The General Scope of the Book

The Learner’s Dictionary of Kazakh Idioms contains more than 2,000 idioms and is intended for upper intermediate and advanced language learners of Kazakh and other Turkic languages who are familiar with the Kazakh Cyrillic alphabet. The dictionary is aimed at making Kazakh idioms accessible to English speakers and useful for their learning while exposing them to some aspects of Kazakh culture. The collection may also be used by native Kazakh speakers who wish to improve their proficiency in English and heritage learners who are proficient in English and wish to enhance their Kazakh language skills.

The idioms are organized into semantic categories — such as the human body, food, clothing, color, number, animals, and nature — that best represent the topics on which language learners focus at the beginning and intermediate levels of language study. As students progress to the upper intermediate and advanced levels, they expand their vocabulary pertaining to these everyday objects and concepts into idiomatic expressions. At this stage language learners come into contact with cultural concepts embedded in simple words that they have learned as part of everyday vocabulary, and at this point this dictionary will further enrich their knowledge while expanding their vocabularies. The dictionary also contains idioms that are based on core concepts central to the Kazakh culture, such as life and death, the verbal arts, soul and spirit, and the human mind.

The dictionary is organized with two main purposes in mind: to enable the user to quickly find the meanings of idioms, and to learn more about the grammar and usage of these idioms. Each entry is presented with its literal translation and English definition, which allows users to look for quick references to English definitions of Kazakh idioms. Users looking for more detailed information about the idiom will find grammatical and cultural explanations and illustrative sentences within the entry. The dictionary also includes five types of indexes to enable the user to more easily find idioms in either Kazakh or English.

The dictionary includes idioms that are either opaque or semantically semitransparent. These two types are most challenging to learners of the Kazakh language.

Opaque idioms are pure idioms whose meanings are difficult or impossible to gather from the literal meanings of their constituents. For instance,

алаяқ [literally, “a multicolored leg”]: crook, swindler
маңдайға сыймау [literally, “not to fit the forehead”]: to lose someone to death

Semitransparent idioms are phrases and expressions whose one or more components are used in a metaphoric sense, whereas the others are used in a literal sense. For instance,

көк жасау [literally, “blue lazy”]: extremely lazy person
домалық арыз [literally, “a round complaint letter”]: an anonymous letter written to untruthfully accuse or denounce someone

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These types of idioms are also useful for upper intermediate and advanced learners of the Kazakh language to become familiar with so they can understand humorous, sarcastic, and other emotive undertones of the conversations and texts that they encounter. The dictionary also contains truncated (i.e., shortened) sayings and proverbs that are used idiomatically, such as сипағанды білмеу [literally, "not to appreciate the patting"], which originates from the saying “сыыр сипағанды білмейді” [literally, "the cow does not appreciate the patting"], and is used in reference to people who are not appreciative of others’ kindness. These types of idioms are important because they introduce learners to Kazakh proverbs and sayings that are also used frequently in a variety of linguistic settings, from daily conversations to newspaper articles to literary books.

Methodology

The Collection and Selection of Idioms

I began my collection of Kazakh idioms in 2003 as a small sample that would be included in one of my projects, Advanced Kazakh DVD-ROM courseware. This collection was then supplemented with idiomatic expressions culled from the July 2003 issues of the Kazakh newspapers Egemen Kazakhstan, Zhas Alash, Kazakh Adebieti, and Turkistan. I explored the cultural and linguistic implications of these and other idioms in my graduate presentations and papers: “Kazakh Food as a Sign”; “Speech Acts: Expressing Condolence in Kazakh”; “Metaphors in Kazakh Political Rhetoric”; and “Livestock Metaphors Kazakhs Live By.” The collection further grew with idioms from the August 2007 issues of the newspapers Aikyn, Egemen Kazakhstan, and Zhas Alash. At this time I began to group them under various semantic categories. After including idioms in my teaching practice and seeing their usefulness, in 2007 I decided to focus on those selected idioms that are extensions of the vocabulary learned at the beginning and intermediate levels of language study.

To meet the needs of an upper intermediate and advanced learner, I reviewed topics in beginning and intermediate language learning materials and identified those that offer insights into cultural concepts discussed in books on Kazakh culture and teaching materials by the scholars Seit Kenzheakhmetuly and Auybai Kuraluly. Once I determined these semantic categories and the idioms that belong to them, I expanded the list of categories by identifying other core semantic categories from a wide range of values and beliefs — such as the power of the word, human mind and intellect, and soul and spirit — that have been discussed in books by Kenzheakhmetuly and Kuraluly. I then identified key words and consulted the dictionary of phraseological units by Kozhakmetova, Zhaisakova, and Kozhakmetova for possible additional idioms. To present the culturally rich expressions with careful definitions and explanations of meaning, use, and structure, I tried not to resort to the Russian language as an intermediary between Kazakh and English because it would have meant explaining the idioms through the lens of a different culture and potentially causing gaps in translation. The Russian-language dictionaries noted in the references were used in my careful research on how best to translate individual words.

Also in 2007, even more articles and materials in Kazakh became accessible on the Internet, which I then integrated into my work. By doing a key phrase search online, I was able to locate more contemporary idioms in Kazakh-language blogs, forums, and national and local newspapers that suited my project’s goal. English-language newspapers, television, and the Internet were equally important for gaining a full understanding of the semantic, stylistic, and structural meanings of the English idioms and in pairing them with their Kazakh equivalents.

The Linguistic and Cultural Context of Kazakh: Challenges and Choices

The linguistic and cultural context of the Kazakh language is very important for understanding some of the methodological choices I made in creating this dictionary. It was difficult, if not impossible, to consider frequency in selecting
which idioms to include because there are no contemporary corpuses and very little linguistic research on the Kazakh language. The only Kazakh-language corpus has been started by the government of Kazakhstan and is still in its very early stage of development. Therefore I relied on my sense, as a native speaker, of the relative frequency and use of the various idioms, as well as the relative frequency demonstrated by a key word search on the Internet.

Although using the Latin alphabet to transliterate the entries would have made the dictionary accessible to a wider readership, it, too, has not been finalized by Kazakh scholars and approved in Kazakhstan for accurate use. In fact, the Kazakh government has yet to decide on the adoption of the Latin alphabet.

_A Learner’s Dictionary of Kazakh Idioms_ was compiled during a period when the Kazakh language has been seeking to claim a leading role and place in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, which is still dominated by the Russian language. The language is still growing and changing, as all are languages, and the linguistics field is still catching up. Because of this, I made the choices mentioned above as I created the dictionary.

For anyone who is interested in learning more about the Kazakh language itself, I recommend consulting William Fierman’s works listed in the references, which provide valuable background information about the past, present, and future of the Kazakh language in Kazakhstan.

### Illustrative Sentences

I created example sentences for each entry to demonstrate how an idiom might be used by a native speaker. I chose not to use examples from authentic sources — such as classic literary works, formal speeches, articles, and so on — because I would have had to provide many more additional sentences for context, given that single sentences containing the idiom often do not provide an appropriate context. The sentences that I have written for the purpose of exemplification make more sense for a learner’s dictionary. The examples are grammatically complex, exposing learners to the nuances of how the idioms are used, and clearly indicate the meaning of the idiom in its context. I also tried to capture some regional variations by including words and expressions that occur in the western variety of Kazakh that I grew up speaking.

During the process of writing illustrative sentences and translating them, semantic and stylistic nuances became apparent more than ever, and I was able to provide accurate definitions and equivalents. I constantly consulted family, friends, and colleagues who are native speakers of different varieties of Kazakh on the selection and definition, as well as cultural and grammatical features, of the idioms.

### How the Entries Are Presented

This dictionary has fourteen cultural categories, each of which is listed in the table of contents. Some categories — such as “Body,” “Color,” and “Livestock with Beasts and Birds” — are complex and include subcategories. The sections “Body,” “Livestock with Beasts and Birds,” and “Nature” start with general idioms that are not directly related to the subcategories. Each idiom is located in the category to which it is most suited.

Within each section or subsection the entries are listed alphabetically by the first word of the idiom according to the Kazakh alphabet. In places where a word appears in multiple idioms, I have included it as a headword.
Those idioms that contain that headword fall beneath it.

At the end of the book there are five indexes to help you locate a Kazakh idiom or look up an English idiom’s Kazakh equivalent:

- index of Kazakh idioms
- index of English idioms
- index of Kazakh key words
- index of English key words
- index of Kazakh expressions.

**Organization and Guide to Each Part of an Entry**

Each entry of the dictionary includes:

- a literal translation;
- an English definition and/or English equivalent idiom;
- notes, if needed, containing grammatical and/or cultural information ( (){ );
- illustrative sentences ( ()).

Depending on the complexity of the phrase, the notes may be extensive, and there may be multiple illustrative sentences.

The entries are listed alphabetically according to the first word of the idiom within each section and subsection. For idioms that include verbs, the verbs are presented in their infinitive form. All synonyms and variants are listed as separate entries, except rarely used variants and those showing variation by compounding words or by spelling. Some idioms are amplifications or extensions of other idioms. These amplified idioms may not be listed with the idioms that you would expect because they belong to different cultural categories. For example, қозбен ату (literally, “to shoot with the eye” or, idiomatically, “to give someone the evil eye”) is included in the “Body” section; but its variant, ала қозбен ату (literally, “to shoot with the multicolored eye” or, idiomatically, “to give someone the evil eye”) is in the “Color” section because the color ала intensifies the feeling of anger providing focus and intensity. It is for this reason that the indexes are helpful.

Some idioms are listed under a headphrase. For example, the following idioms are found under the headphrase ішіңұқ (the top part of the yurt): ішіңұқ көтеру, ішіңұқ күру (to marry and form a family; to be established); ішіңұқтың өрттісін тұсу (to collapse or break up as a family, establishment, or country); ішіңұқтың шайқалу (to be falling apart, as a family, establishment, or country); ішіңұқтың бір уығы (a pillar of family, community, or country).

**Literal Translation**

The literal translation immediately follows the entry and is presented in square brackets. The literal translations are intended to preserve the idioms’ lexical and grammatical features, some of which reveal Kazakhs’ cultural imagination. This literal translation is often amusing, and it can also offer insights into the origin of the idiom and help further learning and enhance retention (Boers, Eyckmans, and Stengers 2007, 43–62).

**English Definitions and Idioms**

Unlike the literal translations, the English definitions and idioms try to convey the most likely linguistic and cultural translation of the idioms. The English definitions may contain information about the use of an idiom, such as whether it should refer to animate or inanimate objects, whether it should refer to abstract concepts only, or whether it may be used in relation to a specific gender or age group. Sometimes the closest English idiom is preceded by a more general English definition. This means that the Kazakh idiom is either broader or narrower in meaning than its English idiomatic counterpart.

I have used the following specific formatting throughout:

- An italicized definition indicates that the entry is an expression of encouragement, hope, curse, or condolence. In other words, the entry is in an imperative, optative, or imprecativ mood.
- An italicized and boldfaced definition indicates an equivalent English idiom.
“See” directs you to another entry for additional information or to a related idiom. If the entry is in a different category than its variant or synonym, a note directs you to the appropriate section.

Notes (★)

Notes may include the following information about the meaning and use of the idiom:
- Grammatical features, such as required case-marked complements.
- Emotive undertones, such as sarcasm, disparaging attitude, or a mocking view.
- Cultural and historical content.
- Style and register of the idiom. Those used in formal and literary Kazakh are so noted. If no such information is provided, it should be assumed that the idiom is used in informal Kazakh. Consult the Style and Register section of this Introduction for more information.
- Other relevant aspects of use.

Information about the lexical variations and grammatical structures is presented in the following manner:
- If appropriate, I indicate that one or more cases should be used with this idiom. The terms “genitive,” “dative,” “accusative,” “locative,” “ablative,” and “instrumental” signal that the idiom requires a complement in one or more of these cases. If the idiom has two or more meanings and it requires a complement in only one sense (or two senses), then that is noted. Refer to the Grammatical Features section of this Introduction to see the examples.
- If appropriate, the idiom is described as “formal,” “informal,” “literary,” and so on. See the Description section for more on these labels.
- Variants may be included as the idiom’s varying lexical forms. The variations are also listed as entries. If they are arranged in a different section than that of the entry, the title of the section follows the variation in parentheses. See the types and examples of variations in the Grammatical Features section of this Introduction.
- “Also” indicates the idiom’s syntactic transformations. It may display voice (active, passive, causative, reflexive, and reciprocal, or noncausative, nonreciprocal, and nonreflexive), transitivity (transitive structures requiring a direct object, i.e., an accusative complement), aspect, and other relevant structures. These syntactic transformations are followed by different abbreviations that signal other words or structures that are needed. See the abbreviations for syntactic variations in the Abbreviations section. Learn about the types of syntactic constructions in the Grammatical Features section of this Introduction.
- “Syn”: Any idioms that are synonymous with the entry are listed. If relevant, a note about semantic and/or structural differences between the synonyms follows.
- “Ant”: Indicates a list of any idioms that are antonyms of the entry.
- “Hom”: Any homonyms are listed.
- “Collocations”: Common collocating structures in which the idiom occurs are noted here. See the examples in the Grammatical Features section of this Introduction.
- “Note”: Includes phrases that are relevant and useful.
- “See also” refers you to other, related idioms that readers may find relevant, useful, or interesting.

Terms Used in the Notes

Several terms may be included within an entry to indicate specific usage situations, nuances, or the special grammatical treatment they require:
- Ablative: Idiom requires a preceding word (complement) in the ablative case.
- Accusative: Idiom requires a preceding word (complement) in the accusative case.
- Dative: Idiom requires a preceding word (complement) in the dative case.
- Disapproving: Idiom shows feeling of disapproval or contempt.
• Disparaging: Idiom is used to insult or offend people.
• Euphemistic: Idiom is used to substitute for offensive or unpleasant terms.
• Formal: Idiom usually occurs in serious or official language only.
• Genitive: Idiom requires a preceding word (complement) in the genitive case.
• Informal: Idiom is used in a casual or unofficial situation.
• Instrumental: Idiom requires a preceding word (complement) in the instrumental case.
• Literary: Idiom occurs in literature and imaginative writing.
• Locative: Idiom requires a preceding word (complement) in the locative case.

Example Sentences
As discussed above, each example sentence illustrates its use in a context and provides greater context for the definition. All Kazakh example sentences are followed by an English translation. The Kazakh idioms are italicized within the example sentence, as are elements having a grammatical and semantic relationship with the idiom, so that learners can see how they fit within a sentence’s structure. One illustration may consist of two or more sentences to provide a concrete context. Sometimes you will see the examples as two sentences, each in quotes. These represent dialogue exchanges between two people, some of which are in question-and-answer form.

If the idiom has more than one meaning, one sentence is given for each meaning. Though synonyms and variants are not followed by example sentences, I have provided some examples for the structurally different ones. In this case, you will see one illustrative sentence. There might be additional sentences for common collocations.

How to Use the Dictionary
You can use the dictionary as follows:
• To find a Kazakh idiom, go to the Index of Kazakh Idioms and locate it alphabetically. The Index of Kazakh Idioms lists all entries and subentries in the dictionary. Because idioms are arranged in sections throughout the book, this index is most useful for locating a particular Kazakh idiom.
• If you know one or two words in an idiom but not the whole idiom, use the Index of Kazakh Key Words to find the idiom. The Index of Kazakh Key Words contains words or phrases that are central to the meaning of different idioms. By glancing at the cultural categories, which are also used as the section titles, you might also think of a word that could be the basis for an idiom and look it up this way in the alphabetical listing.
• To find the Kazakh equivalent of an English idiom, use the Index of English Idioms. In this dictionary all the English idioms that are used as equivalents are included in this index. Note that English verbs are listed without the particle “to.”
• For more advanced learners, some Kazakh idioms can also be located through their English counterparts in the Index of English Idioms. Some English idioms might be equivalents of extended structures in Kazakh and are mentioned in the Notes.
• To explore Kazakh idioms by English key word, use the Index of English Key Words. This index lists words and phrases that are central to the meanings of various English idioms in the book and are useful in searching for Kazakh idioms or exploring Kazakh idioms.
• To find a Kazakh expression of appreciation, hope, encouragement, condolence, invective, or a wedding wish, use the Index of Kazakh Expressions. This index provides a usage index, allowing you to learn new expressions for different settings.
• To aid memorization and learning, read the literal translation. The cultural dimensions presented in the literal translation may provide an interesting detail or memory cue as you enhance your vocabulary.
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• For explanations on the grammatical notes, consult the Grammatical Features section of this Introduction.

A Brief Introduction to the Kazakh Language

Kazakh is spoken in the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan and by Kazakh diasporas in other countries such as Mongolia, China, and the former Soviet republics. Kazakh belongs to the Kypchak group of the Turkic languages family and is related to Nogai and Karakalpak. Modern Kazakh exhibits a lexical influence from Arabic, Persian, and Russian. Kazakh does not have distinctive dialects but has the following varieties: northeastern, southern, and western. Arabic and Latin alphabets had been used before the introduction of the Russian Cyrillic, which is still in use today. Like other Turkic languages, Kazakh is a head-final language, meaning that modifiers, including relative structures, precede the head nouns and that postpositions are used. With a subject–object–verb word order, Kazakh is an agglutinative language involving an exclusive suffixation. The Kazakh language reflects traces of the ancient Turkic language and culture, as can be seen in many of the idioms that this book presents.

Cultural Emphasis

As noted above, the idioms in this book have been organized by cultural categories. Each category was chosen for its cultural relevance to Kazakh life. This is a brief introduction to the different subject categories into which the Kazakh idioms have been placed.

In Kazakh culture, certain body parts can have significance beyond their physical nature. The liver, for example, is considered a center of familial relation and compassion and is often found in idioms that refer to family bonds, such as бауыр басу (literally, “to press with liver”), which means to become like a family. Therefore the “Body” section contains idioms that call out a particular body part or reference the physical body in a significant way. Although it is impossible to list all the different relationships here, it is culturally enriching to explore this section with this in mind.

The “Color” section includes idioms for which color is the main focus. The color idioms are based on the extended meanings of the color terms. Color offers a fascinating insight into how Kazakh culture maps the world. As Bennett (1988, 22) claims, color adds vigor to an idiom, and this is true of many Kazakh color idioms. Explore this section to learn new ways to “color” your vocabulary.

With a desire to better communicate their experiences, humans compare their world and observations with natural objects, features, and phenomena. The “Nature” section exhibits idioms that engage in this practice. For instance жеңөкпе (wind lung) and also a lack of substance in rumors being described as жеңө сөз (wind word). Because a culture’s relationship to its land and nature is so entwined, the idioms in this section may be especially interesting.

Some numbers have additional meaning and represent Kazakh values and beliefs, which is evident in the “Numbers” section. The number seven in жеңө ата (literally, “seven clans”) is at the core of the tradition that governs the genealogical history and social relationship. Additionally, numbers add vigor and focus to statements. “Blowing hot and cold” in English is қырық құбылу (literally, “to change forty times”) in Kazakh. The number forty reinforces the sense of multiplicity. Note that the number eleven is not included here because there are no idioms that contain this number.

The “Clothing” section is distinguished from the “Body” section in that in addition to other associations, clothing is used as a metaphorical shield to mask the truth, as in тонын жамылу (literally, “to cover oneself with someone’s fur coat” or, idiomatically, “to pretend to be someone or something else”); or to hide an unethical action, as in жеңө ұшынан жалғас у (literally, “to be connected through the end of a sleeve” or, idiomatically, “to be engaged in bribery”). Idioms in this section also highlight traditional
Kazakh clothing. As part of the process to revive native vocabulary, the native Kazakh terms for clothing are currently replacing the Russian terms that have been used for a long time.

As is true in all cultures, food is an important part of daily life and can show key parts of its culture. Many Kazakh idioms are drawn from the process of making dairy products, an important part of Kazakh diet and cuisine. “Living in peace and harmony” is literally “clabbering like milk” (сүттей ұя), and “fomenting discord among others” is “putting a rennet to curdle” (ірінкі салу).

The idioms that demonstrate relationships between people are gathered in the “Humans and Their Kin” section. One can find Kazakh idioms that reveal the attitudes associated with people of different ages and genetic ties. If the youngest child in a family (кенже) is spoiled, he or she is allowed and expected to have shortcomings. This idea is evident in кенже қалу (literally, “to remain the youngest child”), which means “to fall behind in technology, economy, or politics” and “to fall short.”

Livestock are at the heart of Kazakh culture, which is why there is a complete section of idioms devoted to them. Although the modern Kazakh experience is very heterogeneous, the livestock idioms reflect an earlier pastoral period. The lexicon pertaining to livestock includes elaborate terms for the identification and description of different breeds and half-breeds of animals; animals’ movements, behavior, sound, fur, age, color, diseases, pet names, the ways they are milked, and communication; types of pastures; and curse words. Because of Kazakhs’ close relationship with animals, their observations are acute and have been incorporated into idioms that describe human personality, appearance, behavior, beauty, and experience, as well as to express endearment.

For centuries before Kazakhstan joined the Soviet Union, the yurt had been a house for nomadic Kazakhs. Readily assembled and disassembled, the yurt was perfect for a nomadic culture. It continues to play a large role in coining new idioms full of the cultural life of Kazakhstan, as you will discover in the “Yurt” section. The top of the yurt, шаңырақ, is often used as a metaphor for home and family, and is extended to an institution or an entity. The idea of removing the top cover of the yurt to let the light in is transformed into “having an opening or commencement ceremony” (туындоіім тұру). Installing the pole that connects to the top part of the yurt with its walls (ұзынды кадай) signifies laying a foundation, in an idiomatic sense.

Death is personified in the Kazakh culture. In this personification there is an undeniable similarity between Kazakh and English idioms. In English, death not only has a jaw (to snatch someone out of the jaws of death) but also a door (to lie at death’s door), whereas in Kazakh it has a mouth (ажай аузы) that is ready to swallow (өлім аузында жату). Conversely, life occurs in a concrete physical environment that one can step on, as in жалғанды жасалғаның басу (literally, “to step on this world in its wideness” or, idiomatically, “to live carefree, without any concerns”) and this presents difficulties — as in тар жерл, таілақ кешу (idiomatically, “to go through a narrow and slippery road” or, idiomatically, “to go down a rocky road”). These cross-cultural features make the idioms related to death interesting and important for the learner, who may find commonalities between Kazakh and English in the section “Life and Death.”

The Kazakh culture has a long history of oral arts and literature. There is a strong belief in the power of the word, and eloquence and oratory skills are highly praised. I have collected idioms that relate to this category in the “Power of the Word” section. The meaning of “word” (сөз) incorporates word, speech, and speaking. This word is at the core of many widely used phrases and expressions involving oral expression, including debate, dispute, promise, and conversation.

Idioms based on the mind and intellect are employed to convey ideas and experiences related to human memory, thought processes, reason, and mental condition. These idioms are collected in the section “Mind and the Intellect.” The mind is a place for burning ideas or thoughts, and cherished ideals “cut through” (кокеікесті) or are “cracked out” of the mind (кокеіден жарып шығқан). In Kazakh, in-
tellect is a sign of maturity of the mind and is gained with time or through experiences. Thus, once the intellect “comes in” (құлақ күй), it can stay (құлақ қаңғысы қылу) and can also expand one’s mind (құлақ-ойы толысу).

An emotional experience is embedded in Kazakh idioms inspired by the human soul and spirit. Emotions are a “system of the soul” (жәң жәңілесті), and mood is a “state of the soul” (қоңіл куй). A person is happy only if his or her soul, not heart, is happy, as in жәңіл жәңілдіретіп (to do someone’s heart good). You will find these idioms in the “Soul and Spirit” section.

During my search for idioms to fit within the above-mentioned categories, I could not ignore other idiomatic phrases and expressions that are linguistically and, in some cases, culturally important. I have arranged these into the category “Miscellaneous.” All these cultural idioms exhibit certain structures that make their use grammatically unique.

**Grammatical Features**

Often, language learners are cautioned about misusing idioms in various contexts and situations. But with a little practice and information, they should be able to incorporate idioms into their vocabularies. Another challenge to using idioms appropriately is knowing the grammatical and syntactic relationships of these units of meaning with other parts of a sentence. This overview is presented with the intention of helping learners identify what areas of grammar they should explore to ensure correct grammatical use of the idioms as they improve their overall proficiency in the Kazakh language.

**Subclasses of Idioms**

The grammatical features of Kazakh are clearly evident in the idioms presented in this dictionary. Many Kazakh idioms may require case-marked arguments or complements. Some idioms are transitive structures; that is, they require a direct object in the accusative case. And some are ditransitive; that is, they take an indirect object in the dative case and a direct object in the accusative case. Few idioms can be used in either an intransitive or transitive structure. There are also subclasses of idioms that require one of the genitive, dative, ablative, locative, or instrumental complements. Here is a list of examples of patterns that you will find in many of the Kazakh idioms in this book; these examples should help you determine how to use them correctly in a sentence:

- direct object (accusative) + idiom: қаңғыс басу  
  Жалғасты қаңғыс басты.

- indirect object + direct object + idiom: құлақ қаңғысы қылу  
  Маратқа жәңілдіретіп құлақ қаңғысы еттім.

- genitive complement + idiom: аты шығу  
  Сүретшінің атағы тез шықты.

- locative complement + idiom: коз алартуу  
  Ол Сүлөлге көзін алартты.

- ablative complement + idiom: ізін сүйтүү  
  Қылмыскер өкіңе өрніңіз ізін сүйтті.

- instrumental complement + idiom: қоңіл қосу  
  Ол қорайысімен қоңіл қосыт.

**Syntactic and Lexical Transformations**

Many Kazakh idioms display collocating, affirmative, and negative structures. Some occur in the passive, causative, reciprocal, or reflexive voice. Simile is also often employed in the idioms; grammatical mood and number are also highlighted in the idioms. These transformations are significant because they signal how and when the idioms are used for various purposes.

**Collocation**

Some idioms occur in combination with other words, and the selection is rather restrictive in grammatical or lexical terms. Changing the word the idiom occurs with or one of the words in the idiom significantly alters the idiom’s meaning. Learners should pay attention to collocations, because they help to expand their vocabulary. For example, қас-қабақтан (literally, “from the eyebrow and the eyelid”) collocates with different verbs of mental perception:
Affirmative and Negative Structures

Most idioms can transform from affirmative into negative structures. Some idioms, however, are used only in the negative form, and their affirmative pair appears only in rhetorical questions. For example, with the phrase әл бермеу (literally, “not to give strength”), its affirmative pair әл беру (to give strength) is used only in rhetorical questions.

Causative voice

If a causative verb is part of the internal pattern, the idiom can transform to a causative structure requiring the accusative case argument to become a definite object:

Noncausative: төң жібіу
Causative: төңды жібіту

Reciprocal voice

It is not always apparent which idiom can transform into a reciprocal structure. I have noted when this is the case for each idiom in the book.

Nonreciprocal: құдалар құйрық-бауыр жеді.
Reciprocal: құдалар құйрық-бауыр жесті.

Reflexive voice

The reflexive version of the idiom is marked by the absence of an object. As shown in the example below, the nonreflexive version is essentially a transitive structure.

Reflexive: Ол үлде мен бүлдеге оралды.
Nonreflexive: Ол қызын үлде мен бүлдеге оралды.

Simile

Simile is part of the internal pattern of the idiom, as in:

ботадай әлдай (to bleat like a baby camel)

Simile is significant because it demonstrates where the comparisons are drawn from, providing an insight into Kazakhs’ linguistic and cultural imagination.

Number

Grammatical number marked on the subject may require the idiom to be used with a complement and also may affect the case relationship between the idiom and its complement. Look for two patterns in particular throughout the dictionary, and be sure to use the idiom correctly:

plural subject + idiom: құдалар құйрық-бауыр жесті
singular subject + instrumental complement + idiom: өл құдасымен құйрық-бауыр жесті

Mood

Idioms can express different moods. Learners should memorize this along with the idiom; there are no rules that can guide you into determining it. I have included this information in the notes when it is useful.

Some idioms are used to express encouragement and hope. These idioms are called optative, as in:

байын ашылысын (may you be happy)
байын ашылысын (may he or she be happy)

Some idioms can be imprecative; that is, they are used to wish a curse, as in жер жастанғыр (may you pillow the earth), “may you die.”

Some idioms can also be used in the imperative mood to express a command in informal language:

табанды жалтырат у (to make the foot sparkle), “to go away”
табанды жалтырат (make your foot sparkle), “go away, get lost”

Lexical Variations

Idioms are often altered by native speakers to suit their needs and as creative flourishes in their speech. One of the most difficult things to learn in a new language is how to detect and understand these nuances. As described
in great detail by Moon (1998, 124–38), idioms with variations have no or some change in meaning. I have included this information in the Notes section, using the term “Variant” to indicate them. Details about some specific types of variations that you will see in the dictionary follow here.

**Noun Variation**
The varying nouns do not cause a change in the meaning, for example:

*бет* / *мойны беру*
to have the face / neck turn

Often, the varying nouns display meronymy:

*бас* / *ми қату*
to have the head / brain harden

Some noun phrases might appear alone or with synonymous phrases that are otherwise not frequently used. When used together, the two phrases create more emphasis than when used separately:

*түйені түгімен, биені жүгімен жұту* / *

tүйені түгімен жұту* to swallow the camel with its fur and the mare with its load / to swallow the camel with its fur

**Verb Variation**
The varying verbs are semantically related:

*үлде мен бүлдеге бөлеу* / *орау*
to swaddle / to wrap someone with luxurious things

Alternating verbs show different grammatical forms:

*ит біледі ме* / *ит білсін бе*
does / would the dog know

**Reversals**
Parts of an idiom are sometimes reversed within the idiom with no resulting meaning distinctions:

*шакшақай бас шарадай болу* / *шарадай бас шакшақай болу*
to have the head as small as a snuffbox become as big as a bowl / to have the head as big as a bowl become as small as a snuffbox

**Amplifications**
Often, adjectives or numerals are added for emphasis or intensity:

*қозғал аты / ала қозғал аты*  
to shoot with the eye / to shoot with the multicolored eye

**Spelling Variation**
Spelling variation is mostly seen in word-compounding or spelling:

*ала ауыз / алауыз*  
a multicolored mouth

*mici mici тымеу / mici-mici тымеу*  
one’s tooth does not touch another tooth

**Variety**
Some idioms show lexical variation in different varieties of Kazakh:

western and southern varieties / northeastern variety

*ит койлек / ит өжідә*  
dog shirt / dog shirt

**Style and Register**
This is a brief overview to demonstrate the importance of understanding the styles and registers in which an idiom can be used. Learning when and how to use idioms helps to increase learners’ proficiency in Kazakh and to improve their insight into the Kazakh culture.

Kazakh idioms are, in general, associated either with formal or informal contexts or as part of a literary style. A significant number of idioms carry emotive information and commonly occur in informal Kazakh. For example, *бирінің аузына бірі түкіріп қою* (literally, “to spit into each other’s mouth” or, idiomatically, “to say one and the same thing”) is marked by sarcasm and a negative view of people telling the same story. This and other types of idioms give emotional undertones to various texts, particularly newspaper editorials.

A small but important sample of idioms are used mainly in formal contexts to achieve a serious tone. For example, *жан аты* (literally, “to take the soul”): *to claim a life* is used only in
formal Kazakh. Some idioms are part of literary Kazakh and are often employed for poetic purposes only. For example, бақыт құсы қолға қоңу (literally, “to have one’s bird of happiness land on the hand”) refers to a man who is getting married.

Throughout the dictionary I have noted the style and register for different idioms to help you determine their best usage. It should be borne in mind that idioms in any language are creative pieces and can also be used outside their usual contexts for various stylistic emphases. Learning the register of each idiom as you learn it will help you effectively use your new vocabulary.

I hope that A Learner’s Dictionary of Kazakh Idioms introduces key terms of the Kazakh idiomatic lexicon to learners who are interested in advancing their knowledge of the Kazakh language and culture.