



**Comparative Idioms of the Russian Language of the Micro-Field "Slow-
Wittedness"**

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ABSTRACT

Comparative idioms are one of the actively developed problematic spheres of phraseology. At the moment, detailed consideration is being given to the cultural and structural aspects of the analysis of comparatives. In the present article the author analyzes stylistic features of comparative idioms in the micro-field "slow-wittedness", and their functioning in art texts. It has been revealed that such comparisons are not frequent in artistic texts in view of stylistic limitation of comparisons (often they are dubbed colloquial, contemptuous). Specific standards of comparison are established: these are often the names of animals or a tree, its parts and wooden products. The reason of such a choice of standards of comparison is linked with the features of the national world view of the Russian people at early stages of development. Estimations as to when comparative idioms of such semantics came into use are often placed at the 19th century, less frequently at the 20th. Special attention is paid to the subject comparative connection. Generally, they serve as the characteristic of the representatives of the masculine gender. The characteristic of representatives of the feminine gender is met quite seldom and demands a change in the standard of comparison. The descriptive method serves as a key method of linguistic analysis in work as it allows the analyzing of the specifics of functioning of a comparative idiom in context and opens implicitly the presented linguo-culturological potential of comparative idioms

Keywords: comparative idiom, linguo-culturology, phraseology, gender, intelligence.



1. INTRODUCTION

The phraseological fund of a language over a long period of time is the subject of linguistic research. Not only the structural organization of phraseological units, but also their semantic and linguo-culturological component is exposed to analysis. The development of the phraseological aspect of linguistic thought was influenced by Arsenyeva (2016), Fernando (1996), Gibbs (1994), Kunin (1996), Melerovich (2001). As a result of the detailed description of types of phraseological units, comparative idioms were distinguished as an independent unit of phraseology. In the present moment comparative idioms are in a stage of active study in structural, linguo-cultural and comparative plans. V. Ogol'cev(2015) first paid attention to complexity of comparative idioms, having pointed to their similarity to logical comparison and having found their differentiating signs. So, it was established that the cornerstone of logical comparison is the cogitative operation directed at searching and fixing of identical signs at observed objects; at the foundation of comparative idioms lies the figurative perception of a subject and the comparison of this perception to the subjective background knowledge, which allows the making of certain conclusions on rather observed objects (Ogol'cev, 2015). Now researches of comparatives take place in a comparative aspect. This allows in finding a unanimity in the perception of the world by different national cultures, and also to open their logic of thinking, to find out the reasons of development of similar figurative comparisons. Such researches not only disclose the width of comparative idioms as the subject of the linguistic analysis, but also indicate their linguo-culturological potential in showing the naive features of attitude of a citizen of this nation at an early stage of development. In connection with this, the works performed in anthropocentric aspect are topical in that they enhance the opening of many features of national thinking (Safin, 2016; Gilazetdinova, 2016). The real research is focused on the analysis of the macro-field's "character of the person and his internal state" as this field is an opposition in relation to the macro-field's "appearance of the person", therefore, will allow to open features of figurative perception of appearance of the person and his inner world.

2. METHODS



Research methods used were: the method of continuous selection (The Dictionary of Comparative Idioms of V. M. Ogol'cev served as the material for research) (Ogol'cev, 2015), the method of linguistic description, the typological method and the quantitative method. During the analysis we addressed art texts and explanatory dictionaries with the purpose to offer an exhaustive explanation for comparative idioms

3. MAIN PART

A comparative idiom has three obligatory structural components: object of comparison, standard of comparison and basis of comparison. The object of comparison is the observed subject. It is often already familiar to the speaker (listener/reader) from a context, a previous dialogue or life experience. The feature of this object is only that fact that the speaker finds in it certain sign, which he wants to name figuratively. Moreover, often this sign is shown in excessive quantity and perceived as "out of norm", which causes the tendency to give it a figurative description. Figurativeness is that extent to which the manifestation of a feature in an object is compared to the extent of existence of the characterized feature in another object acting as the reference carrier. For example, the comparative idiom *a sense of smell like a dog's* we can consider the information that the dog possesses the best nose. Therefore, the sense of smell of the observed object is also quite keen.

The basis of comparison is often expressed implicitly (it is silly as a gray gelding, mad as hell, etc.) and indicates traits of character known to all, features of appearance, behavior (clever, silly, beautiful, high, etc.).

Often comparative idioms form synonymic ranks: silly as gray gelding, as chock, as log, etc. Comparative idioms have "indicators" of existence of the synonymous relations: coincidence of a conceptual core, valence.

Coincidence of a conceptual core means the coincidence of the basis of comparison since this element indicates the sign which is exposed to the quantitative characteristic (specifies, where and in what degree it is shown). Often synonymous relations develop in those comparative idioms where the basis of comparison is presented by an adjective (beautiful, clever, and cunning as a fox). If the basis of comparison is presented by a verb, then a deep analysis of the broadcast semantics is required as the described action can have a different shade contained in a comparison standard. In that case it is not always



possible to speak about a synonymy. So the comparative idiom *to wander aimlessly* designates the external perception of a person who does not find tranquility because of internal torments; the comparative idiom *to go as a thread behind a needle* indicates an image of action - one subject goes behind the other subject everywhere. These aforementioned comparative idioms are not synonyms since they convey various concepts, despite a comparison basis similarity.

The subject connection is also important. So, comparative idioms, having identical semantics, can belong to the feminine or to the masculine gender, depriving the units of synonymic relations: the expressions *as an elephant*, *as a bear* are aimed at the characteristic of the clumsy man whereas comparison *as a mortar* are applied in relation to the feminine gender. Therefore, different subject domains do not give the grounds for development of the synonymous relations.

Let's consider a synonymic row with the meaning "silly", which consists of 11 comparative idioms: *silly as a ram*, *silly as a log (colloquial, contemptuous)*, *stupid as the oak (colloquial, contemptuous about the man, extremely silly)*, *is silly as a gray gelding (colloquial, contemptuous)*, *silly as a donkey*, *silly as a goose (colloquial, contemptuous)*, *silly as a stub (colloquial, contemptuous) as a stopper (contemptuous) as a log (colloquial, contemptuous) as a block (чурбак, a chock)*, *stupid as the Siberian valenok (colloquial, contemptuous)*.

As we can notice, out of 11 comparatives, 9 have a stylistic label of colloquial or contemptuous which defines at once the sphere of use of the language unit (Bochina, 2016; Spiridonov, 2016; Ukhanova, 2016). 1 unit has a strictly limited scope of application - *stupid as an oak*, is applied only in relation to a man. Other comparatives have no labels concerning gender application (Bochina, 2014).

Moreover, a number of units has as the basis of comparison the adjective *silly*, and the remainder the adjective *stupid*. We understand them as synonyms as according to Ojegov's dictionary, silly and stupid are synonyms. Silly is understood as "1. with limited abilities, slow, confused. 2. Lacking wits, deprived of reasonable pithiness, expediency" (<http://slovarozhegova.ru/word.php?wordid=5275>); stupid is treated as "... 4. Deprived of sharp perception, slow, and also hinting at intellectual limitation (<http://slovarozhegova.ru/word.php?wordid=32509>).



The general sense of the two lexemes is "slow-wittedness", which gives us the grounds to speak about development of the synonymous relations in system of comparatives.

The given number of comparatives with synonymous semantics naturally places us face to face with the question of frequency and the nature of applying each of them. In this regard we analyzed the national corpus of Russian language (NKRY) regarding the relevance of the comparatives found in it. We obtained the following data:

The comparative idioms *silly as the ram, is silly as a donkey* are each found 2 times in NKRY: *Another, Alexey Petrovich Choubin, was a pathetic, insignificant creature, lascivious as a cat, silly as a ram.* (F. F. Vigel. Notes (1850-1860), *Both of you do well, being accomodating; but as for Grabshaufel, he, as far as I know, is a real German; that is, he is silly as a ram, as angry as a monkey, and is stubborn as a Ukrainian bull!* (V. T. Narezhny. Russian Zhiblaz, or Adventures of the prince Gavril Simonovich Chistyakov (1814)). An important feature of these comparatives is their use in texts of the 19th century, and also a connection to the masculine gender that was not recorded in dictionaries of comparisons.

The comparative idioms *as silly as a gray gelding, as silly as a donkey* are both met 3 times in NKRY: *Be silent, Rakhmanov, you are as silly as a gray gelding.* (A. K. Tolstoy. From comic letters to N. V. Adlerberg (1837-1838); *And say, – Gosha questioned Zhorik, – that Egor is as silly as a donkey.* (Ildar Abuzyarov. An offensive language (2002), *And here, look, Vera, someone wrote: "here Murchik – was as fresh as a cucumber", and another added: "also he is as silly as a donkey!"* (P. N. Krasnov. From Two-headed Eagle to a red banner (the book 1) (1922). As we can notice, the use of these comparatives is dated to the 20th and 21st centuries, indicating the modern nature of comparisons. The subject connection remains focused on the masculine gender.

Comparison with a goose is met once and is rather modern: *She will cause herself to exceed her strengths, and right there will die of diligence ... They also say: she is as silly as a goose ... And there is none wiser than this bird.* (A. I. Kuprin. (1927).

We connect the inclination to the masculine gender of the comparatives given above with a standard of comparison – of the male gender of animals (*as a donkey, as a goose, as a ram, as a gray gelding*). Perhaps, comparison with the male gender defines a subject connection. So, such comparison in relation to the feminine gender sounds unnatural: *She*



is stupid as a ram / donkey, because the grammatical form of the used noun a priori indicates the noun's gender. Moreover, the comparisons designated as standards have the suppletive forms of a feminine gender (a ram – a sheep). This fact is reflected in the NKRY: *With submissively dropped eyes, in which now shame burned, he silently listened to the reproaches of his wife, quiet and stupid as a sheep, he went to his room and there locked himself in.* (Maxim Gorky. Foma Gordeev (1899). However in the dictionary of comparative idioms, as silly as a sheep is not recorded.

4. SUMMARY

An inanimate object, in particular a part of a tree or a product from it also can act as a standard of comparison (a stopper, a block, a log, an oak, etc.).

Comparative idioms with an oak, log are not recorded in NKRY. 4 instances have been found where the comparative idiom, *as silly as a log*, is used: *Happiness finds only him, who is as silly as a log, does not think of anything and does nothing*". (Alexander Voronsky. Gogol (1934), *And that he is as silly as a log, that's right.* (A. F. Pisemsky. *Whether it is guilty?* (1855), *It may be that he treats his patients well, nevertheless ... he is as silly as a log*". (F. M. Dostoyevsky. *The double* (1846), *That's just a man, as silly as a log who also has in his pocket the most fair capital.* (A. I. Ertel. *Stepnyak's notes* (1883). The listed examples from works of art are also dated to the 19th century and concern the masculine gender.

The stub as a standard of comparison is used twice: *Yes, but Rayumsdal is as silly as a stub, – the Moon was surprised.* (Andrey Belyanin. *Furious landgrave* (1999). And the use belongs to the end of the XX century.

The most popular is comparison with a stopper (7 examples are revealed): *Mischa, you are silly as a stopper*", – *and he shrank and became as a beaten doggie.* (Vladimir Shakhidjanyan. *1001 questions about IT* (No. No. 501-1001) (1999). It is remarkable that in this example the indication at slow-wittedness as a means of comparison is used in relation to the interlocutor who wasn't met earlier: generally similar comparisons are characterised by the third party not participating in the dialogue.

The appeal to the feminine gender was revealed in the analysis of the functioning of the comparative *as stupid as a log*: *Nothing, except the thought, as stupid as a log, that this strange book is not necessary to me.* (Anatoly Pristavkin. *Little cuckoos or a plaintive*



song for calm of heart (1992). However it is important to emphasize that the characteristic concerns not an animate object, but an inanimate, abstract object.

5. CONCLUSION

Thus, comparative idioms of the Russian language of the micro-field "slow-wittedness" represent quite a numerous variety. Standards of comparison can be the names of animals: goose, donkey, ram, gray gelding, or names of a tree, its parts and wooden products: (oak, log, stopper, stub, chock, block). Many of comparative of this group have a colloquial or contemptuous label, that limits the sphere of their use. In the national corpus of Russian language each of comparative is presented not more often than 2-3 times. The most frequent is the use of the comparative stupid as an owl. A main feature of comparative idioms of this semantics is their implicit inclination to the masculine gender. The appeal to the feminine gender is met seldom and demands a change of the addressee (this situation concerns the standards of comparison presented by names of animals). Disputable is also the question of the reason of distribution of these characteristics on males.

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