



## **A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPTS OF ‘MAN’ AND ‘WOMAN’ IN SPANISH PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present study examines the linguistic conceptualization of the notions “man” and “woman” in Spanish phraseological units. Phraseology is approached as a culturally saturated domain of language that reflects collective representations, social values, and evaluative stereotypes (Corpas Pastor, 1996; Sabban, 2008). The material comprises gender-marked idioms and fixed expressions drawn from authoritative phraseological dictionaries and corpus data. Using a combination of semantic, conceptual, and comparative methods, the analysis identifies the dominant semantic fields and axiological components associated with masculinity and femininity. The results reveal a systematic asymmetry: phraseological units referring to men predominantly encode attributes of strength, agency, rationality, and social authority, whereas those associated with women tend to emphasize appearance, emotionality, morality, and socially regulated behavior (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001–2003; Talbot, 2010). The study demonstrates that Spanish phraseology contributes to the preservation and transmission of traditional gender models within the linguistic worldview.

### **KEYWORDS**

Spanish phraseology, gender concepts, linguistic worldview, masculinity, femininity, cultural linguistics, conceptual analysis.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Contemporary linguistic research increasingly focuses on the interaction between language, cognition, and culture. Within this paradigm, phraseological units are regarded as a particularly informative object of study, as they accumulate historically formed cultural meanings and evaluative attitudes (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2005; Sabban, 2008). Fixed expressions not only name phenomena but also interpret them, embedding social experience into stable linguistic forms (Wierzbicka, 1997).

The analysis of gender concepts in phraseology is of particular relevance, since the categories “man” and “woman” function as key elements of the linguistic worldview. They reflect not only biological distinctions but also culturally mediated models of behavior, social roles, and value orientations (Bem, 1993; Butler, 1990). The present article aims to conduct a comparative investigation of how these

concepts are represented in Spanish phraseological units and to identify the dominant conceptual features associated with masculinity and femininity.

The research objectives are:

- 1) to systematize Spanish phraseological units containing gender markers;
- 2) to determine the principal semantic domains involved in the construction of male and female images;
- 3) to reveal their axiological and cultural specificity.

## Theoretical Framework

The study is situated within the interdisciplinary field combining cognitive linguistics, linguoculturology, and gender linguistics. From this perspective, phraseological units are viewed as verbalized conceptual structures that integrate notional, figurative, and axiological components (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010). The concept is understood as a mental formation encoding culturally significant knowledge and evaluation (Wierzbicka, 1997).

Previous research has demonstrated that gender-marked phraseology frequently exhibits semantic asymmetry, reflecting historically dominant social hierarchies (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001–2003). Masculinity is often conceptualized through agency, power, and rationality, whereas femininity is commonly associated with emotionality, corporeality, and moral regulation (Talbot, 2010; Pavlenko, 2008). Spanish phraseology, shaped by Roman, Christian, and Mediterranean traditions, offers particularly rich material for examining these patterns (Corpas Pastor, 1996).

## Material and methods

The empirical material consists of Spanish phraseological units selected from academic phraseological dictionaries and verified by corpus examples (Corpas Pastor, 1996; Zuluaga, 1980). The corpus includes expressions containing explicit lexical indicators (*hombre*, *mujer*, *macho*, *hembra*, *madre*, *padre*) as well as units in which gender is implied through stable metaphorical or cultural associations (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2005).

The methodology integrates semantic analysis, conceptual modeling, and comparative analysis (Kövecses, 2010; Sabban, 2008). Phraseological units were categorized according to dominant traits: physical qualities, character and intellect, emotionality, morality, appearance, social roles, and power relations.

## Results:

### 1. Conceptual Representation of “Man”

The phraseological material demonstrates that the concept “man” is predominantly associated with social activity, authority, and internal strength. The most frequent semantic domains include **strength and endurance**, reflecting physical and moral resilience; **agency and independence**, portraying the man as an autonomous subject of action; **authority and leadership**, emphasizing dominance and social control; and **honor and rationality**, foregrounding responsibility, reliability, and self-restraint (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001–2003; Talbot, 2010). The axiological orientation of these units is largely positive, constructing masculinity as a normative and socially valued model characterized by decisiveness and responsibility (Bem, 1993).

## 2. Conceptual Representation of “Woman”

The concept “woman” is verbalized through a broader and more evaluatively heterogeneous set of phraseological units. Dominant semantic domains include **appearance and corporeality**, where external features and attractiveness are foregrounded; **emotionality and communicative behavior**, emphasizing sensitivity, expressiveness, or loquacity; **morality and reputation**, reflecting social expectations and normative control; and **relational and domestic roles**, highlighting dependence and interpersonal orientation (Pavlenko, 2008; Talbot, 2010). Compared to masculine phraseology, feminine units are more frequently metaphorical and evaluative, often encoding implicit judgments concerning social conformity (Butler, 1990; Wierzbicka, 1997).

## Discussion

The comparative analysis reveals a stable conceptual asymmetry in Spanish phraseology. Masculinity is primarily constructed through categories of action, power, and rational agency, while femininity is conceptualized through appearance, emotionality, and moral assessment (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001-2003; Talbot, 2010). This opposition reflects an androcentric linguistic model in which male experience is associated with public and authoritative domains, whereas female experience is framed through socially regulated and evaluative perspectives (Bem, 1993; Butler, 1990).

Such asymmetry indicates that phraseological units function not only as linguistic artifacts but also as mechanisms of cultural transmission, reproducing traditional gender stereotypes and social hierarchies (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2005; Sabban, 2008).

## Conclusion

The study confirms that Spanish phraseological units constitute an important repository of culturally encoded gender concepts. The concept of “man” is linguistically represented as a carrier of strength, authority, and rational control, while the concept of “woman” is predominantly associated with emotional, aesthetic, and moral characteristics (Corpas Pastor, 1996; Wierzbicka, 1997). These representations reveal persistent cultural models embedded in the phraseological system of Spanish. Future research may expand the corpus, incorporate quantitative methods, or pursue cross-Romance comparisons to further elucidate the dynamics of gender conceptualization in phraseology (Kövecses, 2010; Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2005).

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