

Semantic and Functional Status of Comparative Units in Mass Media Discourse

By

Svetlana Sergeevna Safonova

Cand. of Sc. Philology, Associate Professor of Russian and Methods of Its Teaching, IPIC,
Kazan Federal University,
Email: prepodss@mail.ru

Olga Anatolevna Chupryakova

Cand. of Sc. Philology, Associate Professor of Russian and Methods of Its Teaching, IPIC,
Kazan Federal University,
Email: bezdna2008@rambler.ru

Anna Vladislavovna Ganitseva

No degree, Assistant of Russian and Methods of Its Teaching, Kazan Federal University,
Email: ms.ganitseva@mail.ru

Irina Aleksandrovna Votyakova

Cand. of Sc. Philology, преподаватель кафедры греческой и славянской филологии,
University of Granada,
Email: irinavot@ugr.es

Abstract

The article is devoted to the linguistic analysis of the semantics and functioning of comparative units in publicistic discourse. It notes that the category of comparative actively interacts with the categories of emotional evaluation, imagery and intensity, and that as a result of comparison they appear as units of speech in which the “Subject - Ground - Object” model is implemented. In the corpus of comparative units, there are comparisons-associations (figurative), which serve to metaphorize the statement, and comparisons-identities, represented by turns of subject-logical and comparative-comparative types. In journalistic discourse, comparisons formed in a syntactic way are the most common, lexical means of expressing comparative meaning are less commonly used, morphological means of formalizing comparison are the least common. Among the means of formalizing the semantics of comparison, dominated by subordinating conjunctions, specialized in the transfer of the semantics of comparison and characterized by a comparative-comparative (what) or modal-comparative function (as if, as if, exactly), and a non-specialized conjunction (as). It is proved that comparative units are included in the structural organization of both simple and complex sentences, often forming a peripheral zone. At the same time, comparative constructions of real modality account for 61%, constructions with unions of unreal modality - 13%, and constructions with union than - 9%. 83% of the considered examples belong to the syntactic means of expressing comparative relations; to morphological means - 4%, of which 1% are instrumental comparisons and 3% are prepositions expressing comparative relations; lexical means of expressing comparative relations are represented by 13% of the analyzed material, of which 3% are stable comparisons. The semantic sphere “Man” dominates in the linguistic fabric of the newspaper and magazine discourse, in which the object of comparison is a certain historical person, a person of a certain kind of activity, etc., while the semantic sphere “Animal” is characterized by stable comparisons.

Keywords: mass media discourse, category of comparativity, means of formalization, grammatical means, lexical means, semantic sphere.

Introduction

At present, in linguistics, the category of comparativity is studied in respect to a scientific paradigm being dominant at the turn of the 20th – 21st centuries – the anthropological one in which a person is accentuated as a native speaker and user of the language. Comparison, or the category of comparativity, is one of the ways of world perception and a linguistic channel for information acquisition. The idea of “the relations of similarity and difference, on which the category of comparison is based, has been put forward by Ferdinand de Saussure and the scholars of the Kazan linguistic school” (Murzina, 2010) (V. A. Bogoroditsky, N. A. Shirokova, N. A. Andramonova, R. M. Bolgarova, etc.) (Andramonova, 1977; Galiullina et al., 2016).

An outstanding representative of the Kazan linguistic school, V. A. Bogoroditsky, was first to disclose the semantic and syntactic nature of comparison (Bogoroditsky, 1935). Subsequently, comparative units receive a detailed semantic-structural characteristic in the works by famous linguist N. A. Shirokova (1963). Nevertheless, the functioning of comparative constructions in the language is of interest of the linguists. Being far off in space, the author of a mass-media text seeks to approach the addressee in time, in the subject of messages by means of expressive-stylistic means, to which we attribute comparative units as one of the ways of “revitalizing” speech.

The relevance of this article is determined, on the one hand, by the need to study the category of comparativity as a synthesis of lexical-phraseological and morphological-syntactic units, on the other hand, by the study of the semantic and functional features of comparative units in journalistic discourse.

The object of the research is comparative units functioning in the texts of newspaper and magazine discourse, and the subject is the revelation of their semantic and functional status in the language of mass media, based on the material of the electronic publications *Russky Reporter* (Russian Reporter) (hereinafter RR), *Expert and Argumenty i Fakty* (Arguments and Facts) (hereinafter AiF).

The purpose of our article is a multi-aspect analysis of comparative units functioning in the linguistic texture of publicistic discourse.

Methods

In the process of our investigation we relied on the previous experience in studying the semantic and functional features of linguistic units in the space of publicistic and literary text (Gimranova et al., 2019; Usmanova & Nurullina, 2016; Fatkhutdinova, 2014). The material of the research was the linguistic units expressing the semantics of comparison, obtained by continuous sampling from the electronic editions RR [<http://rusrep.ru>], Expert [<http://expert.ru>]

and the newspaper AiF [<http://aif.ru>] (the card index file contains more than 300 items).

The purpose and objectives of the study determined the complex of its methods. In the process of analyzing comparative units in journalism, we used the following methods such as method of continuous sampling; quantitative and statistical method; linguistic description involving observation and classification of factual (linguistic) material; method of definition and component analysis.

Results and Discussion

The category of comparativity is presented as a multi-aspect concept having an epistemological, logical and linguistic status. At the same time, it correlates with the categories of intension, evaluativity and emotionality.

In the literature on this issue we find a number of similar theses in relation to the treatment of comparative units.

- 1 Comparison-conformation as a means of metaphorizing the whole utterance or any member of the sentence, and comparison-identity.
- 2 Among the subordinating conjunctions, there are both special for conveying the semantics of comparison (словно / as if, as though, like, будто / as if, as though, точно / as though, as if, like, чем / than), and non-special (как / as).
- 3 Comparative units are contained in the constructions of simple and complex sentences, as well as in the structures of a peripheral zone. As a result, comparison appears as a unit of speech in which the “Subject – Base – Object” model is realized.

Consider the means of formalizing the semantics of comparison, and in the first place, the syntactic means of expressing comparative meaning.

In our material, the conjunction как prevails, as characterized by heterogeneity of structural and functional properties. This is a semantic conjunction that represents the relationship of comparison of objects and phenomena: И это будет означать, что физики сорок лет бродили, как евреи по пустыне, и забрели совсем не туда. [RR №49 (177) 12.16. 2010]

It should be noted that the comparative construction as part of a complicated structure is a means of formalizing additional predication: Вот, казалось бы, Брайан Адамс весь такой сладкий герой-любовник с прической, как у курсанта, и мальчишеским голосом. А ведь 52 года человеку. [RR №25 (254), 06.28. 2012]

In newspaper and magazine texts, comparative conjunctions can act as parceled constructions: Вообще, фотоблог и приложение для мобильных устройств Instagram – это уже не средство, а стиль. Как стиль модерн, как прерафаэлиты, как Тернер, наконец. [RR №25 (254), 06.28. 2012]

Comparative units with the links такой (же), как and так же, как make up 12% of comparative constructions of real modality and, as a rule, are complicated by lexical repetition

and semantics of intension by means of intensifying particles: Впереди Аляска и самая высокая гора Северной Америки – Мак-Кинли. Этап не такой изнурительный, как Эверест, но не менее интересный и интригующий. [RR №25 (254), 06.28. 2012]

In modern publicistic discourse, the conjunction как functions primarily as a conjunction of real (authentic) comparison, which is confirmed by the material of our research.

Having analyzed the functioning of comparative units in the texts of the magazines RR and Expert, note that the conjunctions of unreal modality are not so characteristic of our material (they make up 13% of the entire card index file). The conjunctions будто, как будто are the most common: Обе звучат так хорошо, будто SunSay вот-вот еще раз перевернет всю нашу музыку... [RR №24 (253), 06.21. 2012]

In our opinion, a very interesting is the following example: Группа «Каста» для русского рэпа – **что** Пушкин для русской поэзии: они дали нашему хип-хопу естественный, искренний язык. [RR №24 (253), 06.21. 2012], in which the comparative conjunction что has a specific tinge of the colloquial style, and it is used as a stylization in the text about the rap group.

In the modern language of mass media, along with the constructions based on the relations of similarity and identity, there are the comparative units with the meaning of difference, formalized by the conjunction чем which necessarily contain comparatives and often lexemes with intensifying semantics (гораздо / much, far, куда более/ far): В итоге уже к концу девятнадцатого века эта территория была **гораздо более русской, чем** остальная Латвия, и это чувствуется до сих пор. [RR №24 (253), 06.21.2012]

Secondly, in the Russian language, the prepositions with comparative meaning and the instrumental comparisons act as morphological means of formalizing comparative meaning.

In publicistic discourse the comparative units in which comparison is expressed by means of prepositions are few, and the core is formed by the comparative prepositions вроде, наподобие, подобно (like): Режиссеры обескровливают его, **подобно** таксидермистам, и эта «стратегия скуки» уже превратилась в штамп. [RR №26(255), 07.12. 2012] Russian prepositions вроде, наподобие, подобно express exclusively the semantics of comparison (namely, the comparison of one of the phenomena of reality with another), perform a grammatical function, participating in the organization of the sentence. Within a complicated sentence, the prepositions вроде, наподобие, подобно have a functional similarity to the conjunctions, although there is a certain grammatical difference between them since prepositions govern case forms.

In newspaper and magazine discourse, comparative units with the instrumental case of comparison have a restricted character and are mainly represented by set expressions. The instrumental case of comparison is used for verbs with a certain lexical meaning: movement in space and time, human speech activity and thinking, at the same time performing the function

of relativity: Как только он услышал эту новость, сразу же **стрелой полетел** в больницу. [RR № 18(247), 05.10. 2012]

And, finally, consider the lexical means of formalizing comparative meaning, which are represented by the verbal (напоминать, походить напоминая, напомирующий / to remind of, to look like, to resemble, be reminiscent of) and adjective vocabulary (похожий, подобный / resembling, similar to).

In newspaper and magazine texts, the verb напоминать and its forms напоминая, напомирующий are very regularly used. At the same time, there are cases of comparison based not on the similarity but on the difference between the object and the subject of comparison: Сашка в эту минуту казался очень подавленным, **напоминая** больше виды выдавшего старика, чем бодрого юношу. [RR №16 (245), 04.26. 2012] “Within the framework of phrases, these words are often approached by representations that appear as connected not by relations of objective similarity noted by the speaker but by relations of subjective, relatively arbitrary approach” (Cheremisina, 1976).

The Russian adjectives похожий and подобный belong to the class of significant words, the denotation of which already contains an indication of comparing. If the adjective похожий means ‘resembling someone or something’, and the constructions with it express, first of all, an external similarity perceived by sight, then the lexical meaning of the adjective подобный is defined as ‘containing, constituting a similarity to someone, something.’ Depending on the position, these adjectives in a short form (похож, подобен) always appear in a predicative function, and in a full form – both in a predicative function and in an attributive one: В этом смысле Павлово **похоже** на Великобританию с ее культом хобби [RR, №15 (244), 04.19. 2012]

The analysis of the representation of comparative units in publicistic discourse allowed for the identification of 6 semantic spheres: “Man”, “Animal”, “Place”, “Plants”, “Substance” and “Parts of the Body”.

In the texts of newspaper and magazine discourse, the semantic sphere “Man” prevails, attaching figurativeness, and in most cases the object of comparison is a well-known person (writers, iconic literary characters, representatives of government and show business, etc.): Антон спокоен и улыбчив, **как Будда**. [RR №15 (244), 04.19. 2012] Дядя Юра складывает руки на груди, **как Ленин** в мавзолее. [«РР» №25 (254), 06.28. 2012]

In addition, in the media texts there are comparisons according to occupation, age, nationality and gender (учительница, мальчишка, якут, девушка и др.): Красота гатчинского парка не бросается в глаза, а проникает в душу постепенно, **как девушка**, которой смотришь вслед и вроде ничего в ней нет. [RR №38 (267), 09.27. 2012]

In publicistic discourse, the basis for comparison with animals is their appearance and actions, and the most frequent are the comparative constructions, including set expressions

[10]: Про Жан-Мари Ле Пена можно даже не говорить – не первый год Ширак и лидер Национального фронта уживаются на французской политической арене, **как кошка с собакой**. [Expert, 03.21. 2007] Женщины, **словно мотыльки**, по-прежнему слетаются на яркие рекламные объявления. [AiF, 04.10. 2014]

The semantic sphere “Place” stands third in our material, while the comparison is also based on phraseological or precedent texts: Особенно мне понравился химфак – он изнутри **похож на Хогвартс** <...> На конференциях часто знакомишься с интересными умными ребятами. [RR 02.26. 2013]

In comparative constructions with the semantic spheres “Plants”, “Substance” and “Parts of the Body”, the comparison is based on the properties of the comparison object, including very often in set units: В Китае липнут к потенциальным клиентам **как банный лист** – наглости им не занимать. [AiF 10.21. 2015] А свежестроенные бизнес-офисы в небоскрёбах безлюдны, новые отели полупусты, но у моря **словно грибы** растут гостиницы. [AiF 03.16. 2016] Если покопаться в госпрограммах, можно увидеть, сколько миллиардов сочится, **словно песок**, сквозь государственные пальцы и прилипает к рукам нечестных чиновников. [AiF 03.04. 2015] Инфраструктура для города – **как воздух для человека**. [Expert, 02.08.2015]

Summary

So, having considered the semantic and functional status of comparative units in mass media discourse, we note that the category of comparativity actively interacts with the categories of emotional evaluation, imagery and intension. As a result, the comparison appears as the units of speech in which the “Subject – Base – Object” model is realized.

Comparative units comprehend, first, comparison-conformation (figurative) serving as the units of metaphorizing utterances, and comparison-identity represented by non-figurative comparisons, subject-logical constructions and contrastive-comparative expressions.

Second, among the subordinating conjunctions dominant are the conjunctions for conveying the semantics of comparison and characterized by a contrastive-comparative (чем) or modal-comparative function (словно, будто, точно), and a general conjunction (как).

Third, comparative units are included in the structural organization of both simple and complex sentences, often forming a peripheral zone.

In our study, comparative constructions of real modality make up 61% (183), comparisons with conjunctions of unreal modality – 13% (39), and 9% of constructions is referred to comparative constructions with the conjunction чем (27). So, 83% of the examples considered belong to the syntactic means of expressing comparative relations.

In publicistic discourse, based on the material of the electronic publications Russian

Reporter, Expert and Arguments and Facts, the most common are comparisons formed syntactically, less common are lexical means of expressing comparative meaning, morphological means of formalizing comparison are the least common.

In publicistic discourse, dominant is the semantic sphere “Man” in which a certain historical person, a literary character or a person of a certain kind of activity, etc. are the object of comparison, and the semantic sphere “Animal” is distinguished by set comparisons.

Conclusions

A person obtains most of the information about the world through linguistic channel, so a person lives more in the world of concepts created by them for intellectual, spiritual, social needs than in the world of objects and things. A huge portion of information comes to them through the word and personal success in society depends on their being eloquent in speaking or writing. One of such channels of information and ways of perceiving the world is the category of comparativity.

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Svetlana Sergeevna Safonova, born in 1975, Cand. of Sc. (Philology), Associate Professor. A graduate of Kazan State Pedagogical University with a degree in Philology (1999). Candidate dissertation defence (2002) on Pronominal-Conjunctive Clauses with Intensity Semantics in the Language of Modern Press.

Associate Professor of Russian and Methods of Its Teaching of IPIC KFU. Areas of expertise: cultural linguistics, the language of artistic, publicistic and advertising discourse.

Olga Anatolevna Chupryakova, born in 1979, Cand. of Sc. (Philology), Associate Professor. Graduate of the Yelabuga State Pedagogical Institute with a degree in Philology (2002). Candidate dissertation defence on Semantic Verb Derivation in the Dialects of the Volga-Kamya (2007).

Associate Professor of Russian and Methods of Its Teaching of IPIC KFU. Areas of expertise: Russian dialectology, cultural linguistics, language of literary text.

Anna Vladislavovna Ganitseva, born in 1997. No degree.