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Semantic Relations in The Comparative Phraseological Units in English and Bulgarian

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Abstract. The investigation is an attempt to define the nature and the place of the comparative phraseological units in English and Bulgarian in respect to their semantics. A semantic classification of the units is developed. It stresses upon the symbols used in the comparative units. It also throws light on the way of the thinking, the everyday life, the historical events, the folklore and the beliefs of the investigated nations. The resemblances and the differences are outlined and discussed.

Key Words: Comparative phraseological units, Semantic groups, Image.

Özet. Bu araştırma, İngilizce ve Bulgarcadaki sözcüksel yapıların yerini ve doğasını semantiklerine göre karşılaştırmalı olarak tanımlamaya yöneliktir. Çalışmada, yapıların semantik bir sınıflaması geliştirilmiş ve karşılaştırmalı yapılarda kullanılan semboller vurgulanmıştır. Ayrıca bu araştırma, her iki ulusun düşünme tarzlarına, günlük yaşamlarına, tarihsel olaylarına, folkloruna ve inanışlarına ışık tutmaktadır. Benzerlik ve farklılıklar ortaya konularak tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Karşılaştırmalı sözcüksel yapılar, semantic gruplar, simge.

INTRODUCTION

This article is part of a bigger investigation on the comparative phraseological units in English and Bulgarian, namely the author's PhD thesis. The comparative phraseological units represent a specific layer in language phraseology due to their structure and semantics. They incorporate in themselves the three basic characteristic features of the phraseological units:

1) Segmental structure of the lexical components, 2) Reproduction in the speech act as ready-made units and 3) Expressive character as a result of a semantic transformation.

The **corpus** of the present investigation consists of 729 comparative units in English (ECUs) and 1315 comparative units in Bulgarian (BCUs). The corpora are drawn out of a significant number of lexicographic references (see below). The presence of the comparative unit into the phraseological compilations is considered to represent a proof for defining the unit as being fixed and not randomly uttered.

The **aim** is to establish the semantic relations that exist between the units, where we find the greatest resemblances or differences in the two investigated languages. The material is organized into several semantic groups that facilitate the investigation process. The study's contribution is mainly to the process of translation and the rendering of an adequate meaning and also the English language teaching.

The **contrastive method** of the investigation involves the identification procedure that allows the finding of the exact unit match in both languages; English and Bulgarian. The methods of the investigation also include 1) contrastive analysis of the units' structure that requires the structural-typological procedure and 2) contrastive analysis of the units' functioning in the speech act that requires the distributional procedure. The leading role is given to the overall expressive meaning.

The **results** will show the percentage of the identical, the close in meaning and the comparative units that have no correspondence in one of the investigated languages. This quantitative approach throws light not only on the language facts but also on some spheres of the human thinking and culture.

Results and Discussion. The comparative phraseological units represent a two-component system of the type <as> white as snow (бял като сняг), <as> hungry as a wolf (гладен като вълк), work like a slave (работя като

добитък). The leading component in the present investigation is the symbol, the key-word expressed by the second element.

The following groups can be outlined:

ECUs and BCUs that have **an animal** as a semantic base

This group contains 153 ECUs and 334 BCUs.

ECUs and BCUs that have **a plant, fruit** as a semantic base

Here external qualities like the color, the freshness and the beauty are being taken into consideration. The group includes 23 ECUs and 65 BCUs.

ECUs and BCUs that have **objects from everyday life** as semantic bases

Such are 100 ECUs and 142 BCUs.

ECUs and BCUs that have **historical events, custom, celebrations, folklore, religion** as semantic bases

This group includes comparative units that are extremely culture specific. And that's why we expect great differences between the symbols used in the phraseological units. In English there are 44 and in Bulgarian – 60.

ECUs and BCUs that have **people** – their social status, profession, nationality, family relations as semantic bases

This group presupposes great differences, too, bearing in mind the different way of life of the two nations. In English there are 15 and in Bulgarian – 133. This group shows great number differences. We can draw the conclusion that the social status of the people, their profession, nationality and family relations are of great importance for the Bulgarians and that is expressed in the existence of so many BCUs containing the symbol.

ECUs and BCUs that can be generally said to have **nature** as a semantic base

The comparative units here are based on the image of the mountain, the rocks, the stone, the storm, the lightning, the night, the wind, the rain, etc. such are 58 ECUs and 53 BCUs.

The analysis of the different semantic groups shows the following results:

ECUs and BCUs that have an animal as a semantic base

The ECUs and BCUs that have an animal as a semantic base express a significant dominance of the domestic animals used as symbols compared to the wild animals (67 ECUs – 43% and 198 BCUs – 59%). This fact is quite

normal and derives from the universal part of the human thinking to compare things with the closest and most well-known objects. This conclusion is also confirmed by S. Munitsa while analyzing the comparative units in German and in Ukrainian (Муница / Munitsa, 1975, p.13).

The negative characteristics of the animal (appearance, behavior) prevail as a comparison symbol (102 ECUs – 66% and 291 BCUs – 87%). This fact also has its explanation – the negative characteristics are more powerful, expressive and emotional. The same conclusion is also drawn by I. Chernisheva in regard to the German comparative units:

“Наиболее ярко оценочный характер компаративных фразеологизмов проявляется при отрицательной характеристике, чем, очевидно, объясняется и их численный перевес” (Чернышева / Chernisheva, 1970, p. 48).

“The negative connotation of the comparative phraseological units prevails and that is evident from their great quantity” (Chernisheva, 1970, p. 48).

This semantic group includes many identical units (48 units – 10%) and ECUs and BCUs that are close in meaning (56 units – 11%). The identical comparative units have the same structure (form) and meaning in English and in Bulgarian. Relatively close are those units that experience a slight difference in structure and meaning. For example, the pig / swain is associated with negative features both in English and in Bulgarian:

English	Bulgarian
eat like a pig	ям като свиня

The **dog** as a symbol is used in 7 ECUs and 33 BCUs, the **cat** in 8 ECUs and 18 BCUs, the **pig/swain** in 6 ECUs and 12 BCUs, the **rabbit** in 5 ECUs and 15 BCUs, the **sheep** in 3 ECUs and 8 BCUs, the **lamb** in 4 ECUs and 2 BCUs, the **donkey** in 3 ECUs and 14 BCUs, the **fish** in 5 ECUs and 7 BCUs, the **wolf** in 3 ECUs and 8 BCUs, the **horse** in 2 ECUs and 13 BCUs, the **mouse** in 1 ECU and 12 BCUs.

In Bulgarian a great number of the comparative units are based on the symbol of the **frog** – 9 BCUs, the **fly** – 9 BCUs, the **bull** – 9 BCUs, the **camel** – 5 BCUs.

The symbol of the rabbit is the reason for the existence of many identical units in both languages:

English	Bulgarian
<as> timid as a hare	плашлив като заек

<as> scared as a rabbit	страхлив като заек
breed like rabbits	плодим се като зайци
run like a hare / rabbit	бягам като <изтърван, пушнат> заек

The animal-based ECUs and BCUs show no great differences in the chosen symbol and their linguistic realization. Both nations recognize the pig as a symbol of uncleanness; the rabbit of speed, fear and fast breeding; the wolf of hunger, great appetite; the fox of slyness; the bee of work; the bull of strength; the donkey of stupidity, etc.

The semantic closeness expressed by ECUs and BCUs supports the thesis of U. Dolgoplov on the national specifics of the phraseological units and their investigation:

“В целом, однако, гипертрофирование или даже абсолютизация национальной исключительности фразеологии, с одной стороны, принципиально неверны, а, с другой стороны, заслоняют возможность сопоставительного и структурно-типологического изучения фразеологических систем различных языков” (Долгополов / Dolgoplov, 1973, p. 27).

“To underline the culture specificity of language phraseology is quite wrong and what’s more it hinders the possibilities for contrastive studies” (Dolgoplov, 1973, p. 27).

There are a definite number of ECUs (101) and BCUs (282) that lack in one of the languages. Comparisons based on *the bandicoot* lack in Bulgarian because of the simple fact that the animal does not exist in the Bulgarian nature. But even if it exists, the mere existence is not a guarantee for generating comparative units. This brings the problem of **choice** into light. Not all existing animals become symbols of the phraseological units. The comparative units are emotional and expressive in nature, not nominal. Their aim is to show attitude, not to name phenomena. Such nominal units are the words.

ECUs and BCUs that have a plant, fruit as a semantic base

This group includes 8 ECUs (34%) and 19 BCUs (29%) from all the phraseological units that fall into the different semantic groups. Most of them are formed on the basis of the color or the freshness of the plant. And exactly this objective quality is the reason for the great number of the identical or the close in meaning ECUs and BCUs:

English	Bulgarian
	Identical comparative phraseological units
<as> black as sloes	черен като трънка
stick to smb like bur<r>	закачам се като шипка; закатанчвам се като драка
quake (or quiver, shake, tremble) like an <aspen> leaf	треперя като лист
grow (or spring up)	растат като гъби <след дъжд>
like mushrooms	

Close in meaning comparative phraseological units

blush like a rose	почервенявам / почервенея като божур
<as> fresh as a daisy	свеж (бодър) като кукуряк
<as> red as a rose	червен като трендафил
like two peas <in a pot>	лика прилика като два стръка иглика

There are also comparative units that are not motivated and do not find their correspondence in the other language (10 ECUs and 52 BCUs):

English	Bulgarian
<as> good as a wheat	наред като тиква на плет
<as> cool as a cucumber	стоя (седя) като дъб
like old gooseberry	пълен като слива

ECUs and BCUs that have objects from everyday life as a semantic base

The comparative units here vary considerably in their semantic relations. Most of them do not have a counterpart in the other language. They are typical for the different language realities. (79 ECUs and 121 BCUs – 82% altogether).

The identical and the close in meaning units are considerably less in number (10% identical, 8% close in meaning units):

English	Bulgarian
	Identical comparative phraseological units
<as> sharp as a razor	остър като бръснач

<as> smooth as satin	гладък като сатен
<as> hard as iron	твърд като желязо
<as> straight as a poker (or ramrod)	прав като пръчка
<as> white as a sheet	бял като платно
<as> flat as a board	плосък като дъска
speak (or talk) like a book	говоря като по книга
smoke like chimney	пуша като комин
go (or sell) like hot cakes	вървя (или продавам) като топъл хляб

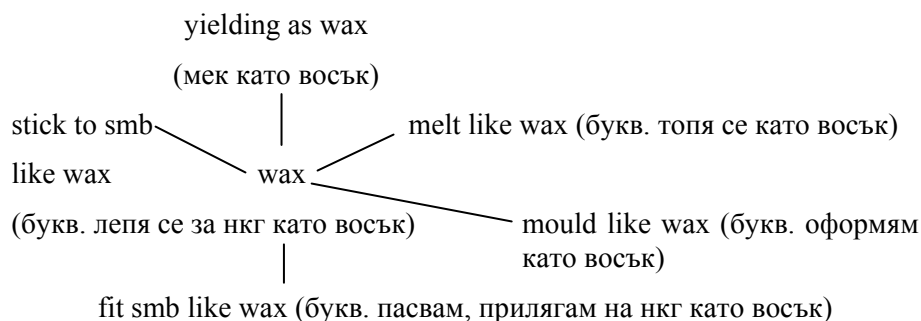
Close in meaning comparative phraseological units

<as> thin as a lath	тънък като вретено (или остен)
<as> white as chalk	бял като сирене
<as> round as a barrel	дебел като бъчва (или буре)

The identical ECUs and BCUs are based on an objectively observed characteristic. And exactly this characteristic becomes the most typical for the object, in other words it becomes a symbol. In English sharpness is associated with the razor, hardness is associated with the iron, whiteness with the sheet and etc. Sometimes one and the same object generates different comparative units. Since an object is viewed as many-sided, one of the investigated languages may stress upon one characteristic and the other highlightens another:

English	Bulgarian
<as> clean as a whistle (букв. чист като свирка)	тънък (слаб) като свирка
<as> hard as the nether millstone	бърз като на воденицата долния Камък

It's also possible that the different characteristics of an object to generate several comparative units. The semantic base "wax" in English forms five comparative units:



The same semantic base forms BCUs that are completely different in meaning than ECUs. Bulgarian associates wax with the yellow color: *жълт като восък, пожълтявам / пожълтея (прежълтявам / прежълтея) като восък (<as> yellow as wax).*

Bearing in mind the fact that the two nations have different ways of life, folklore, history, etc., we naturally observe many comparative units that do not have a correspondence in the other language:

English - <as> rough as a nutmeg-grater, <as> safe as the bank, <as> keen as mustard, phony (or queer) as a three-dollar bill, go up and down like a yo-yo

Bulgarian - влача нкг подире си като съдран цървул, излишен като ер голям, отпуснал се като свински цървул, мътен като боза, свил се като наденица в копаня, бистър като боза, гол като хурка (фурка), сериозен като ибрик, рошав като разплетена дамаджана, etc.

ECUs and BCUs that have historical events, custom, celebrations, folklore, religion as a semantic base

This semantic group presupposes the greatest differences in the investigated languages (34 ECUs and 50 BCUs – 81% altogether).

ECUs and BCUs based on historical events and characters

English	Bulgarian
<as> dead as Queen Ann	вървя (или ходя) като в турски гробища; минавам като през (покрай) турски гробища;
<as> dead as Julius Caesar	стоя (или заставам) като

	Наполеон пред Ватерло;
<as> thin as a whipping-post	мълча като турско гробище;
<as> game as Ned Kelly	работя като на бейлик

Most of the BCUs are generated during the period of the Turkish reign. For example, *вървя (ходя) като в турски гробища* – walk like in a Turkish graveyard means walk with difficulty as the stones in the Turkish graveyards were placed without any specific order, in chaos. It's important to point out that most of these units slowly pass into oblivience.

ECUs and BCUs based on celebrations, folklore, tales

English	Bulgarian
<as> tall as a maypole;	ходя като вампир;
<as> merry as a marriage-bell;	ходя като таласъм;
climb like steeple Jack;	ям като ламя;
grin like a Cheshire cat.	живеем като в дядовата ръкавичка.

ECUs and BCUs based on religion and beliefs

Christianity generates many comparative phraseological units that are close in meaning (16 КФЕ – 15% altogether):

English	Bulgarian
<as> old as Methuselah	стар като Мефасуил
<as> sure as death	грозен като смъртта
<as> poor as Job	беден като Йов
<as> still as death (or as the grave)	тих като смъртта
<as> proud as Lucifer	хитър като дявол
<as> black as hell	черен като дявол
fear smb, sth as the devil fears holly water	страхувам се (или боя се) като дявол от тамян

ECUs and BCUs that have people – their social status, profession, nationality and family relations

This semantic group experience little resemblance between the ECUs and BCUs (11 ECUs and 130 BCUs – 96% altogether).

flow like water тече (лее се) като река

<as> red as fire (flame)

горещ като огън

sink like a stone

падам/падна

(тупвам/тупна) като камък

Most of the identical and the close in meaning units derive from the objectively observed facts that are the same for the two language realities. The units that do not have correspondences are relatively small in number (34 ECUs and 29 BCUs):

English

Bulgarian

<as> deaf as a stone

изчезвам/изчезна като мъгла

<as> black as ebony

минавам (преминавам/премина)

като мълния

<as> green as grass

тих като водата

<as> loud as thunder

изчезвам/изчезна като (яко) дим

<as> black as soot

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the different semantic groups of ECUs and BCUs leads us to draw the following conclusions:

1. Despite the structural differences, ECUs and BCUs experience a great closeness in respect to their meaning (110 identical units – 9% and 136 close in meaning units – 11,5%). This observation derives from the following facts:

- people have close mentality, behavior, reaction and perception regardless of their nationality;
- shared cultural values;
- calques.

2. ECUs and BCUs based on national specific characteristics are less than expected. Bearing in mind the different historical background and the geographical distance between the two nations, we expected a significant difference in the language bases (269 ECUs – 68% and 664 BCUs – 84% or 932 units - 79% altogether).

3. The negative characteristics of the semantic base experience greater emotional effect. Thus most of the ECUs and the BCUs have a negative connotation (207 ECUs – 52% and 590 BCUs – 74%)
4. One and the same base can generate different comparative units in the two investigated languages. The different characteristics of an object can also form up to several comparative units (e. g. wax).
5. The semantic bases in ECUs and BCUs are not arbitrary. They are deliberately chosen to designate the most typical characteristics of an object.
6. According to their semantic closeness ECUs and BCUs can be presented into the following way:

Group	Identical		Close in meaning		No correspondence – altogether		Number	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	ECUs	BCUs
A	48	10	56	11	383	79	153	334
B	8	9	18	20	62	69	23	65
C	22	10	20	8	200	82	100	142
D	4	4	16	15	84	81	44	60
E	2	1	4	3	141	96	14	133
F	26	23	22	20	63	57	58	53

Legend:

Group A – ECUs and BCUs that have an animal as a semantic base.

Group B - ECUs and BCUs that have a plant, fruit as a semantic base.

Group C - ECUs and BCUs that have objects from everyday life as semantic bases.

Group D - ECUs and BCUs that have historical events, custom, celebrations, folklore, religion as semantic bases.

Group E - ECUs and BCUs that have people – their social status, profession, nationality, family relations as semantic bases.

Group F - ECUs and BCUs that have nature as a semantic base.

68% of ECUs and 84% of BCUs do not have a correspondence in one of the investigated languages. Most of them are formed on the culturally specific bases and derive from the everyday life, the history, the way of life of the two nations.

Despite the differences, there is a considerable number of identical and close in structure and meaning ECUs and BCUs (21%). This is due to:

- a) close thinking and mentality of the people;
- b) shared cultural values;
- c) calques.

Most of ECUs and BCUs (90%) characterize people – appearance, behavior, emotional relations, moral values, social status, etc. A small number of ECUs and BCUs (10%) characterize nature – objects, animals, etc. Many of the ECUs and the BCUs that have an animal as a semantic base are identical (10%) or close in meaning (11%). ECUs and BCUs that are formed on the basis of everyday life activities differ considerably in their meaning (79% ECUs and 85% BCUs). The culture specific comparative units represent a valuable source for reaching language proficiency both in the foreign and the mother tongue.

The results of the investigation and the respected corpora can be used in the foreign language teaching and will undoubtedly facilitate the foreign teaching process. The paper is also of importance to the translators of English into Bulgarian. The outlined semantic groups of comparative phraseological units in English and Bulgarian are very appropriate for further contrastive studies in the field.

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