

English Comparisons In Cultural And Historical Context

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Abstract: Comparison is one of the oldest and most expressive devices in the English language. It not only imbues speech with imagery and emotion but also reflects a national worldview, value system, and cultural characteristics. Each comparison carries a cultural and historical code—an echo of a particular era, beliefs, traditions, and social norms. This article examines the cultural and historical context of English similes, which allows for a deeper understanding of the development of the language, as well as the characteristics of English thought and imagery.

Keywords: Comparison, cultural, historical context, cultural code.

Introduction: Comparison is one of the most important expressive tools in the English language, serving both cognitive and cultural-aesthetic functions. Comparisons reflect the distinctive worldviews of a people, their values, traditions, and historical experience. Therefore, studying English comparisons requires not only a linguistic but also a cultural-historical approach.

The development of English comparisons as stable linguistic constructs began in the Middle English period (12th–15th centuries). During this period, the biblical tradition and the classical heritage brought by Latin and French literature exerted a strong influence. Many images entered the English language from religious and mythological sources.

The aim of the given article is to consider the classification of English comparisons taking into account the cultural and historical context, to identify their features and to show how they reflect the evolution of the English linguistic picture of the world.

METHODS

The given article explores the cultural and historical aspects of comparisons using an interdisciplinary approach: a combination of historical-linguistic, linguacultural, and comparative-typological approaches. This allows us to trace the origins, changes in meaning, and cultural connotations of units (comparisons) across different eras. The study of the

cultural and historical context of English comparisons draws on a wide range of scholarly works covering phraseology, linguacultural studies, cognitive linguistics, and semantics. The theoretical basis of the study is comprised of works devoted to the nature of set expressions, their imagery, and their connection to national worldviews. The classical foundations of phraseological theory are laid in the works of V.V. Vinogradov, A.V. Kunin, N.M. Shansky, and R. Hild, where set expressions are considered a special category of vocabulary with a holistic meaning and cultural connotations. In the English linguistic tradition, similar approaches were developed by A.P. Cowie, J. Seidl and W. McCord, who identified comparisons as a separate subgroup of phraseological units, distinguished by a high degree of imagery and cultural motivation.

Works on linguacultural studies are of great importance for the analysis of the cultural aspect—in particular, the works of V.A. Maslova, E.M. Vereshchagin, and V.G. Kostomarov, where language is considered as a form of cultural existence and a means of reflecting national values. In the context of the English tradition, a similar approach was developed by researchers A. Wierzbicka and C. Kramsch, who emphasized the relationship between linguistic forms and the cultural scripts ingrained in the consciousness of speakers. Historical studies of English comparisons are presented in works on diachronic phraseology,

which analyze the origins and development of images. For example, the works of C. Ferguson and M. Clarke trace the influence of biblical, classical, and medieval sources on the formation of set similes in English. Thus, the expressions as brave as a lion and as proud as a peacock are rooted in biblical and ancient symbolism, which emphasizes the importance of cultural context in their interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

English comparisons are not just a means of expression but also a form of cultural memory. Their evolution traces the development of the English language from religious and symbolic to modern technological imagery. Through this system of similes, one can trace changes in the thinking, aesthetics, and values of the English people.

According to V. Maslova, comparison is not simply a stylistic device, but a way of conceptualizing reality that reveals the connection between language, culture, and consciousness. Maslova emphasizes that each comparison draws on culturally significant images ingrained in collective memory, and therefore their meaning cannot be understood without considering the historical and cultural background. [1: 144-152]

Understanding the cultural and historical context of comparisons is important for linguists, translators, and anyone seeking a deeper understanding of the English linguistic worldview.

Anna Wierzbicka views comparisons as an important tool for expressing national worldviews and as a key to understanding how culture structures the meaning of words and expressions. [2: 1-22]

Comparison is a trope based on comparing two objects or phenomena based on some common characteristic. In English, it is often expressed using conjunctions such as "as...as," "like," "than," "as if," "as though," and others. Example:

as brave as a lion — The lion has traditionally symbolized strength, courage, and nobility in many cultures, including England. In the English cultural and historical context, this image has particular significance: since the 12th century, the lion has been depicted on the coat of arms of England and the British monarchy. It is associated with royal power, bravery, and dignity. For example, the coat of arms of Richard I (Richard the Lionheart) features three lions, and his nickname itself has become a symbol of courage and heroism. In English literature and folklore, the lion often appears as the ideal warrior and protector: in medieval chronicles, as a symbol of knightly valor; in fairy tales and fables, as a just, noble king of the beasts; in works such as C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*,

the lion Aslan symbolizes not only bravery but also spiritual strength, wisdom, and self-sacrifice.

as proud as a peacock — This expression describes a person who is excessively proud of themselves, their appearance, position, or achievements. It is often used ironically or mockingly, when the reference is not to noble pride, but to vanity, complacency, and ostentatious importance. In English culture (as in many other European traditions), the peacock is associated primarily with beauty, self-love, and pride. In England, the peacock became a popular symbol back in the Renaissance, when its image was associated with wealth, aristocracy, and external splendor. The comparison "as proud as a peacock" reflects Victorian morality, where excessive pride was considered a vice. It was often used in satirical works of the 18th and 19th centuries, which ridiculed people's desire to demonstrate their position, wealth, or beauty.

as busy as a bee — This expression describes a person who is constantly on the move, working hard, and performing various tasks without rest. It conveys a positive assessment—diligence, industriousness, activity, and determination. In English culture, the symbol of the industrious bee appears as early as the Middle Ages. In the 15th and 16th centuries, it was actively used in didactic and religious texts, where bees personified virtue, order, and discipline. During the Renaissance, the image of the bee often appeared in moralizing works as an example of integrity and social good. William Shakespeare, in his play *Henry V* (1599), compares the ideal state to a hive, where each bee knows its place and works for the common good—emphasizing the perception of bees as a model of a harmonious society.

as cool as a cucumber — is an expression used to describe someone who maintains coolness, composure, and self-control even in a stressful or tense situation. In English culture, a cucumber is associated with coolness and freshness, as it is literally cold to the touch. As early as the 18th century, the phrase "as cool as a cucumber" was used to describe emotional restraint—a quality highly valued in British society. Traditionally, the English pride themselves on their ability to maintain composure ("the stiff upper lip"), and this expression metaphorically embodies the national ideal of self-control and emotional restraint.

as white as snow — is an expression used to describe extreme whiteness, purity, innocence, or pallor (for example, from fear). In English culture, snow is a symbol of purity, innocence, and spiritual purification. In English literature, the expression is often found in Shakespeare and 19th-century poetry—for example, in the Victorian tradition, it symbolizes feminine

innocence and moral perfection.

as stubborn as a mule — describes a person who is unwilling to give in and who sticks to their opinion, despite reason or the entreaties of others. The mule (a hybrid of a horse and a donkey) has long been a symbol of stubbornness and insubordination in European culture. English folklore, as well as popular proverbs, depict donkeys and mules as animals that “won’t budge” if they don’t want to move. This expression carries a connotation of disapproval, but is often used in a casual, humorous context. It reflects British respect for strength of character, but also criticism of excessive stubbornness as a manifestation of pride.

as gentle as a lamb — describes a person who is good-natured, gentle, submissive, and harmless. The lamb is a central image in Christian symbolism, associated with purity, innocence, and self-sacrifice. The image of the Lamb of God symbolizes Christ, who embodies humility and spiritual perfection. In English culture, the expression “as gentle as a lamb” came to denote the ideal of meekness and kindness, especially in Victorian morality, where gentleness of character and obedience were viewed as virtues.

CONCLUSION

English comparisons are not just a means of expression but also a form of cultural memory. Their evolution traces the development of the English language from religious and symbolic to modern technological imagery. Through this system of similes, one can trace changes in the thinking, aesthetics, and values of the English people. Understanding the cultural and historical context of similes is important for linguists, translators, and anyone seeking a deeper understanding of the English linguistic worldview.

Thus, the integrated use of these methods enables a multifaceted study of English comparisons as culturally and historically conditioned units that reveal the specific features of the English worldview and value systems.

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