



Differentiation of Lexical Units in Languages With Different Systems According to Their Linguocultural Characteristics

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ABSTRACT

This study examines complex lexical units in Azerbaijani and English from linguocultural and cognitive perspectives, aiming to identify differences in their structural organization, semantic composition, and cultural interpretation. Using a qualitative comparative approach, the research analyzes compound words and syntactic expressions from lexicographic sources. The results demonstrate that English lexical units are generally more compact and semantically condensed. Noun-noun compounds, in particular, express culturally embedded meanings in a cognitively economical manner. Conversely, Azerbaijani lexical units expand meaning through syntactic and morphological means, distributing semantic information across several elements and relying more strongly on contextual interpretation. While both languages encode culturally significant knowledge, they employ different cognitive strategies: English favors conceptual compression, whereas Azerbaijani prefers more explicit, descriptive, and relational expressions. Ultimately, the study concludes that these structural differences reflect deeper typological, cultural, and cognitive patterns. This confirms that language structure, cognitive processes, and cultural experience are inextricably linked in the conceptualization and expression of meaning.

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1. Introduction

Language is considered one of the most important means through which people understand, explain, and conceptualize the surrounding world. Language is not only a system of words and grammatical rules but also a living, dynamic structure that reflects how people think, feel, and interpret reality, shaped by culture.

In modern linguistics, greater attention is given to the relationship between language, thought, and culture. The main idea of this approach is that during communication, people not only transfer information but also reveal how they organize knowledge and structure concepts in the human mind. This idea has been widely developed within the frameworks of cognitive linguistics and linguoculturology (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kubryakova, 1988; Maslova, 2001).

In earlier linguistic theories, language was mainly approached as a system of signs governed by grammatical and structural rules. During that period, linguistic structure was considered more important than meaning itself. However, later linguistic research

demonstrated that such an approach was insufficient to explain real communication processes because meaning occupies a central position in language use. As a result, attention gradually shifted toward the processes by which people construct meaning and form concepts through language (Langacker, 1987; Jackendoff, 1997).

One of the linguistic areas where this process is most evident is word formation, especially the formation of compound words. In the English language, a large amount of semantic information can often be combined within a single lexical unit. Such a feature makes communication relatively simpler, more economical, and faster. At the same time, the English language demonstrates a high degree of productivity in the formation of new lexical units, especially under the influence of social and cultural change (Bauer, 1983; Marchand, 1969; Adams, 1973; Aronoff, 1981).

In Azerbaijani, however, meaning is more frequently expressed through expanded and descriptive structures. Instead of concentrating meaning within a single lexical form, semantic information is distributed across different structural elements of the expression. Because of this feature, contextual interpretation plays a particularly important role in understanding meaning (Həsənov, 1988; Quliyev, 2011). In addition, various linguistic studies show that word-formation processes in Azerbaijani are closely linked to cultural and discourse-related factors (Abdulla, 2010; Abdullayev, 2011; Adilov, 2019).

From a cognitive perspective, word formation cannot be regarded as a random linguistic process. On the contrary, it reflects how people organize and categorize knowledge in the mind. Language influences human thinking, while thinking itself also shapes the development of language. In this process, metaphor plays a particularly important role because people often understand abstract and complex concepts through simpler, more familiar experiences (Kubryakova, 1988; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Another important issue is the close relationship between language and culture. Lexical units do not simply carry dictionary meaning but also preserve cultural information, traditions, values, and collectively shared knowledge. Therefore, in order to understand the full meaning of a lexical unit, it is also necessary to consider the cultural background connected with it (Maslova, 2001; Karasik, 2002; Slyshkin, 2000). Although a considerable number of studies have been devoted to this topic, there remains a need to integrate diverse theoretical approaches into a unified framework. Many existing studies focus either on structural analysis or on cultural interpretation, while fewer examine these aspects together, especially in comparative research involving Azerbaijani and English.

This study attempts to address this problem by examining the formation and functioning of complex lexical units in both languages and by identifying what these structures reveal about cognitive processes and cultural differences. The aim of the research is not only to describe lexical structure, but also to explain how speakers of different languages conceptualize and organize reality through linguistic means.

The article is organized as follows: first, previous theoretical and linguistic studies on the topic are reviewed; second, the research methodology is explained; third, the analysis and findings are presented; and finally, the article summarizes the main conclusions and emphasizes the study's theoretical significance.

2. Literature Review

The main idea of linguocultural and cognitive approaches to language is that language is not only a system of grammatical rules and linguistic signs but also a means

by which people from different cultures understand, conceptualize, and interpret the surrounding world. Language reflects the processes through which concepts are formed in the human mind and demonstrates the influence of culture on these cognitive processes.

In the early stages of linguistic studies, researchers such as Saussure (1977) and Bloomfield (1933) primarily focused on language as a structured, organized system. Within this approach, language was described primarily as a set of signs governed by formal rules. However, later linguistic theories gradually shifted their attention toward meaning, mental processes, and the mechanisms by which people construct understanding through language.

Within cognitive linguistics, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain that metaphor should not be regarded only as a stylistic or decorative element of language, but rather as one of the fundamental mechanisms of human thinking. Similarly, Langacker (1987) argues that grammar and vocabulary are directly connected to mental and cognitive processes. These approaches significantly changed the understanding of word formation, as lexical units began to be interpreted not only as formal linguistic structures but also as reflections of human conceptualization and thought patterns.

In the Russian and post-Soviet linguistic tradition, Kubryakova (1988; 1996) provides a cognitive explanation of word-formation processes. According to her view, words, especially derived and compound lexical units, function as instruments for storing knowledge and for classifying and organizing information within the human mind. Rakhilina (2008) also supports this position by emphasizing that lexical meaning depends on the interaction and combinational behavior of words within language.

Linguoculturology is regarded as a field that studies the relationship between language and culture. According to Maslova (2001), language preserves cultural values, collective knowledge, and culturally shaped ways of thinking. Karasik (2002) introduces the concept of the "linguistic circle," in which language, personality, and culture interact continuously. Slyshkin (2000) also emphasizes that cultural concepts play an important role in understanding the deeper, culturally conditioned meanings of words.

More recent linguistic studies additionally demonstrate that meaning in language should not be considered fixed and unchangeable. On the contrary, meaning varies with usage patterns, cultural background, and communicative context. Researchers argue that lexical units should be understood as flexible cognitive structures shaped by experience and communication (Evans & Green, 2018; Croft, 2020). Other studies based on linguistic data also show that word-formation processes are influenced by both cognitive habits and the cultural significance of concepts within each language system (Booij, 2019; Plag, 2021). This once again demonstrates that word formation is not only a grammatical process but also a cognitive and cultural phenomenon.

In Azerbaijani linguistics, researchers such as Abdulla (2010), Abdullayev (2011), Həsənov (1988), and Adilov (2019) investigate word formation processes and the organization of meaning in language use. Bünyatova (2018) pays special attention to the role of intercultural communication, while İsmayılova (2021; 2022) conducts comparative research on Azerbaijani and English lexical structures.

In English linguistics, Bauer (1983) and Marchand (1969) provide detailed explanations of different types and mechanisms of word formation. Adams (1973) and Aronoff (1981) also examine the productivity of English word formation and the processes through which new lexical units are created. These studies provide an

important theoretical basis for understanding how compound lexical units function in English.

Although many studies have been devoted to this field, a significant research problem remains. Most existing studies focus either on structural analysis or on cultural interpretation separately. There are comparatively few studies that combine both approaches, especially in comparative analyses involving Azerbaijani and English. This study attempts to fill this gap by examining word formation processes simultaneously from cognitive and linguocultural perspectives.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative research design and investigates complex lexical units in Azerbaijani and English from linguocultural and cognitive perspectives. The main theoretical idea of the research is that lexical units should not be treated only as grammatical or structural formations. Rather, they should be understood as reflections of human thinking processes and as linguistic manifestations of cultural knowledge and meaning construction (Kubryakova, 1988; Maslova, 2001; Karasik, 2002).

In other words, the study attempts to demonstrate how language expresses culture and cognition through lexical units, especially through complex formations such as compound words and syntactically formed lexical expressions.

3.1. Research Design

The research follows a descriptive-analytical and comparative methodological framework (Antwi et al., 2026; Gapur et al., 2024; Novruzov & Novruzova, 2025). This means that the study is not based on quantitative analysis or statistical calculation, but rather focuses on the explanation, interpretation, and comparative understanding of linguistic material.

The comparative method occupies an important place in the study because it allows the comparison of two typologically different language systems:

English language, which is mainly analytic in structure and demonstrates a highly productive compounding system (Bauer, 1983; Marchand, 1969);

Azerbaijani language, which is agglutinative in nature and tends to express meaning through more expanded and descriptive structures (Həsənov, 1988; Quliyev, 2011).

Because of these structural differences, it becomes possible to observe how each language organizes and represents meaning through its own linguistic mechanisms.

3.2. Materials and Data Sources

The material for the research comprises complex lexical units drawn from various linguistic sources to ensure the reliability and diversity of the data.

Firstly, explanatory and bilingual dictionaries were used as lexicographic sources. Secondly, previous scientific studies devoted to Azerbaijani and English word formation were included in the research material (Adams, 1973; Aronoff, 1981; İsmayılova, 2021). Thirdly, theoretical studies in cognitive linguistics and linguoculturology were applied to support the interpretation and explanation of the data (Kubryakova, 1996; Maslova, 2001; Slyshkin, 2000).

The lexical units selected for analysis mainly include compound words, syntactic lexical combinations, and culturally marked expressions. These lexical units were

selected because they belong to culturally significant semantic domains such as religion, family relations, traditions, and everyday social life.

For example, English lexical units such as *Christmas tree*, *churchwarden*, and *Easter egg* were analyzed within the research. Azerbaijani examples were selected from similar semantic and cultural domains based on previous linguistic studies (Bünyatova, 2018; Həsənov, 1988).

3.3. Analytical Procedure

The analytical process of the research was carried out in three main stages. The first stage consists of structural analysis. At this stage, attention was given to the structural formation of lexical units and to how words are formed through compounding, derivation, or syntactic combination within sentence structures.

The second stage includes semantic analysis. In this part of the study, the focus was on lexical meaning, semantic transparency, and the contribution of individual components to the lexical unit's overall meaning. Special attention was also paid to the process through which meaning is interpreted and understood by speakers (Nikitin, 1996; Rakhilina, 2008).

The third stage involves linguocultural interpretation. At this stage, the analysis aimed to identify the cultural information encoded within lexical units, including cultural values, traditions, social experience, and culturally shaped models of thinking reflected in language (Maslova, 2001; Slyshkin, 2000; Karasik, 2002).

3.4. Rationale for the Method

This methodological approach was selected because the research topic is directly connected to meaning construction, cultural interpretation, and cognitive processes. Therefore, such phenomena cannot be fully investigated only through numerical or statistical methods.

Qualitative analysis enables the examination of language within real communicative and cultural contexts. It helps reveal how meaning emerges through the interaction of language, cognition, and culture rather than existing merely as a dictionary definition.

In addition, the combination of structural, semantic, and cultural analyses provides a more comprehensive understanding of how lexical units function. The comparative aspect of the method is also significant because it allows the researcher not only to observe the internal mechanisms of each language separately, but also to identify the similarities and differences existing between them.

3.5. Reliability and Validity

To ensure the study's reliability, widely recognized, academically trusted linguistic sources were used throughout the research process.

To enhance the validity of the research results, three theoretical approaches were integrated into a unified analytical framework: cognitive linguistics, lexical semantics, and linguoculturology.

The integration of these approaches helps avoid one-sided interpretation and contributes to a more balanced, objective, and theoretically grounded analysis of lexical units.

4. Results and Discussion

The comparative analysis of complex lexical units in Azerbaijani and English reveals clear, systematic differences in how these two languages organize, encode, and interpret meaning. These differences are not limited only to the surface level of linguistic structure; rather, they are also connected with deeper cognitive models and culturally shaped ways of conceptualizing reality (Kubryakova, 1988; Karasik, 2002).

In other words, the way in which words are formed and combined in each language is closely related to how speakers of that language perceive, categorize, and structure the surrounding world.

Recent cognitive-linguistic research also supports this interpretation. It is generally argued that variation between languages in word-formation processes should not be considered solely as a grammatical difference, but rather as the result of habitual usage patterns, cultural experience, and repeated communicative practices that gradually shape and reorganize lexical structures (Croft, 2020; Booij, 2019).

4.1. Structural Differentiation of Lexical Units

One of the most noticeable differences between the Azerbaijani and English languages appears at the structural level of lexical formation.

In English, compound formation is highly productive and functionally efficient. Especially frequent are noun + noun type compounds, such as *Christmas-tree*, *church-warden*, and *Easter-egg*. These lexical units are generally compact in structure, relatively stable, and cognitively easy to decode. In most cases, the meaning of such units can be derived directly from the combination of their components, without the need for additional syntactic explanation (Bauer, 1983; Marchand, 1969). This structural compactness provides English speakers with relatively fast access to meaning in a simplified cognitive form.

In contrast, the Azerbaijani language demonstrates a different structural pattern. Lexical meaning is often expressed through agglutinative formation and syntactic expansion, where semantic information is distributed across several morphological or syntactic elements instead of being condensed into a single lexical compound (Həsənov, 1988; Quliyev, 2011).

As a result, Azerbaijani lexical expressions tend to be more explicit in form and more dependent on contextual interpretation within a broader linguistic environment.

4.2. Semantic and Cognitive Interpretation

From a cognitive perspective, English compound words often function as a mechanism of conceptual compression. This means that complex cultural and conceptual information is “packed” into a single lexical unit.

For instance, *a Christmas tree* is not only a physical object but also a culturally loaded symbol associated with religious traditions, family interactions, and seasonal rituals. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), such expressions can be interpreted as conceptual metaphors that reflect underlying cultural schemas of human experience. Similarly, *church-warden* encodes institutional roles and social hierarchy, while *Easter-egg* reflects symbolic and ritual meanings related to religious celebration. In all these examples, a single lexical unit carries a relatively complex network of cultural knowledge.

In Azerbaijani, however, similar meanings are usually expressed more descriptively and analytically. Instead of compressing meaning into a single lexical item, the language tends to distribute semantic content across multiple linguistic elements,

thereby making cultural meaning more explicit and context-sensitive (Bünyatova, 2018; İsmayilova, 2022).

This situation indicates that English generally prioritizes lexical condensation, whereas Azerbaijani prefers more relational and explanatory forms of expression.

4.3. Linguocultural Encoding of Meaning

The linguocultural analysis shows that lexical units in both languages cannot be treated as neutral linguistic forms; rather, they function as carriers of culturally specific knowledge and experience.

In English, compound lexical units frequently reflect institutionalized cultural practices such as religious celebrations, social organization, and material culture. Over time, these meanings become conventionalized and are stored in relatively fixed lexical structures.

In Azerbaijani, lexical expressions more strongly reflect ethnocultural values such as kinship relations, hospitality traditions, and food culture. In this case, lexical meaning is more closely connected with everyday communication and situational context (Həsənov, 1988; Göyalp, 1991).

Recent linguocultural studies also emphasize that lexical units should be understood as cognitive-cultural signs, in which meaning emerges through the interaction between linguistic structure and cultural cognition (Evans & Green, 2018). In this sense, words do not simply contain meaning but rather reflect how a given culture organizes knowledge.

4.4. Cognitive Mechanisms: Metaphor and Conceptual Blending

Another important result of the analysis concerns cognitive mechanisms such as metaphorization and conceptual blending in lexical formation.

As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) state, metaphor is not only a stylistic device but also a fundamental cognitive mechanism of human thought. This feature is clearly observable in both English and Azerbaijani lexical systems.

In English, compound formations often exhibit a strong tendency toward metaphorical condensation, in which symbolic meaning is embedded within a relatively compact lexical structure. In Azerbaijani, however, metaphorical and conceptual relations are more often expressed explicitly, with clearer semantic connections between linguistic elements.

Conceptual blending theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002) further explains how different conceptual domains interact and merge in order to generate new meanings. This process is especially visible in culturally marked lexical units, where language combines multiple layers of human experience within a single expression.

Recent research also suggests that the degree and form of metaphorical and blending processes vary across languages depending on cultural relevance and lexical productivity patterns (Croft, 2020).

4.5. Summary of Findings

In general, the comparative analysis leads to several main conclusions. English lexical units are usually more compact and demonstrate a higher degree of conceptual condensation.

Azerbaijani lexical units are generally more descriptive and rely more on relational and context-based meaning construction. Both languages encode culturally specific

knowledge, but they do so through different cognitive and structural strategies. Lexical structure and cultural worldview are deeply interconnected and inseparable.

These findings support the study's main hypothesis, namely that lexical differentiation between typologically distinct languages is not only a structural issue but also a reflection of deeper cognitive and cultural models of worldview representation (Maslova, 2001; Kubryakova, 1996).

5. Conclusion

This study was designed to examine how complex lexical units are differentiated in Azerbaijani and English from both linguocultural and cognitive perspectives. In other words, the research is not limited to the structural formation of words but also examines why such differences exist between the two languages and what these differences can reveal about cultural thinking patterns and conceptual organization.

The results of the comparative analysis clearly indicate that the Azerbaijani and English languages differ not only in lexical structure but also in the conceptual and cognitive representation of experience through language.

In English, complex lexical units are generally characterized by greater compactness and information density. A significant amount of meaning is often compressed into single compound structures such as *Christmas tree*, *church warden*, and *Easter egg*. These lexical units are not simply combinations of individual words, but function as integrated cognitive units that carry cultural, religious, and social meanings in a condensed form. In this sense, English compound words can be considered a type of "mental shortcut" that allows speakers to access culturally rich information relatively quickly and efficiently.

In Azerbaijani, however, a different structural and semantic pattern is observed. Meaning is more often distributed across several linguistic elements, and the interpretation of lexical units is more dependent on context. Instead of compressing cultural and conceptual information into a single lexical unit, Azerbaijani tends to express meaning in a more explicit, analytical, and relational manner. As a result, meaning construction becomes more descriptive and situational, with a stronger emphasis on contextual interpretation and clarity.

Taken together, these findings support the general idea that lexical structure is closely related to broader cultural models of thinking. In other words, the way languages form and structure words is not random or purely grammatical in nature; rather, it is deeply influenced by the way speakers of that language conceptualize and interpret reality.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to both linguoculturology and cognitive linguistics by demonstrating that word formation should be understood not only as a linguistic mechanism, but also as a culturally and cognitively motivated process. It emphasizes that lexical systems are shaped through the interaction of shared cultural experience, cognitive structures, and communicative needs.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study are also relevant for fields such as translation studies, intercultural communication, and foreign language teaching. A better understanding of how different languages encode cultural meaning can help reduce misinterpretation and improve cross-cultural communication, especially in cases involving culturally specific lexical expressions.

Finally, future research may further develop this topic by using larger linguistic corpora and applying quantitative research methods. In addition, expanding the analysis

to other semantic domains would allow for a more comprehensive and empirically stronger comparison of lexical systems across languages.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The founding sponsors had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

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