

**SCTCMG 2019**  
**International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural  
Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism»**

**TERTIUM COMPARATIONIS OF COMPARATIVE  
COMBINATIONS: COGNITIVE ANALYSIS**

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***Abstract***

The article focuses on the study of a cognitive mechanism in the formation of stable comparative combinations. Comparison is defined as the most important cognitive mechanism, its difference from concepts of identity and simile is represented. The article shows the leading role of a feature during cognition of the surrounding world. The categorical properties of comparative combinations as a universal language phenomenon are defined. Based on the analysis of the feature linking the explained and explaining elements in comparative combinations, various groups of features, combining the base and the goal in comparative combinations are identified. The first group is formed by the motivated attributes of Tertium comparationis, which are included in the core of the lexical meaning or its periphery. Some of the features of this group are stable and unchanging, while others are variable and flexible. The latter is the resultant effect of the objective factors causing changes in the properties of an object both in space and in time. The second group is represented by unmotivated features that cannot link the Comparandum and the Comparatum. The existence of this group of features is explained by the peculiarities of the associative thinking of a person, which is not always random in its nature, and is to some extent regulated by ordinary human knowledge. It is a value-oriented pragmatic knowledge. The expediency of turning to historical facts and the cultural past of the language community is shown. Illustrative material is taken from the Kabardino-Circassian, Russian and English languages.

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**Keywords:** Comparison, comparative combinations, feature, motivated, unmotivated.



## 1. Introduction

Comparison is a multidimensional concept. On the one hand, it is a logical category that plays a significant role in the knowledge of the surrounding reality. Cognition begins with the establishing similarity of an object with other related objects; and with establishing the differences from all other objects. (Kondakov, 1971). Cassirer (2000) emphasized that primarily our cognition is based on the search for a single principle that unites heterogeneous observations into one. The individual must not remain single; it must be subsumed under some category in which it is represented as an element of either a logical or a teleological causal structure. On the other hand, comparison is a language phenomenon comparing the similarities and differences in the various properties, qualities and characteristics of individual objects and phenomena of the surrounding reality. It is also "an element of artistic thinking and it serves the tasks of depicting and unveiling an artistic image" (Zhilin, 1963, p. 87).

The logical comparison procedure involves the following components: 1. *Comparandum* - a concept that requires clarification; 2. *Comparatum* - a concept explaining the original concept; 3. *Tertium comparationis* - the fundamental third element connecting the explained and explaining concepts (Potebnya, 1914). This scheme can be supplemented with two more components: the process of comparison itself and the result of comparison, on the basis of which the identity or similarity of objects is established.

Identity is the final result of the matching procedure. The identity of objects assumes the general external characteristics of two things, and of their similar internal properties. They are used in similar connections, to accomplish the same goal (Fefilov, 2010). Identical relations imply the maximum or complete coincidence of the properties and qualities of the objects being compared. In addition, identity can be defined as the expected, objective result of the comparison of some realities of the objective world, whereas the procedure of establishing similarities implies a certain amount of subjectivism.

It is appropriate to draw the distinction between the figurative comparison, known in English as a *simile*, and the ordinary (uncomplicated) comparison — a *comparison*. The latter implies a comparison of realities belonging to the same class of objects and having, respectively, many common features.

*Simile*, the figurative comparison, assumes the juxtaposition of realities belonging to different classes, ontologically heterogeneous, having no obvious common features and therefore not allowing even the very idea of comparison itself. But the author's communicative intentions, his striving for the figurative expression of thoughts, make it possible to find points of contact between them. As a result, a new subjective image is created, which may include all the qualities of the objects being compared, *except for the general ones* (Miller, 1993). The similarity relationships are dynamic, subjective, and temporary.

## 2. Problem Statement

In the system of language figurative comparisons, a rather solid layer of comparative structures is distinguished. These structures become stable and reproducible and pass into the category of phraseological combinations. They begin to perform the nominative function. A distinctive feature of comparative combinations is that their semantic component appears in its significative aspect. It represents a certain concept and reflects the essential attributes of a whole class of objects.

The appearance of the comparative structures and their fixation in the language is dictated by the needs of everyday knowledge. The intention to understand the essence of any object, its properties and

qualities, to make it more accessible to consciousness, to give it an assessment determines the person's appeal to the simple things of the objective world, accessible to his sensual perception.

Comparative combinations are heterogeneous as to the nature of conveyed meaning. Sometimes this is a reinforcement of a feature inherent in the first element of the structure:

Russian: *худой как щепка* – as thin as a sliver, very thin;

Kabardian: *уэсым хуэдэу хужь* – *хужьыбзэ* - very white;

English: *black as ink* - very black;

*soft as butter* – very soft, soft-bodied.

In stable complexes, an explanatory element sometimes performs a characterizing function, for example:

Russian: *молчит, как в рот воды набрал* - silent as if having a full mouth of water;

Kabardian: *къурт ижъэм жьдэна хуэдэу* (as if a dry cheese was stuck in the mouth);

English: *gibber like an ape* – one speaks quickly, incomprehensibly, indistinctly, like a monkey.

Heterogeneous nature of the formed meaning dictates the need for a differentiated approach to *Tertium comparationis* - which connects the explained (*goal*) and clarifying (*base*) concepts (Gentner, Holyoak, & Kokinov, 2001). A *base*, or a source is an analogue from which some properties are borrowed, or an interpreter structure. For example, in Russian language: in a comparison “*худой, как щепка*” [*as thin as a sliver*], the base is the name “*sliver*”, and the goal is such a quality as “*thin*”. The goal, therefore, is an analogue that stimulates the creation of an explanatory structure. The choice of the goal is determined by the speaker's intention to clearly and vividly express his thought, to give an exhaustive description of the subject of speech, to make it vivid and understandable.

To understand the cognitive processes that are reflected in comparative combinations, it seems appropriate to consider the mechanism of stable combinations formation, answering the questions: it is similar to *what*? it is similar in *what respect*? what features does it *remind*? etc. to highlight *Tertium comparationis*, which combines the clarified and clarifying concepts.

### 3. Research Questions

The study of the structure and semantics of comparative phraseological units is highlighted in a fairly large number of works. Scholars are interested in the component composition of these combinations, their thematic affiliation, peculiarities of functioning in different languages (Sologub, 1985; Kopylenko & Popova, 1989; Dmitrieva, 2000; and others). Studies on the cognitive analysis of comparative combinations, research of the internal mechanisms of their emergence through the analysis of *Tertium comparationis* – a connection of *goal* and *base*, began to appear relatively recently (Prokhorova, 2006, 2012; Goldberg, 2007; Denisova, 2009; Petkelite, 2011; Goldberg, 2013).

To study the cognitive mechanisms of the comparative combinations formation, we try to reconstruct the process of their formation on the basis of combinations fixed in the language.

The work examines the following questions:

- a. The role of the feature in the semantic organization of comparative combinations.
- b. Inclusion of the feature in the core / periphery of the structure of the lexical meaning of the *base*.
- c. Motivated / unmotivated choice of the feature.

Naturally, in different languages different language means are used to express the logical-conceptual content of the comparison. The difference in the employed language recourses can be accounted for by the typological characteristics of the syntax of the phrase and the expression of the grammatical category of comparison. The formal side of the linguistic representation of comparison is not included in the range of issues studied in this paper.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the work is to identify and systematize the features (*Tretium comparationis*) inherent to the objects that form the *base* - the explaining part (*Comparatum*) of the comparative combinations, and to establish the nature of the connection of this characteristic with the *goal* of the explained stable part (*Comparandum*).

Illustrative material was selected from the dictionaries of the Kabardino-Circassian language (Kardanov, 1968; Dictionary of Kabardino-Circassian Language, 1999), Russian (Yarantsev, 2001; Teliya, 1995) English (Collins Cobuild Dictionary of English Idioms, 1997; Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, 1998).

In linguistic literature there are various names of the phenomenon under study. Two synonymous terms are used in the work: comparative combinations (CC) and stable combinations (SC). For convenience, a shortened version of Kabardino-Circassian language - Kabardian language is used in the paper.

#### **5. Research Methods**

In the course of the study, general scientific methods were used, involving the *analysis* and *synthesis* of the selected material, *descriptive* and *comparative* methods, the method of *cognitive modeling*, as well as *introspective* analysis, which is based on the language intuition.

#### **6. Findings**

The concept "feature" has an unambiguous interpretation. It has a different role in the process of cognition. So, for example, gestalt psychologists do not recognize a feature as a significant element in the perception of the image. In their opinion, gestalt is the integrity of the image - that is what is decisive in the perception and knowledge of the world (Solso, 1996). Of course, the object is perceived in its integrity, but then there is a selection of an individual attribute of the object, the fixation of some special, significant, may be somewhat unusual features. Separation of a feature from the object is possible only in our consciousness as a result of the abstractive ability of human thinking. This process is dictated by the objective desire of a person to penetrate into the essence of a thing, to know it deeper in its entirety.

The design of the comparative combination is dictated by objective reasons for visibility of thinking. At one time, Humboldt (1985) drew attention to the "objectivity" of the human language, emphasizing that "language expresses its thoughts and feelings as objects" (p. 283).

The same is true of stable combinations. Its first component *Comparandum* is specified, evaluated, determined through reference to a specific item. Among its features, one or several are singled out, which, from the point of view of the speaker of this language, best illustrate the qualities and properties of the *Comparandum*. The choice of the second, an explanatory element of a combination, is predetermined by

stereotypes of ordinary consciousness. The empirical basis of stereotypes of everyday consciousness is formed by the objective space that surrounds a person and the natural and geographical conditions of his habitat.

For example, in the Kabardian language, a high degree of *guilt* is transmitted to the CC *арэфу къуанишэ* - (transl.: guilty, as wrong as a hook). As a reference base, an “*арэф*” instrument (a hook) is used - a wooden stick curve, having a sharply bent end. It is used to get the logs out of the water, or to moor. The sharply bent end of a flat stick served as the basis for its use as a standard of *wrongness* in this linguistic culture. But not that only. The standardization of this object is preceded by a long “familiarity”, a good knowledge of all the characteristics of this device, and the “approval” by the language speakers of its use for conceptualizing the degree of human unlawfulness. So, in order for an object to serve as a *base* in a comparative combination, it must have the properties of selectivity, salinity (Langacker, 2000). This property is a necessary condition for choosing one or another object of the objective world as the basis for the figurative conceptualization of abstract qualities.

The study of the characteristics of the base used in the CC, their correlation with the vocabulary representation of the structure of their lexical meaning, as well as with our knowledge of the object, revealed the following results.

First of all, the group of motivated features peculiar to the *base* of the CC is highlighted. They are formed by the essential features of objects, if we consider the sign from the point of view of its role in the categorization of objects, They, as a rule, are unchanged, rigidly defined, are included in the conceptual basis of the lexeme and are reflected in the corresponding vocabulary interpretations.

Here are some examples:

**Kabardian:**

*вындым хуэдэу фIыцIэц* – as black as a raven; ‘вынд’ is a ‘bird, a passerine with black plumage’.

*зэзым хуэдэу дыджц* – as bitter as a bile; ‘зэз’ - ‘yellow-green bitter liquid’

*фом хуэдэу афын* - as sweet as honey - ‘фо’ - sweet product produced by bees in the spring’

*уэсым хуэдэу* – as white as snow. ‘Snow’ - ‘precipitation falling in the form of white star-shaped crystals or in the form of flakes, representing an accumulation of such crystals.

**Russian:**

*горький как редька; ‘редька’* - ‘root crop with thick and light (in dark skin) root and pungent taste and smell’

*горький как полынь; ‘полынь’* - ‘ether-bearing plant with a strong smell and bitter taste’

*сладкий как мед* - very sweet; ‘мед’ - ‘sweet, healthy matter produced by bees from nectar.

*плестись, как черепаха* – to go very slowly. ‘черепаха’ – a reptile creeping slowly on its short limbs, covered with a bone shell’.

**English:**

*red as raspberry* - ‘raspberry’ – ‘an edible soft fruit related to the blackberry, consisting of a cluster of reddish-pink drupelets’

*as slow as a snail* - ‘a snail’ – ‘any mollusk... having a spirally coiled shell and a ventral muscular foot on which it slowly glides about’.

*as black as a crow;*

*as black as a raven's wing* - 'Raven' - 'a large heavily built crow with black plumage, feeding chiefly on carrion'.

The interpretation of the meaning in the dictionary entry is aimed at enumerating those essential features that distinguish this particular object from similar ones. Therefore, for the most part, the characteristic features are not reflected in the dictionary definitions of the base, although they form a general knowledge of the object and are included in the core of the lexical meaning of the naming language unit.

Lexicographic traditions of representation of meaning do not coincide with elements of the prototype categorization procedure. They can also be qualified as intrinsic attributes, more typical of the items called base, although they allow for some changes. Here the time factor is triggered, causing changes in the structure and character of the reference comparison feature, as well as its use according to its utilitarian purpose. For example, in the Russian language CC, *as red as a crayfish* - 'crayfish' is used as a *red* reference because it becomes red as a result of heat treatment. It is precisely in this quality, like cooked food, that it is of interest to native Russian speakers, which is reflected in the language in the form of a fixed combination. We illustrate what has been said on the material of the English CC *as warm as a toast*. The main differential feature of toast, from the point of view of everyday knowledge, is its heat treatment – "*sliced bread browned on both sides by exposure to radiant heat, such as a grill or fire*". That it is a salient feature that is significant for Anglo-Saxon culture speakers.

Here are some examples from the **Kabardian** language:

*дэным хуэдэу пльыжыц* – as red as a coal, it is used when speaking about a person of experiencing shame, awkwardness. It is known that hot coal is *red*;

*абджым хуэдэу джэфэ* – as smooth as a glass. 'Glass' 'is a transparent solid material obtained from silica sand and oxides of a number of metals'. Normally, glass should have a smooth surface. This, however, does not exclude changes in this feature due to some reasons and goals.

*цхьэ матэ* - a head like a basket (about a big head). *Матэ* – a basket, wicker of twigs. It was used in harvesting and storage. It is usually large in size.

*мыльым хуэдэу* - as cold as ice, very cold. *Мыл* - 'frozen water turned into a solid state'. From the dictionary definition it is clear that the transfer of water to another state of aggregation is important. The scalar temperature parameters are not essential for the interpretation of the conceptual content of the word. But everyone knows that the ice is cold.

Essential features reflecting the general knowledge of the object are included in the core of the lexical meaning of the base of the CC. In addition to them, peripheral features that perform the function of *Tertium comparationis* are highlighted. They surround the core of the lexical meaning, and are included in its implication. Peripheral features are marked by variability and are subjective. However, they are actively used as a basis for explaining the *Comparandum* of a stable combination.

For example:

**Kabardian:**

*ужьым хуэдэу (цабэрыкӀуэ)* (translation: those, whose pace is similar to the soft habits of a weasel); It is said about a person, mostly a woman, who moves quickly and silently. A weasel is very nimble and agile, runs fast, is very bold and aggressive.

*аслъэным хуэдэу къаруу* (as strong as a lion) - a lion is a large predatory mammal with short yellowish hair and a magnificent mane in males. Leo embodies the standard of strength, rather because of

its size and the status of the “king of beasts,” although elephants, grizzly bears and gorillas actually have more power.

*къанжэ кIакIэу (мэпIэнкI)* – bursting like a magpie. This bird is known for its beautiful plumage and natural ability to chatter without stopping.

*бажэм хуэдэу бзаджэ* - sly like a fox. ‘Fox’ is a predatory mammal of the family of canines with lush fur and long fluffy tail’. Long-term observation of the habits of this animal allowed carriers of many linguistic cultures to notice its resourcefulness and ingenuity, which gave reason to use this zoonym for conceptualizing such a quality as cunning.

*цыжъбанэу зызэрыгъэтицхьэн* (to cringe, curl up like a hedgehog) - to withdraw into yourself.

*нартыху гъэпIэнкIам хуэдэу* - (to speak without stopping, as if frying popcorn). It is known that the preparation of maize is accompanied by characteristic sounds.

Similar examples from **Russian**:

*Неуклюж как медведь* (as awkward as a bear) - about a cumbersome man. Although the bear, in fact, climbs trees very well, it is very agile and mobile when fishing, for example. He is clever, smart, and easy to train.

Also, the features that form the basis of the following CC do not always show the quality and properties of the *Comparandum*, the concept requiring clarification:

*голодный, как волк* (as hungry as a wolf);

*злой, как собака* (as angry as a dog);

*важный, как павлин* (as proud as a peacock);

*кроткий, как голубь* (as meek as a dove);

*здоров, как бык (конь)* (as healthy as a bull (horse));

*робкий как ягненок* (as timid like a lamb);

*трястись, как осиновый лист* (to shake like an aspen leaf);

Here are some examples from the **English** language:

*as soft as butter*. ‘Butter’ - a pale yellow edible fatty substance made by churning cream’. As it can be seen from the definition, softness is not included in the characteristics that categorize this product.

Other examples from this group:

*as graceful as a swan,*

*as live as a bird;*

*as tame as a chicken;*

*as gay as a lark;*

*as sharp as a serpent's tooth;*

*as agile as a monkey.*

In addition to the motivated features, which, as has been shown, can occupy a central or peripheral position in the structure of features of a class of objects forming the base of CC, unmotivated features have also been identified. Those features are unmotivated that an object cannot possess under any circumstances. They are attributed to it by the language community for the figurative objectification of the *Comparandum*, the explained part of the comparative combination.

For example:

**Kabardian:**

*мэл дэгү хуэдэ* (like a deaf sheep);

*Лэ гуахьуэ* (hands like pitchfork; about those who can't do anything)

*кьхуэ хуэдэ чэф* (as drunk as a pig);

*хьэ фызышэ нэхъей* (as at a dog "wedding" - about the bad company);

*хывым еса жьэмыжь хуэдэ* (like a cow accustomed to a buffalo (about a slow and good-natured person);

*шыдым хуэдэу ерыщиц* (as stubborn as a donkey)

*ахьшэр бзум хуэдэиц: кьыбжьэхолъатэ, ЛуолъэтыкIыж* (money is like a fluttering birdie: ones fly, and ones fly away);

#### **Russian:**

*глухой как пробка; тупой как пробка* (as deaf as a cork; as stupid as a cork);

*глух, как тетерев* (as deaf as a black grouse);

*как гусь глуп* (as stupid as a goose);

*пьяный как сапожник* (as drunk as a shoemaker);

*глуп как пень* (as stupid as a stump);

*довольный как слон* (as satisfied as an elephant);

#### **English:**

*as deaf as a stone;*

*as dumb as a fish;*

*as deaf as an adder (deaf as a viper, too);*

*drunk as lord, (here lord is a high rank or high office; a nobleman).*

*as drunk as a fiddler;*

*as drunk as a skunk;*

*as drunk as (a boiled) an owl,*

*as poor as church mouse;*

*as silly as a goose;*

*as blunt as a hammer;*

*crazy as a bed-bug;*

The language material shows a large variety of objects that serve as a *base* with unmotivated features in the CC. Their analysis allows us to draw some conclusions about the general laws of choice of an object. If the explained concept - the goal - is qualified by the language community as negative, then the *base* will be chosen accordingly with negative connotation. For example, in Russian: *пьяный как свинья*; in Kabardian: *кьхуэм хуэдэ чэф*; in English: *as drunk as a skunk*.

In those cases when it is necessary to actualize the negative pole of manifestation of any qualities and properties of a person, the choice falls on simple, primitive tools and objects. For example, English: *as blunt as a hammer*; Russian: *тупой, как сибирский валенок* (stupid as a Siberian felt boot) - about a very stupid, uneducated person. In some cases, the inferiority of the object, called the *base*, can also motivate its choice. For example, Russian: *глухой как пень; тупой как пень*. (‘*пень*’-‘protruding remnant of a fallen or a broken tree’).

With all the ontological “disunity” of the base and the goal, some excursus into history allows us to establish a connection between them. For example, the English CC *as drunk as lord*. It is likely, that the



base *lord* actualizes such facts as the opportunity to drink strong drinks, which only the representatives of the upper class - the lords – had. Another English combination: *as poor as church mouse*, in which the degree of the poverty is conceptualized by reference to the church mouse. To some extent, this can be explained by the fact that rats and mice had nothing to live off in the church: food was not stored there. Facts from the history of the life of the Kabardian ethnos shed light on the use of the word *pumpkin* for the qualification of a stupid person: *мхбэ кбэб* (a head like a pumpkin). Previously, Kabardians used hollow pumpkin as a container in everyday life. Here the analogy of an “empty” head and a hollow pumpkin is traced.

In general, the choice of a base with an unmotivated attribute, although it is of an associative character, these associations are not accidental. Otherwise, the CC would not be fixed in the language and would remain at the level of an occasional phenomenon.

## 7. Conclusion

The study of the CC from the point of view of the principles of their formation showed that *Tertium comparationis*, features linking the explaining and the explained parts are heterogeneous. They are divided into two groups - motivated and unmotivated features. The first combines the essential features that are included in the core of the lexical meaning of the word, which denotes the *base*, explaining part of the CC, and peripheral features, representing the system of our knowledge of the object, denoted by the base. The second unmotivated group has no features uniting the base and goal.

The choice of the comparison *base* is made due to everyday knowledge of a person and is determined by his needs and requirements. Ordinary knowledge is value-oriented pragmatic knowledge. This feature determines the choice of the base and goal of comparison, and accordingly the formation of *Tertium comparationis*.

Universal values, similar natural and ecological environment, the same practical experience, predetermine the similarity in the semantic arrangement of comparative combinations in terms of their base and goal in different languages.

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