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Exploring the Semantic Significance ‘Camel’ and Cultural Representation in the Kazakh Ethnic Worldview as Reflected in the National Corpus

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the study of the concept of “cultural worldview” in linguistics, including methods for studying the linguistic expression of the ethnic perspective. It argues that the formation of information about this concept, organized in the mind of a nation before it is expressed through language, is composed of various worldviews. Human knowledge is intrinsically linked to the environment, nation, state, surrounding nature, religion, national values, and cultural traditions. It is impossible to conceive of this knowledge independently from its context or create a discrete worldview. Therefore, the article explains, using examples, that in the environment where the collective image common to an ethnos is formed, the ethnic image is also formed. The linguistic representation of the Kazakh ethnic worldview is explained step-by-step. The study finds that the presence of ethno-marked units in the language system is a key feature in the formation of ethno-cultural knowledge. Additionally, the effectiveness of using socio-philosophical, cultural, symbolic, and semantic research methods to determine the verbalization of the ethnic worldview is demonstrated. Ethnomarking of material cultural names, precedent names, mythological names and concepts, and zoomorphic and phytonymic names are among the elements that constitute the Kazakh ethnic worldview.

Keywords: Semantic valence; verbalization; The ethnic picture; National corpus; National languages; Word “camel”

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 29 February 2024 | Revised: 31 July 2024 | Accepted: 14 August 2024 | Published Online: 30 September 2024
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v6i4.6986>

CITATION

Talgatqyzy, G., Amirbekova, A., Fazylzhanova, A., et al., 2024. Exploring the Semantic Significance ‘Camel’ and Cultural Representation in the Kazakh Ethnic Worldview as Reflected in the National Corpus. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 6(4): 268-276.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v6i4.6986>

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1. Introduction

Language functions as a critical signaling system, essential for conveying the outcomes of cognitive processes and capturing the nuances of evolving cognitive activities. It plays an indispensable role in thought, facilitating the seamless interaction between the first and second signaling systems. A single idea can be expressed across multiple languages, with the core meaning remaining consistent, allowing for diverse linguistic expressions of the same concept (Popova & Stermin, 2007).

The term “cultural worldview” refers to the unique perspectives, beliefs, values, and cultural practices that shape the worldview of a particular ethnic group or community. This concept integrates elements such as religious beliefs, social customs, historical narratives, linguistic expressions, artistic traditions, and symbolic representations. For instance, the cultural worldview of the Kazakh people is deeply rooted in their rich history, nomadic lifestyle, traditional customs, and spiritual beliefs—elements that have been preserved and transmitted across generations.

Historically, the Kazakh people were nomadic pastoralists, moving with their herds across Central Asia’s vast steppes. This nomadic lifestyle has profoundly influenced their cultural identity, fostering values such as independence, adaptability, and a deep connection to the land. Kazakh society has traditionally been organized into clans or tribes, each with its own customs, traditions, and social hierarchy. These affiliations have played a crucial role in shaping both individual and collective identities within the Kazakh community.

Hospitality is highly valued in Kazakh culture and is considered a sacred duty. Guests are treated with the utmost respect and generosity, reflecting the importance of community and solidarity. Additionally, the Kazakh people have a rich tradition of oral storytelling, poetry, and epic narratives, such as the “*Korkyt ata*” epic, which are vital for preserving cultural heritage and transmitting knowledge across generations. Traditional Kazakh spirituality blends Islamic practices with pre-Islamic animistic beliefs and shamanistic rituals, where nature is revered, and rituals like eagle hunting and horseback riding hold significant spiritual meaning.

Kazakh culture is also expressed through various art forms, including music, dance, handicrafts, and cuisine. Traditional instruments like the *dombra* and *kobyz*, along with dances such as the *kara zhorga*, are integral to Kazakh cul-

tural identity. Thus, the cultural worldview of the Kazakh people reflects a complex tapestry of history, environment, and collective identity, distinguishing them as a unique ethnic group within the broader human mosaic.

In linguistics, the ethnic perspective in language is critical for defining the mental character of a nation. It also serves as a phenomenon of integration in nation-building, highlighting unique features in cultural, psychological, spiritual, mental, philosophical, and artistic knowledge that differentiate one ethnic group from another. Consequently, language not only reflects the knowledge of the worldview but also serves as a continuous outline of life experience, evolving with each generation. This necessitates the study of language within a theoretical and cognitive framework, particularly as we move forward in the 21st century.

1.1 Theoretical framework

To fully understand how the cultural worldview is embedded in language, it is essential to explore the concept of semantic valence in linguistics. Semantic valence refers to the compatibility of a word with other words in its linguistic environment, influencing how meanings shift and evolve (Kustova, 2016; Willems, 2006; Apresyan, 1995). This concept is critical in analyzing how language encapsulates and conveys the ethnic perspective, which is deeply intertwined with the cultural worldview.

Valence in language is best understood by individuals who actively engage with the language, as it involves the complex interaction of words at various linguistic levels, including semantics, morphology, and syntax (Kazachuk and Yuzdova, 2019). For instance, the valence of a verb refers to its ability to combine with specific actants, thereby shaping the semantic structure of a sentence. A systematic study of this concept is crucial, particularly at the university level, to ensure a deep understanding of how semantic valences shape language and, by extension, cultural worldviews.

This framework is vital for exploring the ethnic perspective in language. The cultural worldview is closely tied to the individual’s world, developed through cognitive abilities and summarized in an abstract thinking system (Maslova, 2001). The worldview consists of three components: knowledge of the world, perception of the world, and the feeling of the world. Each of these elements contributes to forming an individual’s or a community’s perspective on life.

In his article “Grammatist and His Language” (1924) related to language, the linguist, anthropologist E. Sapir examines the connection between language and human psyche, intuition, and makes the following conclusion “we have every reason to assume that languages are cultural repositories of extensive and comprehensive networks of mental processes, which we still need to define clearly” (p. 151).

Language serves a dual function in this context. First, it creates the image of the world within the language itself, representing the deepest layers of world images in the human mind. Second, language is used to present and explain these images to others, facilitating the spread of accumulated knowledge from the individual to the collective. Therefore, understanding the ethnic perspective in language requires a thorough examination of how language constructs and conveys the cultural worldview.

1.2 Literature review

Research on the semantics of the ethnic worldview spans multiple disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, and linguistics. Scholars like Anthony D. Smith (1991) have extensively explored how historical, cultural, and social factors shape ethnic identities, particularly in the context of nationalism. Similarly, Benedict Anderson’s work on “Imagined Communities” provides insights into the formation of national identities, which are relevant to understanding ethnic identities as well (Anderson, 1983).

Stuart Hall’s contributions to the study of identity, race, and ethnicity have been instrumental in shaping contemporary understandings of these concepts (Hall, 1996). His research focuses on how meanings of ethnicity are produced and negotiated within specific historical and cultural contexts. Rogers Brubaker (2004), with his interdisciplinary approach, examines the complexities of ethnic categorization and the dynamics of ethnic boundary-making in diverse societies.

In the field of sociolinguistics, scholars like Deborah Tannen (1990) and John J. Gumperz (1982) have explored how language reflects and shapes social identities, including ethnic identities. Their work highlights how linguistic features, such as code-switching and speech accommodation, are used to negotiate ethnic identities in multilingual settings. Jan Blommaert’s research further emphasizes the role of language in constructing social identities, particularly in relation to ethnic minority communities (Blommaert, 2010).

The study of national corpora, such as the Russian National Corpus and the British National Corpus, provides valuable resources for exploring the semantics of the ethnic worldview. These corpora offer comprehensive, authentic, and culturally specific linguistic data that can be systematically analyzed to understand how ethnic identities are represented and negotiated in language.

1.3 Research objectives and justification

Our research aims to utilize the national corpus as an electronic resource to explore and verbalize the ethnic language worldview of the Kazakh people. The Kazakh word “*tuye*” (English: camel) was selected as the focus of this study due to its deep cultural symbolism in many regions, particularly in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The camel embodies the values, lifestyles, and beliefs of the communities closely associated with it, symbolizing resilience, adaptability, and survival in harsh environments.

The decision to focus on the camel is rooted in its extensive semantic range, which extends beyond mere physical or biological characteristics to encompass a wide array of cultural meanings. By analyzing how the camel is depicted in literature, folklore, historical documents, and religious texts, we aim to systematically capture the various semantic nuances associated with the camel in the national corpus. This approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of its role in Kazakh culture and contribute to our broader understanding of how language and culture intersect to shape ethnic identities and cultural worldviews.

The national corpus of the Kazakh language serves as a valuable resource for studying the semantics of the ethnic picture of the world in Kazakhstan. By focusing on the camel as a symbol within the Kazakh cultural context, this research provides new insights into the complex relationship between language, ethnicity, and culture. Through a comprehensive and culturally specific analysis of linguistic data, we hope to contribute to the broader discourse on how language and culture intersect to shape ethnic identities and cultural worldviews.

2. Materials and methods

To capture the full extent of the camel’s semantic range, we will analyze its depiction in various contexts, including

literature, folklore, historical documents, and religious texts. This approach will allow us to systematically mark and formalize the various semantic nuances associated with the camel in the national corpus, providing a comprehensive understanding of its role in Kazakh culture.

The concept of the “ethnic worldview” was chosen for this research because it delves into the intersection of language and culture in shaping our understanding of ethnicity, identity, and diversity. By studying the semantics of the ethnic picture of the world, we can gain insights into how language reflects cultural values, norms, and perspectives related to ethnicity. This study also sheds light on the formation of individual and collective identities, the dynamics of social interactions, and the representation of ethnic identities in language.

Using the national corpus as the foundation for this research offers several advantages, including comprehensive coverage, authenticity, cultural specificity, accessibility, and standardization. These features make the national corpus an ideal resource for investigating the semantics of the ethnic picture of the world, particularly within the Kazakh cultural context.

The semantics of the ethnic worldview involves the analysis of language to understand the meanings, connotations, and representations associated with ethnic identity. We have employed several methods to achieve this:

- **Corpus Linguistics:** Utilizing the national corpus of the Kazakh language, we analyzed texts to identify patterns, phrases, and semantic associations related to ethnic terms and concepts. This includes quantitative and qualitative analyses of linguistic data to uncover common themes, attitudes, and discourses surrounding ethnicity.
- **Lexical Semantics:** We studied the meanings of individual words and their interrelationships within a semantic network to clarify the semantic aspects of ethnic terms. This involved analyzing the semantic features, meanings, and connotations of words related to ethnicity to understand their contribution to the ethnic picture of the world.
- **Cross-Cultural Analysis:** We compared linguistic representations of ethnicity across different cultures, languages, and socio-political contexts to reveal both universal and culturally specific aspects of ethnicity. This approach helps illuminate how ethnic identity is constructed and perceived in various cultural settings.

These methodologies are carefully selected to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the semantic and cultural significance of *tuye*. Each method contributes to a deeper understanding of how the word functions within the Kazakh linguistic and cultural landscape.

3. Results

The analysis of the word *tuye* (English: camel) within the Kazakh language reveals its significant role in shaping the ethnic worldview of the Kazakh people. The findings are categorized into thematic sections, each illustrating how *tuye* contributes to various aspects of Kazakh cultural identity, language, and conceptual frameworks.

The semantic analysis indicates that *tuye* is deeply intertwined with Kazakh ethnic identity, symbolizing resilience, adaptability, and survival—traits highly valued in Kazakh culture. The camel is not merely an animal but a cultural icon embedded in various expressions that convey notions of size, strength, and endurance. For instance, the phrase *tuye kese* (camel cup) metaphorically extends the camel’s significance as a symbol of enormity and robustness, reflecting broader cultural values associated with strength and largeness.

The word *tuye* was classified into several conceptual groups to explore its semantic depth:

- **Folk and Cult Animal:** *Tuye* is recognized as a folk and cult animal in Central Asia due to its adaptation to the desert climate where Turkic-speaking people, including Kazakhs, reside. The camel is so integral to the region that it has become an emblematic figure in souvenirs and cultural representations of Asia.
- **Symbol of Bigness:** In Kazakh culture, the camel is synonymous with largeness. For example, the term *tuye örik* (camel apricot) refers to a large apricot, while *tuyekus* (camel bird) is a metaphorical name for an ostrich, recognized as the largest bird and symbolized by the camel’s stature.
- **Linguoculturalism and National Stereotypes:** The camel is also a vehicle and transporter in Kazakh culture, symbolizing endurance and connectivity. Phrases such as *tuye shana* (camel sledge) and *shanaryak tuye* (camel with a load) highlight its role in transportation and cultural symbolism.
- **Ethnographic Significance:** The word *tuye* is linked to

various aspects of Kazakh ethnography, including ornaments, dishes, agricultural tools, national games, and even flora and fauna names, like *tuyetaban* (camel foot), reflecting the integration of the camel into the cultural and ethnic worldview.

To systematically document and analyze the semantic range of *tuye*, a structured subcorpus within the National Corpus was proposed, organized as follows:

- **Lexical Markup:** This includes definitions and pictures of the word *tuye*, encompassing its lexical, zoological, cultic, ancient, ethnographic, and religious meanings. Each markup captures a different aspect of how *tuye* is understood and used in Kazakh culture.
- **Valence Markup:** The valence of the word *tuye* is categorized into nominative, predicative, attributive, and phraseological valences:
- **Nominative Valence:** Includes phrases like *tuye shelek* (camel bucket) and *tuye kymyz* (camel milk), where the camel metaphorically represents largeness or robustness.
- **Predicative Valence:** Examples include *tuye shugerdi* (bringing the camel to its knees), which reflects actions associated with the camel's behavior.
- **Attributive Valence:** Involves descriptive phrases like *baya tuye* (angry camel) and *zharyk tuye* (tired camel), highlighting physical or emotional states.
- **Phraseological Valence:** Contains idiomatic expressions like *tuyenin kumalagyndai* (like camel feces) to indicate largeness or significance.
- **Semantic and Thematic Grouping:** The subcorpus also includes a comprehensive listing of words beginning with *tuye* categorized by semantic domains:
- **Phytonyms:** Plant names such as *tuyebede* (camel clover) and *tuyekoten* (camel thigh), which are based on the camel's physical characteristics.
- **Zoonym:** Animal names like *tuyekus* (camel bird) and *tuyetek* (camel origin), where the camel is used metaphorically to describe size or other attributes.
- **Oronyms:** Geographical names like *Tuye zhon* (camel backbone) and *Tuyemoynaq* (camel neck), reflecting the camel's physical form in landscape features.
- **Household Items:** Items like *tuyebel* (camel tree) and *tuye kazan* (camel cauldron), where the camel's durability or size influences the naming of objects.

The analysis demonstrates that the camel (*tuye*) is not

merely a word but a significant cultural and linguistic unit in Kazakh society, encapsulating a wide array of cultural meanings and values. The structured subcorpus within the National Corpus offers a systematic way to explore and document these meanings, ensuring that the rich cultural heritage associated with the camel is preserved and studied in depth. This approach highlights the importance of integrating cultural and linguistic research in understanding the ethnic worldview, contributing to a broader understanding of how language shapes and reflects cultural identity.

4. Discussion

The camel holds a profound and varied cultural significance across different regions of the world, where its symbolic and practical roles are shaped by local traditions and environments. In Central Asia, particularly within Kazakh culture, the camel is deeply embedded in the fabric of daily life, symbolizing endurance, resilience, and essential cultural values such as hospitality and generosity. This contrasts sharply with how camels are perceived in other parts of the world, such as the Middle East, North Africa, and English-speaking regions.

In the Middle East and North Africa, camels are integral to the social and cultural identity, serving not just as means of desert transportation but also playing prominent roles in camel racing and beauty contests, which are deeply woven into the cultural heritage of these regions (Bornstein, 2021). These activities are not merely recreational but carry significant social and cultural weight, reflecting the historical importance of camels in these societies. Similarly, in Australia, camels introduced in the 19th century have become symbols of exploration and endurance, celebrated in events like the Camel Cup, which underscores their adaptation to and representation of the Australian outback. In contrast, in North America and Europe, where camels are less central to daily life, they often symbolize exoticism, endurance, and adventure, as reflected in literature, art, and public memory (Camel Advisor, n.d.).

These global perspectives underscore the adaptability and cultural significance of the camel across diverse landscapes, reinforcing its role as a symbol of resilience and cultural heritage. The historical importance of camels, particularly along trade routes like the Silk Road, further empha-

sizes their role as connectors of civilizations, contributing to their revered status in various cultural narratives. However, the specific meanings attached to the camel vary significantly across cultures, reflecting different historical, environmental, and social contexts.

Within Kazakh culture, the camel (*tuye*) holds a particularly central place, both symbolically and practically, deeply embedded in the nomadic traditions and daily life of the Kazakh people. The findings from this study highlight the profound cultural and linguistic significance of the camel within the Kazakh ethnic worldview. There has been increasing interest in understanding how ethnic values, particularly those associated with animals like the camel, serve as cultural symbols across different societies (Heinonen, 2018). The role of the camel in Kazakh culture contrasts notably with its representation in English-speaking cultures, where it is often associated with ideas of adventure, exploration, and exoticism rather than being a central cultural symbol.

The work of Dollmann, Rudolphi, and Parameshwaran (2019) provides insights into how language and ethnic identity interact, particularly in sociolinguistic contexts, emphasizing that language is a key marker of ethnic identity and often reflects broader cultural and historical narratives. In English-speaking cultures, the camel is frequently associated with metaphorical ideas of endurance and resilience within literary and metaphorical frameworks, rather than being a vital part of the culture as it is in regions like Central Asia.

In Kazakh culture, the camel is not only a symbol of physical endurance but also embodies social and cultural values such as hospitality and generosity. The Kazakh language is rich with expressions and idioms that reflect the camel's significance, embedding it deeply within the cultural fabric of society. For instance, phrases like *ak iyk tuye* (camel with white shoulders) describe individuals who tirelessly carry heavy burdens, much like a camel. Similarly, the *Zhigit tuye* (groom's camel), given as a gift during marriage rituals, highlights the camel's role in significant cultural practices, further emphasizing its importance beyond mere symbolism.

In contrast, in English-speaking cultures, while the camel appears in language and culture, it often serves as a symbol of exoticism or endurance in extreme conditions rather than being a deeply ingrained cultural symbol. English idioms such as "the straw that broke the camel's back" or "a camel through the eye of a needle" highlight the camel's

role in metaphorical expressions but do not carry the same cultural weight as in Kazakh society. The camel's depiction in English is more abstract, serving as a metaphorical tool rather than a representation of lived cultural experience.

Comparing the representation of camels in Kazakh and English cultures reveals both similarities and differences. In Kazakh culture, the camel is a vital part of the nomadic heritage, intricately tied to daily life, social rituals, and cultural expressions. It symbolizes survival in the harsh landscapes of Central Asia and is celebrated in proverbs, folklore, and traditional practices. The cultural practices surrounding camels, such as the gifting of a camel in marriage rituals or their use in camel racing, have no direct equivalents in English culture, where camels are more likely to be encountered in literature or as part of historical narratives of exploration.

The comparative analysis of how camels are perceived and represented in Kazakh and English-speaking cultures illustrates the varying significance of the camel as a cultural and linguistic symbol. The camel's deep integration into Kazakh culture, as reflected in its language and traditions, stands in contrast to its more symbolic and metaphorical role in English-speaking cultures. The study of the camel in these different contexts offers valuable insights into how language and culture intersect to shape ethnic worldviews. The structured subcorpus within the National Corpus of the Kazakh language provides a robust framework for preserving and analyzing the linguistic and cultural significance of the camel, offering a model for exploring the intersection of language, culture, and identity in diverse linguistic communities.

Moreover, examining the role of camels in other non-English-speaking cultures, such as in Somalia, further enriches this analysis. The work "The Camel in Somali Oral Traditions" highlights the deep cultural significance of camels in Somali society, where they are central to oral literature, proverbs, and daily life, demonstrating their integration into social identity and survival (Abokor, 1997). This contrasts with the more symbolic role that camels play in English-speaking cultures, where they are often used to evoke exoticism and endurance but are less central to the cultural identity.

The camel's significance as a cultural and linguistic symbol is deeply shaped by the specific historical, environmental, and social contexts of the societies in which it is embedded. In Kazakh culture, the camel is an integral part

of the nomadic lifestyle, symbolizing resilience, endurance, and cultural continuity. In English-speaking cultures, while the camel remains a powerful symbol of endurance and exoticism, its role is more metaphorical and less tied to daily life. This comparative study underscores the importance of understanding how different cultures perceive and represent the same animal, revealing the intricate connections between language, culture, and identity.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, determining the Kazakh ethnic worldview through the language system involves several critical steps. Firstly, conducting a socio-philosophical analysis of universal conceptual notions is essential. This process elucidates the underlying conceptual structures that shape the ethnic worldview. Secondly, it is vital to examine the meanings of complex words formed by the combination of simpler ones, as these often convey the conceptual world specific to the object of study. Thirdly, attention must be paid to the harmony of semantic combinations, ensuring that the meanings of phrases are semantically coherent, with phonetic compatibility and morphological consistency. Fourthly, the presence of words with symbolic value in these combinations is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the ethnic perspective. Finally, exploring mythological, stereotypical, zoomorphic, phytonymic, and precedent ethnomarkerized names, as well as the ethnomarkerization of material culture, is indispensable in uncovering the cultural codes embedded in ethno-cultural names.

The semantic valence of the word “camel” varies across cultural, historical, and contextual landscapes. In many regions where camels are prevalent, such as the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia, camels are imbued with positive connotations, symbolizing resilience, adaptability, and survival in harsh desert environments. They are revered for their endurance and their critical role in facilitating trade, transportation, and communication across deserts. In literature, art, and folklore from these regions, camels are often depicted as noble and resourceful creatures. However, this positive perception is not universal. In urbanized or industrialized societies, where camels are less central to daily life, they may be seen as exotic or even antiquated symbols rather than practical or revered animals.

Within the Kazakh ethnic worldview, camels hold profound cultural significance, deeply rooted in the nomadic heritage of the Kazakh people. The traditional Kazakh way of life, centered around nomadic pastoralism in Central Asia’s vast steppes and deserts, relied heavily on camels for transportation, trade, and sustenance. In this context, camels symbolize much more than mere practical utility; they embody key cultural values such as resilience, independence, and adaptability. The nomadic lifestyle, deeply connected to nature and the expansive steppe, highlights the importance of self-reliance, communal cooperation, and respect for the natural world. Camels are also integral to Kazakh oral traditions, folklore, and artistic expressions, often featured in epic narratives like the “*Korkyt ata*” epic, which celebrates the heroic qualities of endurance and determination.

Even in contemporary Kazakh society, where many have adopted sedentary lifestyles, the cultural significance of camels remains deeply ingrained. Festivals, rituals, and celebrations frequently incorporate elements of nomadic heritage, honoring the enduring legacy of the Kazakh ethnic worldview.

In sum, the semantic valence of “camel” and its representation within the Kazakh ethnic worldview provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between language, culture, and identity. By exploring the multifaceted meanings and cultural associations attached to camels, we gain a deeper understanding of how humans interact with the natural world and how these interactions shape their collective identity and sense of belonging.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, GI and AF; methodology, GT; validation, GT, KG and GI; formal analysis, AF; investigation, AA; resources, KG; data curation, AF; writing—original draft preparation, AA; writing—review and editing, GI; supervision, GT; project administration, GI; funding acquisition, KG. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are included within the article. Additional data can be provided by the corresponding author, AM, upon reasonable request.

Funding

This research was funded by scientific project «Development of subcorpus of culturally representative and advertising texts», number BR 18574132.

Acknowledgments

The article was written on the basis of the scientific project “BR 18574132 Development of subcorpus of culturally representative and advertising texts”. We express our gratitude to the A. Baitursynov Institute of Linguistics, which supports the implementation of the project.

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