

Specificity of the Concept “Life” in the Kazakh and English Linguacultures

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Abstract—This paper focuses on exploring the concept of “life” within the linguistic and cultural contexts of Kazakh and English. Through a cognitive and linguacultural analysis of language units that express the meanings associated with this concept, the study highlights key features of how life is perceived in both languages. The study of the concept of “life” in Kazakh and English cultures is highly relevant, despite being a universal concept inherent to all cultures. However, the exploration of its understanding and linguistic representation – shaped by the unique national characteristics of Kazakh and English cultures – has not yet been sufficiently addressed in Linguistics. Comparative analysis shows that the concept of life in the two cultures has common and distinctive features. The Kazakh picture of the world emphasizes the collective perception of life, harmony with nature, and inevitability, while the English picture of the world highlights the desire for success and control over one’s destiny. The scientific and practical significance of the study of the concept of life in Kazakh and English linguistic cultures is that it contributes to the development of cultural dialogue and mutual understanding between representatives of the two language communities.

Index Terms—national specificity, meaning, life, Kazakh and English culture

I. INTRODUCTION

The concepts of “*destiny*”, and “*life*” are key and universal for all mankind. Existential values of a certain nation are concentrated on such key concepts and many fundamental aspects of their existence are based on them. In linguistics, key concepts of culture are understood as basic units of the picture of the world, which are significant both for an individual linguistic personality and for the linguacultural community as a whole. Despite a number of works devoted to the analysis of the conceptual system of language, the specificity of the concept of ‘*life*’ in cognitive and linguacultural aspects remains insufficiently studied. Issues related to its structure, content, and national and cultural features require a deeper analysis.

One of the fundamental concepts of human consciousness, the concept of life, reflects the worldview attitudes, value systems, and cultural traditions of society. Its content and structure are formed under the influence of cognitive mechanisms, linguistic features, and cultural experience, which make its study relevant within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics and Linguacultural Studies.

This article aims to identify the cognitive and linguacultural features of the concept of ‘*life*’, to determine their main characteristics and methods of representation in Kazakh and English languages.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A concept is constructed in the human mind and plays an important role in further cognitive processes. People

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comprehend the world with the help of concepts, organizing experience and knowledge into mental categories and structures. Concepts are cognitive tools that help people make sense of the world around them, which is not simply reflected in the mind, but constructed each time a new in the course of discourse formation. The content of a concept or its “*conceptual structure*” is associated with a universal representation of encyclopedic background knowledge, contextual information, and situation (Harras, 2000). One of the important areas of concept research in Cognitive Linguistics is research within the framework of cultural studies, which is associated with the problem of conceptualization that has a cultural basis, its encoding and transmission in communication using language (Sharifian, 2017). Even though the term “*concept*” plays a pivotal role in modern linguistics, there is still no common definition in Cognitive Linguistics. A concept is understood as a conscious unit of knowledge about objects and events, their properties, individual characteristics, about relationships with other objects and events, with the help of which a person operates while speaking and thinking. “Concepts are those ideal, abstract units with which a person operates in the process of thinking. They reflect the content of the acquired knowledge, experience, the results of all human activity, and the results of his cognition of the surrounding world in the form of specific units, “quantum” of knowledge” (Boldyrev, 2017, p. 97).

In Linguacultural Studies, the concept as an object of study has different names: cultural concept, linguacultural concept, linguacultureme, or ethnoconcept. In Linguacultural Studies, there is no disagreement in the definition of “*concept*”, linguists are almost unanimous in the opinion that it is defined as a core of culture in the mental world of a person, the main element of the culture of a given ethnic group.

Stepanov (2001) defines the concept as a cultural constant. The peculiarity of this notion is that it represents a collectively recognized cultural heritage of any society. These “*constants*” unite all accumulated social, historical, scientific, and cultural-linguistic experiences. Thus, concepts act not only as carriers of knowledge acquired through experience but also serve as “clots of culture”, reflecting and forming cultural norms, values, and worldviews. Thus, a concept is an internally protected formation in ethnocultural consciousness, where a centuries-old idea of the surrounding reality, the cultural values of an ethnic group expressed in a concise but at the same time capacious form (Utegulova et al., 2024; Bazarbayeva et al., 2024). The study of concepts that carry specific cultural meanings and are carriers of cultural information, reflects the features of national experience and allows us to identify the national and cultural features of the linguistic picture of the world of a definite linguistic community.

Kazakh scientists have also contributed to the study of concepts. “The cognitive content of language is carried out as a result of active cognition and mastery of reality, therefore language can be considered one of the means of mastering the world” (Suleimenova, 2013, p. 123). In Kazakh linguistics, Linguacultural Studies within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics are reflected in the works of Z.K. Akhmetzhanova, A.I. Islam, and others, who study the reflection of traditional ideas of the people, history, folklore and mentality in language.

Research by Z.K. Akhmetzhanova, devoted to axiological values, is becoming increasingly important since it is aimed at preserving national identity and transmitting cultural heritage to future generations. In her works, the scientist examines the content of linguacultural concepts such as ‘*adam*’ ‘*human, man*’, ‘*namys*’ (honour), ‘*dastarkhan*’ (dastarkhan or the traditional dining space where food is eaten), ‘*qonaqjailylyq*’ (hospitality), ‘*domyra*’ (domyra or Kazakh two-stringed plucked musical instrument) and others, analyzing their multilayered structure based on language. The researcher identifies the main components of concepts that form their semantic content: axiological, figurative, and conceptual cognitive elements. The study of ethnospecific concepts emphasizes the role of language as a key carrier of the cultural code and custodian of national values.

The study of concepts in Kazakh linguistics has its own specifics, due to the peculiarities of the Kazakh language, culture, and worldview. Kazakh linguists in their research mainly focus on the analysis of the national and cultural specifics of concepts: for example, ‘*qut*’ (blessing) (Isabekova, 2016), “space” (Zhuminova & Khusainova, 2019), ‘*berke*’ (unity, well-being) (Onalbaeva & Kiyнова, 2024) in the Kazakh linguistic picture of the world, “motherland” in the works of Kazakh writers (Bayanbaeva et al., 2016), “woman” in Kazakh folk poetry (Ispandiyarova & Absadyk, 2024); comparative analysis of the concepts of ‘*qanaysh*’ (joy) and “joy” (Kurmangaliyeva et al., 2018), “father’s house” and ‘*qara shangyraq*’ (the most revered house of the family) (Bisen & Utegenova, 2022) in the Russian and Kazakh linguistic pictures of the world.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Materials

The cultural specificity of the concept life is reflected in the use of various idioms, proverbs, and sayings that capture the nuances of its meaning and perception within Kazakh and English cultures. Like all nations, the Kazakhs and the English have depicted, modeled, stored, and passed on their accumulated knowledge, ideas, and worldview from generation to generation through these set expressions. The linguistic picture of the world, represented by proverbs, idioms, sayings, and phraseological units, plays an important role in each language reflecting generally accepted values cultural characteristics, and attitudes of the people. Having analyzed the most common expressions about life in Kazakh and English languages, we can see that the concept of life is a complex notion, which reflects several interpretations of life.

B. Procedure

To examine the concept of *'omir'* (Kazakh translation hereinafter: life) and *'life'*, the method of conceptual analysis is taken as the basis of the research methodology, where linguistic data play a major role. The cognitive method focuses on how a person perceives, processes, and transmits information through language. The essence of this method is that words that are close in meaning and usage are analyzed from the standpoint of their role in explaining cultural phenomena. In other words, conceptual analysis involves revealing the deep processes within the concept through a comparison of the etymology, semantics, and pragmatics of a word, which will ultimately make it possible to trace the specifics of the worldview of a particular person. Modern Cognitive Linguistics considers the concept *life* as a result of the interaction of cognitive processes and language practice. This allows us to study how the abstract concept of *'life'* is structured in thinking and how it is transmitted through language, including the mechanisms of conceptualization, metaphorical transfers, and semantic fields.

The concept of *"life"* is one of the central elements of the conceptual sphere of any specific language and it reflects the richness of various aspects of life itself and has a unique specificity of English culture. Etymological analysis is an important stage in the study of concepts. It is important to understand the origin of the word being studied, how it was formed, and how it is expressed at present. When analyzing the motivating features of the concept *"life"*, we should study its internal form, and thus reveal the original meanings and images.

The linguacultural method is used to study the interaction of language and culture to identify which national and specific components and values are fixed and conveyed in concepts. A comparative analysis of the concept *"life"* in Kazakh and English cultures was carried out to identify unique and universal characteristics.

Both approaches emphasize the importance of interdisciplinary research since it allows us to identify how the cultural characteristics and mentality of the people are reflected in the language. The linguacognitive and linguacultural approaches to understanding a concept are not mutually exclusive: a concept as a mental formation in the consciousness of one individual is the reflection of the conceptual sphere of a nation, its culture, and a concept as a unit of culture is the emergence of collective experience that becomes the property of an individual.

IV. RESULTS

A. The Concept *'Omir'* (Life) in the Kazakh Language Picture of the World

In the Kazakh language, the concept *'omir'* (life) is represented by the lexemes *'omir'*, *'gumyr'*, *'dauren'*, *'tirlik'*, *'tirshilik'* (synonyms for *'omir'*). In the Explanatory Dictionary of the Kazakh Language, the lexical unit *'omir'* has several definitions: 1. light, this world, existence; 2. physiological existence of humans and animals, the process of growth (opposite of death); 3. growth, development, stage in life, human life (Explanatory Dictionary of the Kazakh Language, 2013, p. 1029).

Rustemov S. points out that the concept *'omir'* (Arabic: life, age) has the meanings of *'life'*, "century" (Rustemov, 1989, p. 224). The concept *'omir'* is multifaceted and has several meanings in the linguistic picture of the world. For Kazakhs, human life is a huge cycle consisting of twelve-year periods: respectively thirteen, twenty-five, thirty-seven, forty-nine, sixty-three, etc. Each of these cycles represents a certain period of life associated with physiological, psychological changes, and, accordingly, with the understanding of life, and the completion of one of them means the beginning of the next stage.

One of these signs is the fluidity of life, which no one can stop or return: *'Omir otip bara zhatyr, Qairan zhirma bes, Omir – ozen, agady da ketedi'* (Eng.: Life is like a river, it flows and disappears).

The length of human life seemed very short, *'Qamsynynng sabyndai qysqa'* (literally "life is short, like the handle of a whip"). Probably the understanding of *'omir'* is metaphorically understood by most people as a river: *'Omir – ozen'* (life is a river); *'Omir – bir kundik, olim – mangilik'* (life is short, but death is eternal).

The Kazakh linguaculture is characterized by the impermanence of life, its changeability: *'Elu zhylda – el zhang'* (Every fifty years there is a new world), *'Zhalgan dunie – zheldei otedi'* (The world is deceitful, it passes like the wind), *'Dunie kezek'* (the world is changeable).

The concept *'omir'* in the Kazakh language is also represented by the lexical unit *'dunie'* [Arabic: world, light, universe]: 1. world, universe; 2. life; the second meaning *'dunieden otu'* is also understood as *'omirden otti'* (to die).

Constant variability and unpredictability are conveyed by phrases *'gapyl dunie'*, *'alma gaip dunie'*. However, people do not notice its fluidity and impermanence; life goes on with its charms and people say *'zhalganga tipti toimaidy'*, and, beckoning to follow it, it gives rise to boundless pleasures of life: *'Zhalgandy zhalpagynan basty'*; *'zhalgannyng'* (paradise of life/bliss of life).

Figurative metaphorical transmission of the fluidity of life, a parallel between its impermanence *'dauren'* and *'zaman'* and the loose sand of the desert dunes, is described as a period of time called *'omir'* (life) which flows and disappears without a trace in the flow of time by Almas Khan (whose prototype is Timur, Timur the Lame). Kazakhs metaphorically express a certain period of life as *'beles'* *'bel'* (lit.: range, hill), *'tolqyn'* (wave). If the first traces the movement into the future, then the second implicitly expresses regret that life passes, and flows like a river.

In a work of art, the characteristics of the concept reflect both the collective knowledge of its people and the knowledge of an individual. In the words of edification of Abay: *'Dunie -ulken kol, zaman – soqqan zhel, aldyngy'*

tolqyn-agalar, artqy tolqyn-iniler, kezekpegen oliner, baiagy dai koriner (The world is an ocean, time is a breath of wind, early waves are elder brothers, and late waves are younger brothers. Generation succeeds generation, even though things seem immutable in their quietude) (Abay, Words of Edification – The thirty-seventh word), where the fluidity of *'dunie'* (life) is expressed, and generations are represented as waves.

The writer M. Auezov in “The Path of Abay”, gives an assessment of life as something fleeting, unaffected by time, which no one can stop: *'Omirding ar dami sonday qymbat -biraq ne shara? 'Sozuga da, toqtatuga da', 'otpe, bitpe' dep otinuge de zhol zhoq'* (Every hour of life is very precious. But there is no way out. Neither to extend it nor to stop it, no one to say: “Stop, wait”) (Auezov, 1988, p. 275).

The impermanence of *'fani'* is also conveyed by the phrase *'baiansyz dunie'* (mortal world). *'Omir'*, or *'zhalgan'*, is metaphorically expressed as *'qu'*, *'sum'* (tricky), which shows its *complexity and unpredictability*: *'Sum dunie tonap zhatyr, ising bar ma?'* *'Baiagy qush, baiagy tusing bar ma?'* *'Aldy umit, arty okinish aldamsy omir'*, *'Zhelikpen zherge tyqpas kising bar ma?'* (How cope with this accursed world that robs us every hour? Where has it gone, your former strength, your handsome, youthful face? Bitterness hides in hope, for life is full of evil power; No sense in blaming for your ills the hapless human race. Translated by Dorian Rottenberg) (Abay, 1898, p. 167) Or: *'Omir degen kekse qu. Onyng syry men siqyryn tusinu eshkimming qolynan kele qoimas. Tusinbek tugil, onyng aldynda nareste siaqty. Tattini asty-ustine asatady da, kenet ap-ashy birdengeni auzynga tosa qoiady'*. (Life is a cunning old trick. No one can understand its secrets and magic. We are like children in front of it. It puts sweet things, and suddenly gives something bitter.) (Kekilbaev, 1999, p. 48), or a fixed comparison (literally, cunning life, like a wriggling red fox), also illustrates the understanding of life as an unpredictable phenomenon.

In the modern understanding, the importance of knowledge for life is emphasized: *'Oqusy bilim zhoq, bilimsiz kuning zhoq.* (Without study there is no knowledge, without knowledge, there is no life). There is also an opinion expressed in the proverb: *'Omirding qyzygy-ozinde'* (the joy of life depends on you), where a person's responsibility for his life is conveyed.

Thus, the linguacultural analysis of the worldview concepts of the Kazakhs reveals the deep structures of worldview as the variability of life, inconstancy, unpredictability, and the dependence of life on the person himself.

B. The Concept of “Life” in the English Linguistic Picture of the World

According to the “Online Etymology Dictionary”, the word “*life*” originates from Proto-Germanic “*leiban*” (source also of Old Norse *lif* “life, body”, Old Frisian, Old Saxon *lif* “life, person, body”, Dutch *lijf* “body”, Old High German *lib* “life”, German Leib “body”), properly “continuance, perseverance”, from PIE root “*leip*”, meaning “to stick, adhere” (Online Etymology Dictionary). According to the “Historical Dictionary of the English Language” by M.M. Makovsky, the word “*life*” corresponds to the Lithuanian *liepti* “*anordnen*”, which means the divine structure of the Universe, which is necessarily closely connected with movement. Pagans considered life an incomprehensible miracle, the result of supernatural actions of the Deity (from Old English *lybb* – “magic, witchcraft”) (Makovsky, 1999, pp. 195-196).

Thus, the etymology of the word “*life*” allows us to understand the close historical connection between the concept “*life*” and the physical body and physical experience. Moreover, the concept “*life*” has been closely intertwined with supernatural beliefs and mystical ideas throughout history, as well as with the eternal nature of existence. In order to identify the scope of conceptual characteristics of the concept “*life*”, it is necessary to analyze the definitions of the central lexeme “*life*”. According to the Cambridge and Oxford dictionaries, the following definitions are presented:

1. the period between birth and death, or the experience or state of being alive;
2. a particular type or part of someone's experience;
3. the quality that distinguishes people, animals, and plants from objects, substances, and things that are dead;
4. the state, quality, or fact of being alive; the existence of a person or animal.

In general, the lexeme “*life*” denotes a state that distinguishes organisms from inorganic and dead objects. “*Life*” also refers to the period when an organism is alive, or to the existence of living beings in general. Moreover, the meaning of the word “*life*” goes beyond the biological context and includes subjective experience and the essence of being.

There are many set expressions in the English language with the component “*life*” that convey various aspects of human experience and worldview. For example: “*To lead a dog's life*”, “*Life of the party*”, and “*That's life*”.

Representatives of English culture perceive life as a series of positive and negative events that follow each other, and people cannot control them: *Life is full of ups and downs. Each new day is a chance to change your life. Life is not all beer and Skittles. Life is full of difficulties and responsibilities: Life is not a bed of roses, no life is ever completely smooth sailing.* Analysis of proverbs and sayings shows the moral principle of English: you should always be prepared for the challenges that life throws at you and appreciate the moments of joy and success.

The next feature of the concept “*life*” is a person's responsibility for his or her life. Success, persistence, growth, self-development, and the desire to achieve goals despite obstacles are some of the main life values inherited by English culture. The emphasis is on personal responsibility and initiative, this part of the cultural code is reflected in the following proverbs: *Life gives you lemons, make lemonade; Live and learn; The secret to a happy life is to keep moving forward; Life is what you make it; Life is an open book, but not everyone reads all the pages; Life rewards those who work hard for it.*

Moreover, proverbs and sayings reflect “briefness”, “the value of life” (*Life is too short to waste time on regrets; Life is short, make it sweet*), “the variability of life” (*Life is full of ups and downs; Each new day is a chance to change your life*). These two ideas reflect different views on how one should treat life among the English. Moreover, life is metaphorically presented as a journey and a game. Life is compared to a road, as it has a beginning (birth) and a destination (death) (*Life is a journey, not a destination*). At the same time, such a property as “consistency” (*Life goes on*) is highlighted, this metaphor emphasizes the importance of the process of life and learning based on the various problems we encounter along the way.

In English culture, special importance is attached to individualism, personal freedom, and the right to privacy. These values influence the perception and interpretation of the concept “life”, emphasizing the importance of autonomy and self-actualization: *Stand on one’s own two feet; Paddle one’s own canoe*. These expressions illustrate the “value of independence and responsibility for one’s life” inherent in English culture.

In the fiction, the author demonstrates how the individual perception of life is intertwined with social, cultural, and historical contexts through the images of characters. The interaction between the character and the environment reflects social values, moral norms, and historical events, which in turn forms a unique picture of life.

Sometimes the authors’ ideas about life pass into ideas about life in the culture of the people. The famous idea of life through a metaphorical comparison of life and the theater of William Shakespeare: “*And all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts, His acts being seven ages*” says that life is a stage where each person plays his own unique role, and you can confidently navigate it only by knowing the rules of this game.

In the novel “Never Let Me Go” by Kazuo Ishiguro, the life of clones raised in a specialized institution Hailsham is described. The concept “life” in the novel is implemented through the concept of “memory” and represented through the description of various periods of the life of the main character of the novel Katie, her childhood and adulthood (Boldyrev et al., 2021).

The characteristic of the concept “life” as “predetermination of life” in the novel is expressed with the help of syntactic parallelism: *None of you will go to America, none of you will be film stars. And none of you will be working in supermarkets as I heard some of you planning the other day*.

The lifespan of donors depends on the suitability of their organs for transplantation. It is not the Almighty who decides, but people who determine the lifespan of clones: *Your lives are set out for you. You’ll become adults, then before you’re old before you’re even middle-aged, you’ll start to donate your vital organs. That’s what each of you was created to do... You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided. A donor’s life is contrasted with a normal life*.

In the fictional work “Never Let Me Go”, the concept of “life” receives an author’s individual interpretation. Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel describes in detail the life path of clones, not people. The author warns that life is the most precious value, and no one has the right to end someone’s life.

Thus, the concept of “life” in English culture is characterized by its versatility and depth, reflecting both universal human experiences and specific cultural values, worldviews, and modern understanding in the context of the development of digital technology and artificial intelligence.

V. DISCUSSION

In language, the concept “life” is implemented through numerous metaphors, idiomatic expressions, epithets, and other stylistic means. For example, life can be described as a path, a journey, a flow, or a struggle, which reflects its dynamic and processual nature. Analysis of such linguistic means helps to identify the cognitive schemes underlying ideas about life, in particular, the metaphorical model *Life is a journey*.

The concept “life” is formed under the influence of cultural traditions, historical experience, and social context, which leads to the emergence of both universal and specific semantic shades for a particular culture. Linguistic studies conducted within the framework of comparative and cross-cultural analysis help to discover how differences in worldview are reflected in the linguistic models of this concept.

In the Kazakh national worldview, the concept ‘*omir*’ has a multilayered and symbolic content, reflecting both historical and cultural characteristics and the specifics of the traditional way of life. *Life* for the Kazakhs is closely connected with nature, the steppe, and changing climatic conditions. Historically, the Kazakh culture was formed in the conditions of a nomadic way of life, where life was perceived as constant movement, travel, and the search for new opportunities. A way of life associated with the transition from one place to another symbolizes both the path of life and internal growth, overcoming difficulties and opening new horizons.

Life is presented as a process where time plays a key role. This can be either a linear movement from birth to death, or cyclical models, where certain stages or motifs are repeated, symbolizing renewal, rebirth, and the eternal movement of life.

The concept ‘*omir*’ in works of art is implemented through a combination of philosophical ideas, and the transmission of personal and social perceptions of life, which allows the author to create a multilayered, dynamic, and emotionally rich idea of life.

The national and cultural specificity of the implementation of the concept “*life*” in the English linguistic consciousness is determined by the peculiarities of the national character, the stereotypical character traits of the English are explicated: restraint, adherence to etiquette, secularism, as well as the peculiarities of culture. The worldview of the English emphasizes the importance of perseverance, personal development, and striving for goals from the belief that life is filled with both ups and downs and that a person must be prepared for difficulties, to the idea of life as a continuous journey and game.

The conducted cognitive and linguacultural analysis of concepts allows us to reveal that *life* is understood and perceived as a multifaceted phenomenon that covers various aspects of human experience in the English and Kazakh cultures. To summarize, it can be noted that the national character of the Kazakh and English peoples allows us to better understand the features of their worldview and culture. The examples and the individual author’s interpretation of the concept of “*life*” clearly reflect the mentality of each ethnic group, and provide valuable information about the culture and national consciousness. Within the framework of literary, colloquial, and professional discourses, the concept of “*life*” can acquire various shades of meaning. In literature, it is often saturated with symbolism and emotional coloring, while in scientific or technical language it can be used in a narrower and more formalized sense.

The study has revealed both similarities and specific national and cultural features due to differences in living conditions and cultural traditions. The conducted analysis confirms the importance of the concept of “*life*” in the linguistic picture of the world of both nations, and the comparative study contributes to a deeper understanding of cultural values and may lead to better intercultural relations.

VI. CONCLUSION

The analysis of linguistic means of representing the concept of “*life*” in Kazakh and English cultures reveals its multifaceted, dynamic nature. The features of the concept of “*life*” are associated with the implementation of the metaphorical model “Life is a path, a journey”, where temporal and personal characteristics are the main features. In the Kazakh linguaculture, life is associated with variability and inconstancy, characterized by cunning and flexibility, while in English culture the emphasis is placed on the complexity and dependence of life on a person, the inner freedom of a person. The cognitive characteristics of the concept of “*life*” as 'unpredictability', 'dependence', 'complexity' indicate its connection with a person, his ability to adapt to various life situations, effectively interact with changing conditions. The meaning of life as the greatest 'value' for a person is conveyed through the temporal characteristic common to both cultures as 'short duration, transience of life'.

In works of art, authors as representatives of their nation, depict various periods of life and the life cycle of their characters, describing not only the experience of their people and their attitude to life, but also revealing the meaning of life as the main value for all mankind.

It seems promising to conduct a survey among representatives of a certain culture about the perception of life by fellows in order to identify whether the differences and national-specific peculiarities in the concept of “*life*” are disappearing in the era of globalization.

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