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RUSSIAN COMPARATIVE PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS WITH THE BASIS ‘SILLY’ (ГЛУПЫЙ) AND ‘STUPID’ (ТУПОЙ) AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF OTHER LANGUAGES: UNIVERSAL AND NATIONAL

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ABSTRACT

The research objective is in revealing thematic affiliation of standards of stable comparisons, motivation of comparison, the importance of these units in the Russian language consciousness according to questioning of native speakers, as well as to investigate features of their functioning in the modern Russian speech. The analysis of Russian language units was carried out against the background of kindred and not kindred languages. To achieve the goal, the authors have identified the structure of standards of the considered phraseological units according to Russian lexicographical sources, carried out a comparative analysis of the obtained data with the collection of units functioning in the ‘Russian National Corpus’, conducted a survey of native speakers of Russian and of other languages, analyzed the results. The research has shown that thematic spheres of comparison standards in different languages coincide in many respects. The most universal standards are zoonyms. This thematic group, as well as comparisons with standard names of inanimate objects, can be considered to be motivated in all languages. National specific manifests itself in concrete realities chosen as comparison standards. For Slavs in general the choice of ‘wooden’ subject for standards is very typical. A choice of any standard is influenced by such factors as traditional household culture, country geography, folklore ideas of animals. A lacunarity in Russian of such thematic group of standards as names of natural realities is of interest. The results can be used in theory and practice of phraseography when reprinting dictionaries of Russian stable comparisons.

Keywords: stable comparison, comparison basis, comparison standard, thematic group.

INTRODUCTION

Comparative idioms as a special category of phraseological units are present in all languages. The term ‘stable comparison’ (hereinafter - SC) is more common in Russian linguistics. In this research, SC is understood as a stable word combination representing a figurative language tool (figure of speech) which ‘usually is a result of centuries of use’ [9: 4-5]. SC are examined by modern linguists from various points of view, they ‘represent clot of cultural information, allow to say much along with saving language resources and at the same time as deeply as possible, precisely, brightly, specifically national’ [2: 58]. SCs were studied in different aspects (these aspects are defined in the L.A. Lebedeva’s monograph) [3]: in structural-typological, cognitive-functional, ethnolinguistic, psycholinguistic, pragmatic and communicative ones. It should be noted
that there are individual doctoral researches on the linguocultural analysis of stable comparisons characterizing mainly a person’s appearance [e.g., 1, 4, 6].

Comparison takes the extraordinary important role in cognition and language as one way to reflect a language picture of the world of entire people. In this paper we consider it expedient to take the definition proposed by E. S. Yakovleva: a language picture of the world is ‘a reality perception scheme fixed in a language and specific to a given linguistic community’ [7: 47]. The national specificity of SC is evident in distinction of comparison basis’, comparison standards and stereotypes adopted in one or another culture.

SCs with the basis ‘silly’ are present in almost all languages. In this article, the object of research is the SC standards with this basis in the Russian language compared to other languages. As V. N. Telia fairly notes, stable comparisons are a system of image-standards [5: 241-242]. The objective of this research is to identify a common and national-culturally stereotyped understanding of a silly person through the prism of stable comparisons of Russian and other languages. This goal assumes determining a thematic relatedness of SCs standards in Russian and some other languages, their motivation for selection, a representation of comparisons in a language consciousness of native speakers of different linguistic cultures.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials for the study are based on the data of the dictionaries of Russian SCs by L. A. Lebedeva [10], V. M. Ogoltsev [13], V. M. Mokienko [11], V. I. Dahl’s Russian Dictionary [8], materials of ‘Russian National Corpus’ [12] (hereinafter - RNC), results of questioning of native Russians and foreigners.

By the method of full extract from dictionaries of stable comparisons of the Russian literary language we have defined a bulk of SCs standards with the basis ‘silly’ (‘stupid’). Thematic classification of the selected standards allowed us to reveal thematic spheres, relevant for the Russian linguistic culture. To identify the characteristics of SCs in texts of Russian contemporary literary and publicistic literature (based on RNC) methods of the componential, distributive and contextual analysis have been used. Technique of questioning of Russian native speakers made it possible to draw conclusions concerning frequency and common use of particular standards to characterize a silly person. The questionnaire offered 2 tasks: 1) continue number of comparisons silly as …, stupid as …; 2) fill in the table with recorded in dictionaries Russian stable comparisons by placing a plus sign in one of the boxes: ‘I do not know’, ‘I know, but I do not use’ and ‘I know and I use’. The results of the survey of representatives of other linguocultures using techniques of questioning and linguistic interviewing served as a comparative background for the study. Speakers of other languages were invited to further optional assignment – to write what they think can be explained by the existence of this or that standard in their mother tongue.

100 native speakers of Russian took part in the questioning, students and professors of Saint-Petersburg universities at the age from 18 to 70 years acted as informants. Interviewed speakers of other languages were foreign students studying in Russian universities, as well as professors and students of universities of Serbia, Poland,
Germany and other countries, respectively. For the survey were selected 25 representatives of each linguistic culture.

THE CORPUS OF STANDARDS OF RUSSIAN STABLE COMPARISONS ACCORDING TO LEXICOGRAPHIC SOURCES AND THEIR THEMATIC CLASSIFICATION

In the topical vocabulary of Russian stable comparisons by L. A. Lebedeva the list of units with the comparison basis silly (глупый) and stupid (мудрый) looks as follows: silly, stupid as a log (брёво), a billet (полено), a cork (пробка), a ram (баран), a goose (гусь), a gray gelling (сивый мерин); stupid as an oak (мудрый как дуб), a <Siberian> felt boot (сибирский валенок) [10: 215-219]. Dictionaries of Russian stable comparisons by V. M. Mokienko and V. M. Ogoltsev additionally record the following standards of SCs which are of interest to us: a bastard shoe (запоть), a donkey (осел), a heel (нята), a corkscrew (утюпор), a stump (пень), as well as the rhymed SC silly as a woman's navel (глуп как бабий пуп) [11] and silly as a block (а блок из дуба, a cok) (чурба, чурбак, чурка) [13]. V. I. Dahl gives the following SCs: silly as an Indian rooster (дурок как индейский петух), as a sturgeon noggı̇n (как осетровая башка, a Siberian box (как сибирский мусс) [8].

Thus, it is possible to allocate the following groups of standards of Russian SCs: zoonyms and parts thereof – a ram (баран), a goose (гусь), a gray gelling (сивый мерин), a donkey (осел), an Indian rooster (индийский петух), a sturgeon noggı̇n (осетровая башка); names of household realities – a bastard shoe (запоть), a Siberian felt boot (сибирский валенок), a corkscrew (утюпор), a cork (пробка), a Siberian box (сибирский мусс); lexicon nominating different parts of a tree and a breed of a tree (phytonyms) – a log (брёво), a billet (полено), a stump (пень), a block / cok (чурбак, чурка), an oak (дуб) and somatisms – a heel (нята) and a woman’s navel (бабий пуп).

FUNCTIONING OF STABLE COMPARISONS IN MODERN RUSSIAN

RNC’s data indicates that the most common in written sources of the corpus is a comparison standard from the thematic group of names of household realities – a cork (пробка). This standard is applied to characterize both men and women. For instance: «По вас, евреев, говорят, что вы хитрые и мудрые, но ты, видно, туп, как пробка!» [12]; «Работал по письму 1 человек, бывший следак. Тупой, как пробка. Вся работа свелась к его письменным запросам типа "подтвердите, что такие-то факты имели место"» [12]; «Из грязи в князи. Тупой, как пробка. И дочурка в мамашу пошла, такая же безмозглой напыщенной дура» [12]; «Надо ли говорить, что Шуруочка была глупа как пробка?» [12]. Questioning of Russian native speakers confirmed the highest rate of this comparison standard among others. V. M. Mokienko explains the motivation of this SC so that it arose from a more lengthy saying: Глуп как пробка: куда ни ткни, там и торчит [11: 345]

Another standard of this group, which was found in RNC’s contexts, is a felt boot (валенок): «Неотесанный Живодер, лишний рассудка, иронии и форм протяжения, тупой, как сибирский валенок» [12]. A possible choice motivation as standards of the SCs names of footwear is given, in our opinion, in the following
context from the corpus: «Никогда нельзя было, глядя на нее сказать — «Эта девушка пуста как валенок, мокасин, уит или другой род обуви» [12]. A felt boot (валенок) appears also as the SC standard in questionnaires of Russian native speakers.

A survey of Russian native speakers has also revealed other standards from the sphere of household lexicon which are not recorded in dictionaries: a nesting doll (матрешка) and a stool (табуретка). Informants noted that these standards are used only in relation to women.

From the thematic group of standards-zoonyms in the RNC only a ram (баран), a goose (гусь) and a donkey (осел) are recorded. For example: ‘А скажи ведь, — вопрощал Гоша у Жорика, — что Егор глуп, как осел’ [12]; ‘Она сделает даже то, что превышает ее силы, и тут же подохнет от усердия… Говорят еще: глуп, как гусь… А умнее этой птицы нет на свете’ [12]. The SC as a ram (как баран) acts without reference to the basis of comparison, the stupidity of the bearer of this quality is derived from the following contexts: ‘Ну она же женщина — и я, как баран последний, поверил ей!’ [12]; ‘В половине окна стекло уцелело, и там отражался холодильник, а на нем приемник со светящейся шкалой, но я никак не мог понять, что это шкала, и смотрел на нее, как баран, ничего не понимая… потом все-таки понял и смог перевести взгляд наружу, в темноту’ [12]; ‘Может, она все факты уничтожила в уборной?.. А он, как баран, уши развесил. — Слушай, ты никому не говори, что я тебе разрешил домой заехать, поняла?’ [12]. All these SCs are used only in relation to a male. As for the SC as gray gelding (как сивый мерин), it occurs in the RNC’s materials only in contexts of fiction of the 19th century and can characterize both men, and women, e.g.: ‘Глупа, как сивый мерин, чёрт бы её взял’ [12].

A survey of Russian native speakers has shown that the most common in language consciousness of Russians are the SCs with standards-zoonyms a donkey (осел), an ass (ишак), a ram (баран). This number of zoonyms, according to questioning, was replenished with such often noted units as an amoeba (амёба), a turkey-cock (индюк) and a sheep (овца). The latter standard has been specified with the note that it is the characteristic of only females. Among the occasional standards, apparently, should be considered such standards as a woodpecker (дятел) and a he-goat (козел) which were encountered once.

Among SCs with standard-phytonyms in the materials of the RNC were found silly as a stump (глуп как пень) and silly as a log (глуп как бревно): ‘Да, но Раумсдаль глуп, как пень, — удивилась Луна’ [12]; ‘Только и лезет тому счастье, кто глуп, как бревно, ни о чем не думает, ничего не делает.’ [12] The same SCs were given by Russian native speakers expanding the group of these comparison standards with such nouns as a tree (дерево) (the most frequent standard in questionnaires), a cudgel (дубина), a firewood (древа), a board (доска) and a blank (болованка).

Somatisms as SC standards in the materials of the RNC are not met. However, the Internet forums use the SC silly as a woman’s navel (глуп как бабий пуп).

The results of the survey allowed us to identify another group of SC with standards-names of persons which is not recorded in dictionaries: silly as a Neanderthal (глупый как неандерталец), silly as a blonde (глупа как блондинка) and silly as an infant (глупый как младенец).
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RUSSIAN STABLE COMPARISONS AND STABLE COMPARISONS IN OTHER LANGUAGES

The comparative analysis of the considered SCs with other languages which was carried out by questioning of Russian speakers and representatives of kindred and not kindred languages to the Russian language revealed the following.

In Slavic languages the group of ‘wooden’ standards of comparisons was also revealed. So, in Serbian the following SCs function: глуп к ћао – silly as log; глуп к ћао љепанца – silly as billet. In Czech: hloupý jako dуб – silly as oak, hloupý jak kláda - silly as log, block. In Polish: głupi jak pień – silly as tree trunk. SCs with standards-names of household realities are frequently used in speech of native speakers of Slavic languages: in Polish – głupi jak but – stupid as a boot (глупый как ботинок), in Serbian – глуп као ћукача – stupid like a crowbar, ice pick (глупый как лом, пешня), глуп као топач – silly as wheel (глупый как колесо), глуп као дудук – stupid like a tune, a shepherd's flute. In Czech: hloupý jako fusekle - silly as socks, hloupý jako jelito – silly as a blood sausage, břivý jak báckora – bad (silly) as a house slipper, bibej jak bota – as a boot, hloupý jako kredec - as a sideboard. In Bulgarian: тъп като глалуи – silly as a galosh. Standards-zoonyms function in the following comparisons of Slavic languages. In Serbian: глуп као бо – silly as a bull; only about a woman: глупа као кокои, кокошка (a hen), глупа као ћукра (a turkey), глупа као гуска (a goose), глупа као крааа (a cow). In Czech: hloupý jako bulik – silly as a young bull-calf, hloupý jako boži hovádko – silly as God's cattle, hloupý jako osel – silly as a donkey, hloupý jako [uzená] husa – silly as a [smoked] goose, hloupý jak beran – silly as ram, hloupý jak svině – silly as a pig, břivá jako kráva – nasty (silly) as a cow. In Polish: głupi jak osioł – silly as a donkey, głupia jak krowa – silly like a cow. In Bulgarian: глупав като гъска – silly as a goose. However, Bulgarian informants noted that this expression is peculiar only to the elderly. The difference with the Russian language is that Russians for characteristics of a silly woman do not use SCs with standards-zoonyms, but metaphors, e.g. a (silly) hen, cloth ears. The group of SCs with standard-name of a person in Slavic languages includes the following units. In Serbian: глуп као Босанац – silly as a Bosnian, глупа као плесуша – silly as a blonde. In Czech: hloupý jak Tatar - silly as a Tatar, hloupý jak naš Vávra – silly as our Vavra. In Polish: głupia jak blondynka – silly as the blonde. Noteworthy is the fact that the SC ‘silly as a blonde’ is not recorded in Russian dictionaries, and, apparently, it is formed in the Russian speech as a reflection of the prevailing stereotype, whereas in other Slavic languages this SC is present.

In Finno-Ugric languages the most frequently used, according to the conducted survey, is the following SCs. In Hungarian: buta mint a tők – silly as a pumpkin, buta mint a fold – silly as an earth. In Finnish: tyhmä kuin saapas – silly as a boot; sometimes there is an amplification – in the literal translation – silly as a boot from the left leg, tyhmä kuin tynnyri – silly as barrel (this expression uses alliteration), tyhmä kuin aasi – silly as a donkey.

In Germanic languages as the most commonly used are the next SCs: in the German language – dumm wie ein Esel, wie Stroh, wie Brot – silly as a donkey, as straw, as bread; in Dutch: zo dom als het achterste van een varken/koe – silly as a swine’s (cow’s) ass, zo dom als een ezel – silly as a donkey. In Swedish: dum som en gäs – silly as a goose, dum som ett/en spán - silly as a sawdust, lika dum som gud är vis – so stupid, how God is wise, dum som en flundra – silly as a flounder, dum som en kalv –
stupid as a calf, dum som en ko – stupid as a cow, menlös som en dava – silly like a pigeon. In the English language there is a representative group of SCs with standards-zoonyms: as dumb as a fish, an oyster, an ox, a donkey, an ass, a woodcock, as stupid (dumb) as a goose (of a woman), as well as the names of inanimate objects: as dumb as a statue, a stone, a stump, a doorknob, a post, a lamppost, a rock, sand. In the Turkish language, the most frequent are SCs which sound in a literal translation into English as follows: like a goose’s head, like a bird’s brain and dumb as a blonde.

The situation is more complicated if to deal with the Chinese language. The Russian adjective ‘stupid’ corresponds to several Chinese units. Because of it the meaning of the adjective as a part of the following categories of SCs varies:

1. If a Chinese unit corresponds to the Russian translation of the adjective clumsy (неуклюжий), then it is possible to consider such SCs as (literally) silly as a penguin, silly as a bear, silly like Panda, silly as an idol (устукан).

2. If to consider two other Chinese units acting as the translation analog of Russian silly, then they combine the meanings of ‘bad’ and ‘clumsy’, e.g., the SC (literally) silly as pig. As a motivation of the use of this comparison standard Chinese native speakers put forward the version about the long experience of people-watching over the way of life of pigs. These animals eat and sleep a lot. They do not realize that when they gain weight, they will be killed. The SC silly as bear. Motivation of using of comparison standards is a fairy tale. A bear wanted to collect corn and came to a field. He joyously grabbed one corn cob. Then it walked up to the second ear of corn, but it could not understand how it is possible to carry away two at once. Therefore it threw out one, and took the second ear. This was repeated many times. As a result, it spent a lot of time, but could away only one ear of corn. The SC silly as bird flies in advance, i.e., in a figurative sense, this means that a silly person should start to work earlier and work harder than everyone else. This group of SCs includes the following comparisons: silly as bull (cow) and silly as donkey.

3. The Chinese language unit, which functions within the meaning of Russian adjectives bad and naive, is a part of SCs with a collective noun that can be translated into Russian like silly as a pumpkin, a watermelon, a melon. To this class of SCs relates stupid as a post-graduate student, since it is commonly assumed that the higher the intellectual abilities of the person, the less he has interest in anything else than studying. Such units, as someone’s head is silly like a piece of elm and silly as the child, enter into the same group of SCs.

4. Another unit of the Chinese language which can translate the Russian adjective silly, means that a person does not think of anything. Hence such SCs like silly as a goose, silly as a wooden rooster (in ancient China cockfighting was a game of aristocrats).

CONCLUSION

Thus, as a result of the analysis, it is possible to conclude that thematic spheres of standards of SCs in different languages in many respects coincide. The most universal standards are zoonyms. It can be assumed that for centuries of watching pets, such as an ox and a donkey, people saw how much they have to work. Hence the stereotype was formed: everything that exceeds a norm and is not compensated is silly. Names of
poultry – goose, turkey-cock, etc. as standards of stupidity are motivated probably with the same ideas which Chinese have about such a pet as a pig. These birds live, eat, think about nothing and do not know that in the near future will serve as food for humans. Also the idea of silliness of blondes is stereotypical and universal for speakers of different languages. Names of footwear can be also considered universal standards of SCs describing a silly person, as well as names of other household realities as a whole. Motivated can be considered words with standards-names of inanimate objects in general (all names of economic and household realities, by definition, are deprived of mind as a property inherent in objects referred to animate nouns). National specificity is manifested in the concrete realities chosen as comparison standards. For Slavs as a whole the choice of ‘wooden’ subject of SCs standards is very typical. The choice of a standard is influenced by such factors as a traditional household culture, a country geography (different animals are not randomly selected – flounder or Panda, for example) and folklore beliefs about animals. Lacunarity of such Russian theme group of standards of SCs as names of natural realities is of interest. E.g., in Serbian: глуп (глув, луд) kao ноћ – stupid (deaf, crazy) as night, it is similar in Czech - hloupý jako noc; in English – such standards as a stone, a rock, a sand. Obviously, with a certain degree of conditionality in this case we can speak about not typicalness for the Russian consciousness of the idea of stupidity of inanimate nature because of its primordiality and permanence, i.e. about so-called ‘significant’ absence of this group of SCs in the Russian language.

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