THE SEMANTIC FIELD OF THE WORD "MAN / MEN"

Corina Mihaela GEANĂ
University of Craiova

Abstract

When it comes to the semantic field of a word, one may encounter a number of problems, especially in translation. Words have multiple meanings and are often hard to translate. That is why, in our article, we have tried to focus on the semantic field of the word *man,* by the medium of different phraseological expressions, derivatives or compounds, idioms, slang words and proverbs. The words and phrases are all defined and arranged in alphabetical order. The semantic field of the word *man*, just like the semantic field of any other word in the English language, shifts over time. Thus, the original meaning of this word was *human being* exclusively, while nowadays it is prevailingly used to refer to *adult male*. Nevertheless, its semantic field also extends in some uses to the generic *human*.

Key words*: polysemantic, connotation, idiom, slang, meaning*

Résumé

Quand il s'agit du champ sémantique d'un mot, on peut se confronter à plusieurs problèmes, spécialement en ce qui concerne la traduction. Les mots ont des sens multiples et sont souvent difficiles à traduire. C'est pourquoi, dans le présent article, nous avons essayé d'analyser le champ sémantique du mot *homme*, par l'intermédiaire de différentes expressions phraséologiques, des mots dérivés ou mots composés, des idiomes, des termes argotiques et des proverbes. Les mots et expressions sont tous expliqués et arrangés par ordres alphabétique. Le champ sémantique du mot *homme*, juste comme le champ sémantique de n'importe quel mot de la langue anglaise, a changé à travers le temps. Ainsi, le sens initial de ce mot a été *être humain* exclusivement, tadis qu'aujourd'hui il est fréquemment utilisé avec le sens d'*homme adulte*. Malgré tout, le mot *homme* s'utilise aussi avec le sens général d'*être humain*.

Mots-clés: *poli-sémantique, connotation, idiome, argot, sens*

Our article aims at focusing on the semantic field of the word *man* (with its plural form *men*), by trying to render its different meanings and connotations. We are all aware of the fact that the word *man*, just like any other word, has been submitted to a systematic process of linguistic evolution, to the point that the modern meaning is fundamentally different from the original use. Regarding the etymology of the word *man*, it is first encountered in Old English, having the form *mann*, meaning *adult male*, although it could also designate a person of unspecified gender. The Old English form is derived from Proto-Germanic *mannz*, meaning *human being*, *person*, which is also the etymon of the German word *mann*, meaning *man*, *husband*.

The domain of phraseological expressions based on the word *man* (with its plural form *men*) consists of a limited number of expressions. We have had as a reference

BDD-A27590 © 2017 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-07 16:08:29 UTC)

book "*Dicţionar frazeologic român-englez*", by Bantaş, Gheorghiţoiu and Leviţchi[1]:

- *a man about town* = a society man;
- *a man as honest as the skin between his brows* = the most honest man in the world;
- *a man cannot spin and reel at the same time* = one cannot do two things at the same time;
- *a man of sense* = a reasonable person;
- *a man of square frame* = a squabby man;
- *a man of substance* = a well-off person;
- *a man of weight* = an important person;
- *a man with a heart of gold* = a good human being;
- *as good a man as ever trod shoe-leather* = to overflow with kindness;
- *every jack man of them* (familiar speech) = everyone of them, everybody without exception;
- *every man for himself* = each person puts his or her own interests foremost;
- *every man with his hobby-horse* = a favourite topic that one frequently refers to; a fixation;
- *half man* (familiar speech) = a man of no account;
- *like the odd man out* = needless, unnecessary;
- *man alive!* = look!, fancy!, good gracious!;
- *man eater* (used in fairy tales) = half a man;
- *man lives by hope* = man hopes as long as he lives;
- *quite a man* = a man indeed;
- *the man in the street* = ordinary people, common people;
- *to a man / every man Jack* (familiar speech) = to the last man; any man;
- *to be a sound-man* = to be in high credit with;
- *to be a utility man* = to play a minor role;
- *to be one's own man* = to be free and independent;
- *to be the very man* = to be the right person to do a certain job;
- *to jump a man* (at draughts) = to jump a dam;
- *to look well after the inner man* = to care for one's own soul;
- *to measure another man's foot / feet by one's own last* = to judge other people according to one's own common sense;
- *to refresh one's inner man* (familiar speech) = to have a snack;
- *to take one's licking like a man* = to unblinkingly get the worst of something;
- *to unman somebody* = to move somebody to tears;
- *within the memory of men* = within living memory.

As far as derivatives are concerned, *man* can be found in the following words:

- *manful* (adjectival suffix *–ful*) = male, virile;

[1] Bantaş, Andrei, Gheorghiţoiu, Andreea, Leviţchi, Leon, *Dicţionar frazeologic român-englez*, Bucureşti, Editura Teora, 1993.

BDD-A27590 © 2017 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-07 16:08:29 UTC)

- *manfully* (adjectival suffix *–ful*, adverbial suffix *–ly*) = stout-heartedly;
- *manhood* (noun suffix *–hood*) = humanity; masculinity, virility; maturity;
- *mankind* (noun suffix *–kind*) = humanity;
- *manlike* (adjectival suffix *–like*) = masculine, virile;
- *manliness* (adjectival suffix *–ly*, noun suffix *–ness*) = masculinity, virility;
- *manly* (adjectival suffix *–ly*) = masculine, virile;
- *mannish* (adjectival suffix *–ish*) = masculine;
- *mannishly* (adjectival suffix *–ish*, adverbial suffix *–ly*) = stout-heartedly;
- *mannishness* (adjectival suffix *–ish*, noun suffix *–ness*) = masculinity, virility;
- *manwise* (adverbial suffix *–wise*) = humanly.

The compound words, having in their structure the word *man* (or its plural form *men*), are numerous and are given below:

- *man-at-arms* = soldier, military man;
- *man child* = male child;
- *man eater / man-eating* = cannibal, anthropophagus;
- *mangold* = stock beet;
- *manhandle* = to transport with one's arms; to behave bluntly with someone;
- *man hater / man-hating* = misanthropist;
- *manhole* = a hole in the floor; gully hole;
- *man-hour* = a labour hour;
- *manhunt* = raid, descent;
- *man hunter* = a man who is hunting other men;
- *man-made* = artificial;
- *man-of-war* = war craft, naval ship;
- *man power* = workforce; effectives;
- *man rope* = spotter, lifeline;
- *manservant* = attendant, servant;
- *man-sized* = big, voluminous;
- *manslaughter* = death by incaution;
- *manslayer* = murderer;
- *man-to-man* = heart to heart, personally.

The linguistic domain of the idiomatic expressions[2] based on the word *man / men* is delineated by means of certain illustrative phrases. Here are some examples:

- *a dirty old man* (used in informal language) = an older man who thinks too much about sex;
- *a ladies' man* = a man who likes the company of women and is successful with them;
- *a / the grand old man (of something)* = an old man who is very experienced and respected in a particular profession, etc.;

[2] *Oxford Idioms. Dictionary for Learners of English*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 233-234.

BDD-A27590 © 2017 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-07 16:08:29 UTC)

- *a man / woman of few words* = someone who does not talk much;
- *a man of God / the cloth* (archaic expression, formal language) = a religious man, especially a priest or a clergyman;
- *a man / woman of many parts* = someone who can do many different things well;
- *a man of straw* = a weak or coward person;
- *a man of the people* (used especially in politics) = a man who understands and is sympathetic to common people;
- *a man / woman of the world* = someone with a lot of experience of life, who is not easily shocked or surprised;
- *a man's man* = a man who is more popular with men than with women;
- *a / the man about town* = a man who frequently goes to fashionable parties, clubs, theatres, etc.;
- *a marked man* = a man who is in danger of being killed by his enemies;
- *a new man* (British English) = a man who shares the work in the home that is traditionally done by women, such as cleaning, cooking or taking care of children; *new men* are considered sensitive and not aggressive;
- *as one man* (used in formal language) = in agreement; all together;
- *like a man / woman possessed* = with a lot of force or energy;
- *man and boy* = a period from when someone was young to when he / she was old;
- *man's best friend* = a way of describing a dog;
- *man to man* = this expression is used between two men who are treating each other fairly and equally;
- *old man* (used in informal language) = a person's husband or father;
- *the inner man / woman* = 1. your mind or soul; 2. (humorous) your appetite;
- *the man (or woman) in the street* (British English) / *the man (or woman) on the Clapham omnibus* (archaic expression) = an ordinary person, either male or female;
- *the man / woman in your life* (used in informal language) = the man or woman that you are having a romantic or sexual relationship with;
- *the man of the match* (British English, used in sport) = the best player in a game of football, basketball, etc.;
- *the odd man out* = someone who is different from others or does not fit easily into a group;
- *to a man* (used in written English) = used to emphasize that something is true of all the people being described;
- *to be a man / woman of his / her word* = to be someone who always does what he / she has promised to do;
- *to be man enough (to do something)* = to be brave enough (to do something);
- *to be no good / use to man or beast* (used in informal language) = to be totally useless;
- *to be somebody's man / woman* = to be the best person to perform a certain activity;

BDD-A27590 © 2017 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-07 16:08:29 UTC)

- *to be the poor man's somebody / something* = to be someone or something that is similar to but of a lower quality than a certain person or thing;
- *to be twice the man / woman (that somebody is)* = to be much better, stronger, healthier, etc. than somebody or than before;
- *to be your own man / woman* = to act or think independently, not imitating others;
- *to make a man of / out of somebody* = to make a young man develop and evolve;
- *white-van man* (British English, informal language) = used to refer to a man driving a white van in an aggressive way;
- *your right-hand man* (used in informal language) = an assistant whom you trust with everything.

The slang expressions[3] related to the word *man* and its derivatives are numerous, either we speak of the British slang or the slang used by the other Anglophone countries: America, Australia, Canada, New Zealand or South Africa. *Man* (or its plural form *men*) appears in various slang expressions, among which we can mention the following:

- *action man* (British English, military term) = a dynamic, active man;
- *alderman* (British English, humorous) = tail (of an animal);
- *alias man* (American English) = scrounger; shrewd, stealer;
- *antiman / chi-chi man / four-letter man / freaky-man* = gay, homosexual;
- *arse-man* = a man who appreciates mostly a woman's nates;
- *auntie-man* (British English) = an old gay;
- *backdoor man* = 1. a married woman's lover; 2. (deprecatory meaning) an active homosexual;
- *badge-man* = prisoner who acts as a leaker in penitentiary;
- *bad man* = leaker, informer, sneaky;
- *bagman* (American English) = rambler, tramp; a drug dealer; a person involved in illegal business;
- *baseman* = snifter, user;
- *batman* = a kind of drug that gives hallucination;
- *beast-man* (British English, used by women to refer to men) = as ugly as sin, very ugly;
- *big man / candy-man* (American English) = a drug dealer;
- *binman* (British English) = garbage collector;
- *boogieman* = fantastic creature that scares the children;
- *boss man* = a big wig, a heavy weight;
- *catalogue-man* (British English) = time-serving, boring man;
- *caveman / workman* = potent man;
- *caveman mode* = out-of-date, old-fashioned;
- *coalman's sack* (British English, humorous) = Negro, nigger;
- *company man* (American English) = loyal employee;

[3] Volceanov, George, Nicolae, Raluca, Volceanov, Paul George, *Dicţionar de argou englez- român*, Bucureşti, Editura Niculescu, 2015, p. 50-200; p. 240-430; p. 433-434.

BDD-A27590 © 2017 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-07 16:08:29 UTC)

- *conman* = crook, impostor;
- *dead man* = empty bottle; stump;
- *deck-man / d-man* = drug addict;
- *dirty old man* = lecherous old man;
- *face man* = good-looking but brainless young man;
- *fly man* = redoubtable murderer;
- *freshman* = member of the American Congress, in his first mandate;
- *front man* = 1. (American English) mask; 2. (Australian slang) acolyte of a card sharp;
- *happy as a man weeding the asparagus* (Canadian slang) = as happy as a bird, extremely happy;
- *hard man* = 1. (British English) murderer, gangster; 2. (American English) potent man;
- *hatchet man* (American economic term) = 1. a company manager who announces the names of the employees who are going to be given the sack; 2. triggerman, hit man;
- *headache man* (American English, humorous) = law maker;
- *Isle of Man* (British English, humorous) = frying pan;
- *jug man / needle man* (American English) = drug addict;
- *junker man* (American English) / *shitman* (British English) = marijuana smoker;
- *kilo-man / k-man* = drug dealer;
- *little men with (their bloody) hammers* (American English) = a drinking induced headache;
- *lurkman* (Australian slang) = sneak-thief;
- *main man* (American English) = best friend; a woman's lover; chief, boss;
- *man* as a slang word has different meanings: 1. companion, mate, pal; 2. (American English) drug dealer; bloodhound, bobby, cop; 3. (British English, deprecatory meaning) pale-face, whitey; 4. brother, guy, fellow (an appellative used both for men and for women, especially by Negroes, jazz singers or hippies); 5. the best of all, referring either to a sportsman or to a singer, an artist, etc.;
- *man alive* (British English, humorous) = five; five pounds;
- *man and wife* (British English, humorous) = knife;
- *man at C&A* (British English, a student slang) = a guy who is dressed in old-fashioned clothes;
- *man fat* (British English) = egg-white, cream;
- *mangoes* (British English) = lungs, woman's breasts;
- *manhole / manhole cover* (British English, humorous) = brother;
- *man in the boat* (British English, humorous) = belly button; clitoris;
- *man in the moon* (British English, humorous) = odd in the head, crazy, insane;

BDD-A27590 © 2017 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-07 16:08:29 UTC)

- *man-like* (British English, a teenager slang) = pal, friend;
- *manly alice* = a homosexual with clean-cut masculine features;
- *manny* (British English) = a powerful drug;
- *man on the moon* (British English, humorous) = spoon;
- *man on the street* = a common man; (adjective, American English): simple, habitual, ordinary;
- *mans* = guys, men;
- *mansdem* (British English) = a clan of friends;
- *man upstairs* (humorous) = providence, Holy Lord, God;
- *matman* (in sport) = a fighter, an athlete;
- *medallion man* (deprecatory meaning) = the hub of the universe;
- *men in blue* (American English) = bobbies, cops; the press, the police;
- *men in grey suits* (British English) = wire pullers; the richest ten thousand men in England;
- *moneyman suits* (British English, financial term) = financial expert;
- *my man* (American English) = 1. drug dealer; 2. (an appellative) brother, friend;
- *obie man* (British English) = someone who daily reads about hatches, catches, matches and dispatches;
- *old man* = 1. father; 2. husband; 3. lover; 4. chief, boss; 5. (American English, political term) the American president;
- *pantsman* (Australian English) / *woodman* (British English) = lover boy, womanizer;
- *pedigree-man* (British English) = subsequent offender;
- *pete-man / peter-man* (British English) / *tankman (*Australian English) / *toolman* (American English) = safe breaker;
- *pint-man* (British English) = ill-bred, rude man;
- *point man* (in sport) = goal getter;
- *reedsman* (British English) = saxophonist;
- *reefer man* = marijuana dealer;
- *repo man* (American English) = a thief who earns his living by selling stolen cars;
- *standover man* (Australian English) = someone who scares off people in order to obtain money;
- *sticksman* = drummer, thumper;
- *streetman* = pickpocket;
- *sweetman* = pimp, procurer;
- *tambourine man* = small drug dealer;
- *top man* = bumpkin;
- *white man* = a man of his word.

The word *man* (or its plural form *men*) can also be encountered in a few proverbs given below. The reference books which we have consulted are given at the end of our

BDD-A27590 © 2017 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-07 16:08:29 UTC)

paper. For each and every English proverb we have tried to give an explanation, in an attempt to render its significance:

- *"A man can die but once."* = This saying is used to encourage someone who is reluctant to undertake a dangerous endeavor.
- *"A man is known by the company he keeps."* = People may base their judgement of someone on the reputation of his / her friends.
- *"A man's hat in his hand never did him any harm."* = Kind words worth much.
- *"A man's home is his castle."* (American English) = Someone's home is a place where they can be private and safe and do as they like.
- *"Calamity is man's true touchstone."* = One never knows who his / her real friends are until one is in need.
- *"Clothes do not make the man."* / *"It is not the coat that makes the man."* = The way in which someone dresses is not relevant for his / her personality or way of thinking. / One must never judge another person from appearances.
- *"Don't scald your lips in another man's porridge."* = Do not interfere into other people's affairs.
- *"Every man has his faults."* = Everybody can sometimes make mistakes.
- *"In the kingdom of blind men the one-eyed is king."* = A smart man, within a group made up of foolish people, is considered a great genius.
- *"It is not good praising a ford till a man be over."* = One shouldn't talk big before finishing his / her task.
- *"It's every man for himself."* = One must think about his / her own interests first, before the interests of other people.
- *"Like master, like man."* = If the master is a good employer, the man (the servant) is a good employee, and vice versa.
- *"No man is born wise or learned."* = The more you practise, the more you know.
- *"One man makes a chair, and another man sits in it."* = One man works, and another reaps the benefits.
- *"One man's meat is another man's poison."* = What one person likes very much, another person does not like at all.
- *"Time and tide wait for no man."* = No one is so powerful that they can stop the march of time.
- *"You can't keep a good man down."* = Someone who wants something very much will succeed.

Our article has tried to render as many constructions or combinations of words as possible based on the word *man*, which help any learner of English distinguish spoken from written, formal from informal, literal from figurative usage. People who are learning English find many types of figurative language to be hard to understand because of their vocabulary limitations. The efficiency of vocabulary learning is a prerequisite for the success of language learning. Students or other speakers of English find it hard to remember all the English words or phrases at the same time because some of them

BDD-A27590 © 2017 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-07 16:08:29 UTC)

can look alike. English words are numerous and only a systematic arrangement of them, based on the semantic field theory, would lead to the development of one's linguistic competence. During the vocabulary learning process, one can compare the words that have similar semantic meanings which can be used incorrectly owing to their slight differences. When discussing the semantic field of a word, it is very important to understand the difference between the literal and figurative meanings of that particular word. Thus, the idiomatic constructions, the slangs, the metaphors, the similes, the hyperboles or the sayings based on the word *man* provide a new perspective on this specific word for anyone who wants to be at home with the English language.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ayto, John, Simpson, John, *The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Slang*, New York, Oxford, 1992.

Balaban, Ştefan, *Dicţionar de argou, eufemisme şi expresii familiare englez-român*, Bucureşti, Editura Teora, 1999.

Bantaş, Andrei, Gheorghiţoiu, Andreea, Leviţchi, Leon, *Dicţionar frazeologic român-englez*, București, Editura Teora, 1993.

Gulland, Daphne M., Hinds-Howell, David, *The Penguin Dictionary of English Idioms*. Second Edition, London, Penguin, 1994.

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. 6th Edition, Published by Pearson Education Limited, 2014.

Nimară, Ştefan, *Dicţionar de argou englez-român*, Bucharest, Paco Publishing House, 1993.

Trofin, Aurel, *Dicţionar englez-român. Expresii idiomatice şi locuţiuni*, București, Editura Științifică, 1996.

Volceanov, George, Doca, Ana-Dolores, *Dicţionar de argou al limbii engleze*, București, Editura Nemira, 1993.

Volceanov, George, Nicolae, Raluca, Volceanov, Paul George, *Dicţionar de argou englez- român*, București, Editura Niculescu, 2015.

*** *Oxford Idioms. Dictionary for Learners of English*, Oxford University Press, 2006.

BDD-A27590 © 2017 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-07 16:08:29 UTC)