

LENNART LÖNNGREN

## Means of Expressing Similarity in Russian\*

We generally think of a certain meaning as being expressed in a specific way, either morphologically, lexically or syntactically. But sometimes a particular meaning can be expressed in many different ways, by means belonging to different levels. Such a case is the meaning of similarity.

Similarity is a relation holding between two arguments, i.e., we are dealing with a two-place predicate. Logically, it seems to be a symmetric relation (if A is like B, B must be like A), but in the language the relation is often expressed as unidirectional. For example, it is more natural to say that a son is like his father than the other way round. But of course, similarity can also be expressed as reciprocal, as in English *They are like each other* or *They are very much alike*.

Being a static two-place relation, similarity is most typically expressed by an adjective. This is also the case in Russian, where the most frequent word expressing similarity is the adjective *похожий*. This word is formed from a word of motion, *ходить*, but synchronically that seems to be an irrelevant fact.

Unlike English, the second argument of *похожий* is a prepositional phrase, namely *на* with the accusative case, as we see in example (1):

(1) Сын похож на отца.

The corresponding abstract noun is *похожесть*, see the nominalisation in (2):

(2) похожесть сына на отца

These constructions are associated with the following semantic dependency

---

\* An earlier version of this paper was presented at a conference organized by the Russian Department of The University of Arizona, Tucson, in April 2002.

graphs:

Сын похож (на) отца.                      похожесть сына (на) отца

*Похожий* has two less frequent synonyms, also formed from the verb *ходить*, namely *схожий* and *сходный*. With them we use the preposition *с*, see examples (3) and (4):

- (3) ... один год схож с другим, нет между ними большого различия. (Зорин)
- (4) Проблемы, с которыми в данном случае сталкивается исследователь, сходны с теми, что ожидают археолога, обнаружившего при раскопках груды черепков.

The corresponding abstract nouns are *схожесть* and *сходство*:

- (5) схожесть сына с отцом
- (6) О полном сходстве с ней не приходилось и мечтать. (Анашкевич)

Examples (7) and (8) express reciprocity:

- (7) Они похожи (друг на друга).
- (8) сходство между ними

Note that in the last example a third preposition is used, *между*. Under certain circumstances—see examples 6 and 7—the first and/or second argument can be syntactically missing.

The verbal origin of these words may not be so irrelevant after all, since there is also a verb, *походить*, which can function as a synonym of *похожий*:

- (9) Он походил на бабушку.

This verb is an imperfectivum tantum and totally unrelated semantically to the homonym *походить* ‘walk around for a while’, which is a perfectivum tantum.

One more verb should be mentioned in this connection, namely *напомянуть*:

(10) Зрительный зал напоминал сарай. (Гранин)

This, too, is an imperfectivum tantum. Its semantic relation to the aspect pair *напомнить/напомянуть* is the same as that between the stative and active sense of the English verb *remind*. The “complete” verb *напомнить/напомянуть* has a valency frame different from that of *напомянуть* in (10), for example:

(11) Он напомнил мне о предстоящей встрече с гостями.

It is possible to restrict the validity of the comparison by introducing a third element which is typically expressed by a noun or—more often—pronoun in the instrumental case:

(12) Лицом он схож с братом.

(13) Он не был похож на них еще и тем, что в его комнате не висел на стене портрет матери. (Анашкевич)

(14) Тем, что он не соблюдал режима, он походил на бабушку. (Анашкевич)

Is this new element a complement or an adjunct? That is, does it belong to the valency frame of the adjective/verb or not? In view of the fact that similarity, as I said above, is basically a two-place relation, I would like to regard it as an adjunct. Consequently, the case ending is a semantic morpheme (cf. Lönngren 2003). This function is traditionally termed *instrumentalis respectus*; it is the instrumental we have in examples like *Он родом швед*. The same meaning can be rendered by a preposition phrase, cf.:

(15) По внешнему виду он похож на отца.

This very restriction is inherent in the verb *выглядеть*, which permits several different expressions in the position of the second argument:

- (16) Должен тебе сказать, что ты выглядишь как идиот. (Искандер)  
 (17) И ее отцу почему-то выгоднее выглядеть слабаком. (Щербакова)  
 (18) Было заметно, что он старается выглядеть спокойным. (Искандер)  
 (19) Но женщины, в массе, вообще стали выглядеть моложе. (Ганина)  
 (20) Растения были дикими и выглядели весьма невзрачно.

Somewhat more difficult to analyse is an element in the dative case, which occurs specifically with the verb *напоминать*:

- (21) Он чем-то напоминает мне моего деда.

It does not at all have the meaning of the dative complement in (11) above, which is undoubtedly an argument of the *verbum dicendi* in question. The dative in (21) can be rendered by a separate clause, provided we replace the verb with a different expression of similarity, cf.:

- (22) Мне кажется, он чем-то похож на нашего деда.

This fact makes me recognize, with some hesitation, this element as an adjunct. The semantic dependency graph corresponding to (21) thus contains two “case adjuncts”:



The verb *роднить* has the interesting capacity of converting an adjunct of the *instrumentalis respectus* type into a true and indisputable argument of a three-place predicate:

- (23) Это роднит его со многими из его современников.

As we see, the element assumes the syntactic form of the subject. This example can be paraphrased as

(24) Этим он похож на многих из его современников.

(Cf. ex. 13 above.) Such a conversion is not uncommon; cf. the following sentence pairs:

(25) Все население погибло от тифа. — Тиф погубил все население.

(26) На пустырях построены новые дома. — Пустыри застроены новыми домами.

where the adjuncts *от тифа* and *на пустырях* are turned into subjects.

Quite an important distinction should be made between cases where the second argument is referential and cases where this argument is non-referential. Cf., for example, the ambiguous sentence

(27) Он похож на президента.

where we can have in mind either a specific president or a typical president (cf. *He is like the/a president*). In the latter case the sentence is potentially synonymous with

(28) Он выглядит как президент. 'He looks like a president.'

(Cf. also example 16 above.) Here we use the relation of similarity to create a description. Whereas *похожий*, as we see, can express both meanings, referential and non-referential, certain other words or constructions can express only one of them. For example, only the referential meaning is expressed in the following sentences:

(29) Он весь в отца.

(30) Он вылитый отец.

The verb *выглядеть*, on the other hand, seems only to be able to take a non-referential, descriptive second argument, which explains the variety of expressions in this position (see ex. 16-20 above).

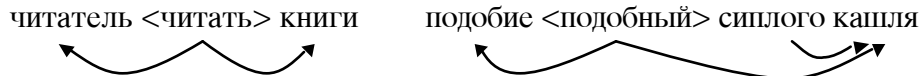
One more synonym of *похожий* should be mentioned, namely *подобный*, which governs the dative case:

(31) Атом в некотором смысле подобен Солнечной системе.

This word has a larger derivational potential than the words mentioned so far. The corresponding noun is *подобие*, as in

(32) смех, который обожженное кокаином горло превратило в подобие сиплого кашля (Пелевин)

Interestingly, *подобие* is not a true abstract noun, like *похожесть*, *сходство*; it does not correspond to the predicate expressing similarity, but to the first argument of this relation (consider the more transparent paraphrase: ... в нечто подобное сиплому кашлю). The difference is similar to that between *nomen actionis* and *nomen agentis*, as in *чтение книги* vs *читатель книги*. Cf. the dependency structures:



The first argument can also be expressed by the adjective itself, provided it is used as a noun, as in:

(33) ... и тому подобное.

From *подобный* can also be formed two adverbs, *подобно* and *наподобие*:

(34) этот подобно холодному душу отрезвляющий факт

(35) небольшое огражденное пространство под навесом, наподобие задней площадки трамвая (Пелевин)

These adverbs take the dative and the genitive case, respectively. In this connection one more adverb taking the dative case should be mentioned, namely *сродни*:

- (36) Мои ощущения были сродни замешательству ноги, ступающей на гнилую доску. (Анашкевич)

From *подобный* can also be formed a verb, *уподобить/уподоблять*, which, like *роднить*, has three arguments, but still quite a different structure. It is a causative verb and can be used in the passive voice, as we see in:

- (37) Любовь уподобляется болезни.

Up to this point I have mentioned words belonging to several parts of speech, namely adjectives, verbs, derived nouns, and even the preposition *в* (see ex. 29). Two parts of speech remain to be mentioned, namely pronouns and conjunctions. The only candidates amongst pronouns are *такой* and *такой же*. In S. I. Ožegov & N. Ju. Švedova, *Tolkovyj slovar' russkogo jazyka* (1995) we find *такой*—in one of its meanings—explained as “именно этот, подобный данному или тому, о чем говорилось”, but as a matter of fact this meaning is not so often realised in a pure form:

- (38) Еще реже попадались навстречу такие же, как и этот, между-городные автобусы. (Казаков)

The most typical conjunction is, of course, *как*, as in:

- (39) Озеро—как зеркало. (Соловьева)<sup>1</sup>

The noun or adjective standing to the right of *как* assumes the “agreement case”, i.e., is assigned the same case as the noun (or pronoun) constituting the first argument. For the sake of simplicity, let us call this argument the antecedent, although it does not always precede the noun immediately governed by the conjunction. This can be seen in the next example:

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the well-known line by the Swedish poet Lars Forcell: "Dina bröst är som svalor som häckar".

- (40) В согнутой левой руке, как ребенка, держала громадный букет.  
(Трифонов)

Of course, here the likeness is not between two objects, but between two actions directed towards these objects. The same is true in constructions with clearly implicit verbs:

- (41) Что ты смотришь на меня, как лошадь на велосипед?

The antecedent of the agreement relation can also be implicit, as in:

- (42) Ее тянуло к министерству как магнитом. (Маринина)

However, if the antecedent is adjectival, the word following after *как* assumes the nominative case, as we see in

- (43) на лысой, как бильярдный шар, голове (Тополь)

Again, what is compared is *лысость* in two objects, not the objects themselves.

The conjunction *как* is an extremely multifunctional word. Less polysemic are the words *словно*, *точно* and *будто*:

- (44) Поплавок лежал на воде словно впаянный. (Воронин)  
(45) Он был весь спокоен, точно Будда.  
(46) Анжелу будто током шарахнуло. (Дашкова)

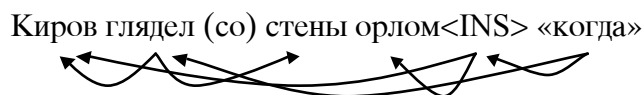
The conjunction *как* may also be a connector between a predicate and its argument, thus forming what I call a conjunction phrase. As we saw in examples (16) and (28) above, such a function it assumes with the verb *выглядеть*.

We saw above that a predicate expressing similarity can be accompanied by a semantic instrumental or dative. But the instrumental case is also itself capable of expressing this very meaning. The most typical syntactic position is that of an adjunct, as in:



- (47) Киров глядел со стены орлом. (Пьецух)  
 (48) В дверях стояла бабушка внушительной глыбой. (Анашкевич)

In (47), the relation of similarity holding between *Киров* and *орел* is not in itself sufficient; it must be restricted temporally by means of an implicit predicate. Thus the sentence can be represented by the following graph:



The noun in the instrumental case can also take the syntactic position of an attribute (49) or even a predicate (50-51):

- (49) бородка веером (Чёрный)  
 (50) Рожа—циферблатом. (Чёрный)  
 (51) Первый блин—комом.

The last-mentioned type is quite unambiguous semantically, since usually ordinary predicative constructions do not permit the instrumental case in the present tense.

Now let us turn to means belonging to another level, namely that of word-formation. Compound adjectives can be formed using the adjective *подобный*, but also by means of the segments *-образный* and *-видный*. A few examples of each are shown in (52-54):

- (52) ядроподобные бедра; избоподобные строения (Пьецух); спичкоподобный нос (Бондарев); женоподобный цирюльник (Соловьева)  
 (53) бегемотообразный буфет; гориллообразный гигант (Тополь); чашеобразное углубление (Пелевин); лопатообразная ладонь (Бондарев); сарделькообразные пальцы (Бондарев); желеобразное состояние (Дашкова)  
 (54) щитовидная железа; серповидный предмет; с граблевидными ручищами (Палей)

In order to render the meaning of similarity it is not necessary to use compound adjectives, as we see in:

(55) стеклянный вид; пирамидальный тополь

Adverbs, regularly formed from such adjectives, can also express similarity:

(56) ртутно сверкающие бляшки пенсне (Олеша)

(57) веревки с фанерно качающимся бельем (Улицкая)

(58) вся эта челядь, стадно жмущаяся друг к другу (Евтушенко)

Here the relation of similarity is restricted in a way that can be demonstrated more explicitly by transforming the participle into a temporal clause, for example:

(59) Белье выглядит как фанера, когда качается (на ветру).

In accordance with this, (57) can be represented by the following semantic graph, which contains an implicit temporal predicate:



Examples like *желеобразное состояние* and *стеклянный вид* are interesting in the respect that they seem to establish a relation of similarity between words belonging to “incompatible” categories, one word (*желе, стекло*) having a concrete meaning and the other (*состояние, вид*) an abstract one. However, if we add one more element, for instance *стеклянный вид его глаз*, we can trace this expression back to a more normal relationship:

(60) Его глаза выглядят как стекло.

We are now close to cases where the relation of similarity is not expressed explicitly, by words or morphemes, but inferred semantically. Adjectives like *стеклянный* do not as such express similarity, as we see in

*стеклянная ваза. Русалочьи глаза* can be found either on a mermaid or on an ordinary woman.

Ordinary predicative constructions with the agreement case can also have the inferred meaning of similarity, as in

- (61) Ты заяц.
- (62) Мое слово кремень.
- (63) Ах, жизнь моя жестянка.

Cf. also example (30) above.

By suppressing one argument we can transform this types of predication into referential noun phrases:

- (64) А вот этот телеграфный столб с бородой! (Бондарев).

Such phrases are often used in slang:

- (65) Дал по чердаку и ставни закрылись.

We now definitely enter the field of literary metaphors.<sup>2</sup> Poets and writers like to create pictures, i.e. put together things which are different but presented as identical, thus imposing on them the relation of similarity. To give one example, if we depart from the explicit expression

- (66) Твои глаза—как огни.

we can present this more poetically with the meaning of similarity inferred implicitly:

---

<sup>2</sup> Of course, I will not be able to add anything to the vast literature in this field (cf., for instance, Arutjunova 1997), just provide a few fresh examples.

(67) Твои глаза огни.<sup>3</sup>


Alternatively, we can use a so-called copulative compound:

(68) глаза-огни (cf. глаза-рубины)

Finally, we can create a genitive construction which is specifically designed to express poetical metaphors:

(69) огни твоих глаз<sup>4</sup>

The corresponding graph contains a semantic genitive case ending with the meaning ‘similar’ (cf. also Lönngren 2002):

огни твоих глаз<GEN>  


I would like to give some more examples of this construction:

(70) Мои башмаки запутались в зеленой лапше травы. (Олеша)

(71) ... глядя не на белокурого лейтенанта, а в направлении грузной глыбы капитана за столом. (Бондарев)

(72) небольшие, но спелые яблоки ее груди (Шитов)

(73) Мне так и чудится, что дом не хочет нас видеть, прикрыв грустные окна веками ставень. (Анашкевич)

(74) в минуту передышки, которая представлялась Андрею соломинкой возможного понимания (Бондарев)

The last example demonstrates, again, an “incompatible” comparison of an abstract meaning with a concrete one.

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the well-known lines by the Swedish poet Erik Axel Karlfeldt:

Dina ögon äro eldar  
 Och min själ är beck och kåda.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. another well-known line by Erik Axel Karlfeldt:

... högt mot höstmånens röda kastrull.

As mentioned in the beginning, although the relation of similarity is, logically, symmetrical, the convertability that one could expect from this circumstance is very seldom realized. One obstacle lies in the fact that one of the members of the relation is often referential and the other non-referential. However, the genitive construction just illustrated is an exception. Here the order of the members is quite freely convertible. In conclusion, I would like to present one example of the convertibility of the metaphor. Thus, eyes can be compared to lakes, as in:

(75) Маша была похожа на белую ночь с озерами глаз, и я боялся ее поцеловать, словно мои поцелуи могли разрушить ее. (Евтушенко)

But it is also possible to carry out the comparison in the opposite direction, as we can see in the short verse given in (76), where lakes are compared to eyes:

(76) Долго будет Карелия сниться,  
Будут сниться с этих пор:  
Остроконечных елей ресницы  
Над голубыми глазами озер.

## References

- Arutjunova, N. D. “Metafora”. *Ėnciklopedija russkij jazyk*, Moskva 1997.  
 Lönngren, L. “Priimennoj roditel’nyj v russkom jazyke s točki zrenija valentnosti”, *Explorare necesse est* (FS B. Nilsson), Stockholm 2002 (= Stockholm Slavic Studies 28), pp. 171-180.  
 — “O značenii russkoj fleksionnoj morfemy”, *Scando-Slavica* 49, 2003, pp. 61-74.

*e-mail: lennart.lonngren@hum.uit.no*