically, the integration of qualitative-quantitative analyses offers a framework for cross-linguistic conceptual studies.

Further research may extend this study by comparing other languages, analyzing the current changes within phraseological representations of 'man', and shed light on the dynamic interaction between language, thought and culture.

AI Tools Declaration

The authors declare that Grammarly and ChatGPT4.0 were used exclusively for grammar and stylistic revision of the manuscript. No artificial intelligence tools were used for data collection, semantic componential analysis or contrastive evaluation procedures. All research design, analysis, argumentation, and intellectual contributions presented in this study are entirely the work of the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the manuscript.

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