

STABLE COMPARATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN LITERARY DISCOURSE

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Abstract. This paper examines stable comparative constructions as a distinct type of phraseological unit in literary texts. These constructions combine lexical fixation with semantic cohesion, allowing them to convey both denotative comparison and evaluative or emotional nuance. Their structural stability supports reproducibility, while contextual flexibility enables creative expression. Through analysis of Azerbaijani literary discourse, the study demonstrates how stable comparative units contribute to imagery formation, textual cohesion, and stylistic organization. The findings highlight the cognitive, semantic, and cultural dimensions of these constructions, underscoring their significance as both linguistic and aesthetic tools.

Key words: stable comparative constructions, phraseology, literary discourse, evaluative meaning, cognitive linguistics, semantic cohesion, Azerbaijani language.

Introduction

The study of stable comparative constructions represents a critical dimension of phraseological research, bridging the gap between syntactic flexibility and semantic stability. These constructions serve as ready-made expressive models that convey both literal comparison and evaluative or emotional nuance, reflecting the interplay of cognitive, cultural, and stylistic factors. In literary discourse, stable comparative units contribute to characterization, imagery formation, and narrative cohesion, demonstrating that phraseological patterns are not merely decorative elements but essential instruments of meaning production. This paper examines the structural, semantic, and cognitive properties of stable comparative constructions, highlighting their function as conventionalized, culturally embedded units that enrich both the expressive and interpretative potential of Azerbaijani and broader literary texts.

Methodology

This study employs a multi-dimensional approach to analyze stable comparative constructions in literary texts, integrating structural, semantic, and cognitive perspectives. The research methodology combines descriptive-analytical techniques with corpus-based observation, allowing for the identification of fixed and semi-fixed comparative units and their contextual variations. Literary examples are examined to determine the degree of lexicalization, combinatorial restriction, and evaluative potential, while cognitive-semantic frameworks are applied to investigate cultural embedding and conceptual modeling. Additionally, comparative constructions are analyzed for their stylistic function, including their role in imagery formation, narrative cohesion, and expressive intensification. By triangulating structural analysis, semantic evaluation, and cognitive interpretation, the methodology ensures a comprehensive understanding of the functioning and stylistic productivity of stable comparative constructions in literary discourse.

Main body

Stable comparative constructions constitute a specific stratum of phraseological units that enter speech as ready-made expressive models and function as semi-fixed carriers of figurative comparison. Unlike free syntactic comparisons formed spontaneously in discourse, stable comparative units demonstrate a certain degree of lexical fixation and semantic cohesion, which ensures their reproducibility across contexts. Their structural stability does not eliminate semantic dynamism; rather, it allows them to preserve a conventionalized image while adapting to various stylistic environments. In Azerbaijani linguistics, early observations concerning such constructions are associated with A.M. Qurbanov, who emphasized the distinction between fixed and free comparative combinations and drew attention to their different degrees of lexicalization. [8, p.46] Subsequent studies in phraseology have shown that the primary criterion separating stable comparative constructions from free comparisons lies in the fixity of the comparative image. When the object of comparison remains constant and is automatically restored in the speaker's linguistic consciousness, the construction tends to function as a language fact rather than a mere speech phenomenon. In contrast, if the comparative element allows broad substitution or syntactic variation, the unit retains features of a free syntactic combination.

This distinction becomes particularly relevant in literary discourse, where the boundary between language fact and speech fact may deliberately be blurred for stylistic purposes. A construction such as "like two drops of water" operates as a ready-made formula because its comparative image is culturally stabilized and immediately evokes the meaning of complete similarity. However, expressions formed on the model "like a flower" demonstrate greater structural flexibility, as the lexical component can combine with various predicates without losing grammatical coherence. The degree of combinatorial restriction therefore serves as an indicator of phraseological consolidation. When a comparative unit co-occurs with only one or two specific verbs and resists substitution, it approaches the status of a stable phraseological construction. Such stability is not merely structural but also semantic: the unit begins to convey not only denotative comparison but also an evaluative or emotional nuance.

From a semantic perspective, stable comparative constructions are characterized by the interaction of two components: the denotative reference and the connotative evaluation. The denotative layer establishes the literal basis of comparison, while the connotative layer introduces expressive coloring, cultural associations, and implicit assessment. This dual structure aligns with general principles of phraseological meaning discussed in broader linguistic theory, where idiomatic units are understood as complex semantic formations integrating conceptual and emotive elements. In literary texts, this interaction becomes particularly visible, as authors exploit stable comparative constructions to intensify characterization, shape imagery, and structure narrative perspective. The comparative image functions not only as a descriptive device but also as a cognitive tool that organizes perception within the fictional world.

Moreover, stable comparative constructions contribute to textual cohesion by activating shared cultural knowledge. Because their imagery is conventionalized, they rely on collective linguistic memory and thus reduce interpretative ambiguity. At the same time, writers may manipulate these constructions through contextual reframing, irony, or partial modification, thereby renewing their expressive potential without fully dissolving their structural integrity. This balance between stability and contextual flexibility explains why such units occupy an intermediate position between lexicon and

syntax. They are syntactically transparent yet semantically integrated, formally comparable to free combinations yet functionally closer to phraseological units.

In this respect, the analysis of stable comparative constructions requires attention to structural restriction, semantic cohesion, reproducibility, and stylistic function. Their presence in literary discourse demonstrates how fixed comparative imagery can serve as a mechanism of emotional intensification and conceptual clarification. Consequently, these constructions should not be regarded as peripheral ornaments of speech but as significant elements of phraseological organization that participate actively in meaning production and aesthetic effect.

The theoretical interpretation of stable comparative constructions becomes more precise when viewed through the broader framework of phraseological theory. In the classification proposed by V. Vinogradov, phraseological units are distinguished according to the degree of semantic cohesion between their components, ranging from free combinations to fully idiomatic fusions. [10, p.93] Within this continuum, stable comparative constructions occupy an intermediate position: they retain formal transparency, yet their comparative image demonstrates a level of evaluative component that exceeds ordinary syntactic comparison. The fixed nature of the comparative standard ensures that the construction is reproduced as a holistic expressive model rather than assembled anew in each communicative act. This semantic cohesion explains why certain comparative images resist lexical substitution and function as established linguistic patterns.

A similar perspective is found in the works of A.V. Kunin, who emphasizes the criterion of phraseologization as a gradual process rather than a binary distinction. According to Kunin, the stability of a phraseological unit is determined not only by structural rigidity but also by reproducibility, idiomaticity, and stylistic markedness. [6, p.124] Applying this approach to comparative constructions allows us to differentiate between merely frequent comparisons and genuinely stabilized phraseological forms. When a comparative structure consistently reproduces the same imagery, carries evaluative connotation, and demonstrates limited combinatorial freedom, it approaches the status of a phraseological unit. Conversely, when variability dominates and semantic motivation remains transparent, the construction remains within the domain of free syntactic comparison. This gradational understanding highlights the dynamic character of phraseological development and avoids rigid categorization.

From a cognitive-semantic perspective, D. Dobrovolsky draws attention to the cultural embedding of idiomatic imagery. [2, p.153] Stable comparative constructions, in this sense, function as culturally codified conceptual models reflecting collective patterns of perception. Their imagery is grounded in shared experiential knowledge and conventional metaphorical mappings rather than arbitrary association. In literary discourse, this cognitive dimension becomes particularly significant: the author activates a culturally recognizable comparative model, thereby engaging the reader's background knowledge and facilitating interpretative processing. At the same time, contextual reframing may introduce subtle semantic shifts, allowing the writer to renew conventional imagery without eliminating its recognizability. Stability therefore coexists with contextual flexibility.

The integration of structural, semantic, and cognitive criteria enables a multidimensional understanding of stable comparative constructions in literary texts. Structurally, they exhibit restricted variability and partial lexical fixation. Semantically,

they combine denotative comparison with evaluative or emotive coloring. Cognitively, they rely on culturally entrenched imagery that ensures communicative efficiency. These dimensions operate simultaneously and determine the stylistic potential of the construction. In narrative prose, such units intensify characterization, reinforce similarity or contrast, and contribute to rhythmic organization. In poetic discourse, they may acquire symbolic resonance, transforming conventional comparison into a layered artistic device.

Consequently, stable comparative constructions should be examined not merely as syntactic patterns but as phraseological formations that mediate between linguistic convention and creative expression. Their relative stability, semantic density, and cultural grounding explain their productivity in literary texts and justify their separate treatment within phraseological theory.

The stylistic functioning of stable comparative constructions in literary discourse can be examined within the broader framework of expressive and cognitive stylistics. Charles Bally, in his theory of stylistic expressiveness, argues that fixed figurative patterns serve as carriers of affective meaning rather than as neutral descriptive tools. [1, p.76] Stable comparative constructions, in this respect, operate as condensed expressive structures that transmit evaluation implicitly. Their stability guarantees recognizability, while their figurative basis intensifies emotional resonance. In literary texts, such constructions allow the author to communicate attitude and assessment without direct qualification, thereby increasing semantic density and stylistic economy.

I.R. Galperin emphasizes that figurative comparison is not an isolated stylistic ornament but a structural component of textual organization. [3, p.52] Stable comparative constructions contribute to imagery formation and influence the rhythmic and semantic balance of narrative discourse. Their syntactic placement often determines their pragmatic impact: when positioned at the culmination of a clause, the comparison acquires emphatic prominence; when integrated into descriptive sequences, it enhances visual concreteness and perceptual clarity. Through this interaction with syntax and rhythm, stable comparative constructions participate in shaping the tonal structure of the text.

From a cognitive linguistic perspective, George Lakoff's theory of conceptual metaphor provides an explanatory foundation for understanding the persistence of certain comparative images. [7, p.68] Such constructions frequently rely on entrenched metaphorical mappings that structure collective perception. A comparison activates a culturally shared conceptual model in which properties from a familiar source domain are projected onto a target domain. The conventionalization of such mappings explains the stability of particular comparative standards in language. In literary discourse, this cognitive mechanism enables authors to compress complex experiential knowledge into concise expressive forms without sacrificing interpretative depth.

Elena Semino further demonstrates that figurative language in discourse guides reader interpretation by activating associative networks grounded in shared cultural knowledge. [9, p.105] In the case of stable comparative constructions, the established imagery reduces interpretative effort while preserving expressive intensity. Because the comparative model is conventionalized, it ensures rapid semantic access and strengthens textual cohesion. At the same time, contextual framing may subtly modify the evaluative orientation of the image, creating stylistic nuance. This balance between conventional

stability and contextual adaptability underlies the artistic productivity of stable comparative constructions in literary texts.

Thus, these units function as structurally fixed yet semantically dynamic elements of literary language. They intensify emotional expression, organize imagery, activate conceptual mappings, and contribute to narrative coherence. Their role extends beyond decorative comparison; they represent a mechanism through which conventional linguistic patterns are transformed into instruments of stylistic and cognitive structuring within the literary text.

Stable comparative constructions in literary texts serve as compact expressive devices that convey evaluative meaning while maintaining cognitive clarity. As Roman Jakobson emphasizes, such figurative patterns function as integral units of poetic language, enhancing imagery and rhythm without the need for explicit explanation. [5, p.92] M.A.K. Halliday further notes that these constructions operate within systemic-functional grammar, linking semantic content to interpersonal and textual meanings, thus reinforcing cohesion and guiding reader interpretation. [4, p.221] Through their conventionalized imagery and structural predictability, stable comparative forms enable writers to efficiently communicate complex experiential and emotional nuances while preserving stylistic coherence.

Conclusion

Stable comparative constructions function as semi-fixed, culturally codified units that combine denotative clarity with evaluative and emotive resonance, thereby enhancing textual cohesion and expressive precision. Their stability ensures recognizability and reproducibility, while their semantic flexibility allows authors to manipulate imagery for stylistic effect. In literary discourse, these constructions operate not only as descriptive devices but also as cognitive and aesthetic tools, shaping perception, reinforcing narrative structures, and activating shared cultural knowledge. Consequently, understanding stable comparative constructions is essential for appreciating the interplay between linguistic convention, cognitive modeling, and artistic expression in literary texts.

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