

DCCD 2020**Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding****SYMBOLIC MEANING OF COMPARISONS IN RELIGIOUS CULTURES**

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Abstract

The article discusses the symbolic meaning of animal names in the German biblical text. The subject of research is comparisons with the religious cultural code. The source of the language material was the Gospels presented in the German translation of the New Testament. When determining the German translation, a revised translation of the Elberfelder Bible was selected as the most accurate and verbatim of German Bible translations. Examples in German are accompanied by examples from the Russian Synodal translation. The theoretical basis relies on the analysis of works in comparison as one of the most commonly used stylistic devices. Special attention is paid to studies in the field of symbolism. It is stated that the Bible is the most important source of figurative symbolism genesis. The article analyzes the gospel stories containing wie-comparisons in German, in which animals and birds names are used. Special emphasis is laid on the implementation of the symbolic meaning of wie-comparisons. The paper notes that many religious symbols have traditionally contradictory meanings. The article underlines the content of the subject of comparison, as well as the feature of comparison. The content analysis shows mainly the anthropological character of the subject of comparison and the small number of non-anthropological groups. The motivating feature of comparison is the external and internal similarity of the compared items. The paper concludes that wie-comparisons are significantly similar to the corresponding structures of the Russian language.

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1. Introduction

The research subject in this paper is *wie*-comparisons in German and correlative meaning of Russian phrases. In modern conditions of the development of relations between peoples, comparative aspect of language phenomena study is undoubtedly productive. Charles Bally (2001) briefly and figuratively defined the purpose of his famous work “Obstschaya lingvistika i voprosy frantsuzskogo yazyka” – “to illuminate the physiognomy of the French language by comparing it with German” (p. 39). The analysis of German *wie*-comparisons against Russian correlates allows to more clearly present the specifics of religious consciousness among different peoples.

2. Problem Statement

The study of religious cultural code is mainly limited to lexicographic description of bibleisms, including historical and etymological analysis. As an example, we can cite the works of Dubrovina (2016, 2017) “Entsiklopedicheskij slovar’ biblejskih frazeologizmov” and “Biblejskie frazeologizmy v russoj i evropejskoj kul’ture”. The attention of linguists is also attracted by phraseological units with biblical characters proper names, which are described in one language or by comparative analysis means. Among a few works featuring other aspects of this issue, we should mention the article by Manerova (2015), in which the author refers to the images of German phraseological units with a religious cultural code “...not only biblical characters (*arm wie Hiob*), spiritual beings (*die Engel singen hören*), dark forces (*wenn der Teufel los ist*), but also Church traditions (*Leviten lesen*), culturally determined historical realities (*an die Grosse Glocke hängen*), Christian symbolic traditions and rites (*weder Fisch noch Fleisch; Salz und Brot macht Wangen rot*) (p. 243).

Symbolism, including Christian one, is studied in a number of works by foreign linguists. The New lexicon of Renata Becker (1991) highlights Christian symbols. The Lexicon of symbols by Wolfgang Bauer describes many symbols, including the Christian “Christliche Symbole” (Bauer et al., 2003, pp. 183-220). In Gerd Heinz-Mohr's lexicon of symbols, symbolism is explored in Christian visual art (Heinz-Mohr, 1992). The importance and necessity of studying religious lexicon is underlined by the fact that in the famous ideographic dictionary of Franz Dornseiff “Der deutsche Wortschatz nach Sachgruppen” there is “Religion” section, in which one of the articles presents the Scriptures lexicon “Heilige Schriften” (Dornseiff, 2004, section 20).

Several works by one of the most famous researchers of “symbols as bridges to the unknown” (“Symbole als Brücken zum Unerforschlichen”) by Manfred Lurker describe symbolic images. In his work “Die Botschaft der Symbole” the author examines the “message of symbols” in myths, cultures and religions (Lurker, 1992). The work “Adler und Schlange” (“Eagle and Snake”) (Lurker, 1983) analyses animal symbolism. Particularly noteworthy symbols dictionaries. Of great interest for this study is the dictionary of biblical images and symbols (“Wörterbuch biblischer Bilder und Symbole”) (Lurker, 1990).

3. Research Questions

A brief review of the works that analyze religious lexicon suggests that the symbolic meaning of comparisons in the religious culture of German and Russian people was not the subject of special research.

The main issue of the research is the use of *wie*-comparisons in a religious text as a means of language expression to convey statement symbolic meaning.

4. Purpose of the Study

The objective of this research is to identify *wie*-comparisons composition and consider them as a part of the phraseological system of the German language against meaning correlates in Russian comparisons.

5. Research Methods

To achieve this goal, we rely on methods generally accepted in linguistics for studying language material, first of all, the comparative method.

The main theoretical foundations on which the research is based are primarily related to the understanding and use of the term “comparison”. Comparison is one of the most controversial and frequently used stylistic tools, which is known to be studied “from Aristotle to the present day” (if we recall the classical definition of metaphor). It has been and remains the object of study of many scholars in Russian and foreign linguistics. Scientific works on this research topic consider the following aspects: comparison as a means of imagery and expressiveness (Parshukova, 2017, pp. 16-21), types and functions of comparisons (Parshukova, 2018, pp. 149-153), pragmatics of comparisons (Postnikova, 2016, pp. 85-89), functional and semantic field of comparison (Postnikova, 2017, pp. 124-128), semantics of comparative phraseology (Revina, 2017, pp. 142-144), etc.

The comparison structure consists of three components: the object that is being compared, the image that the object is being compared with, and the attribute that is used to compare the first two. The attribute by which items are compared is called the basis of comparison.

The binding element that is used for comparison (in this paper, we study comparisons with the *wie* binding element) allows to identify that the two objects being compared are only to some extent identical to each other, while maintaining their individuality. This comparison structure serves to strengthen or emphasize a certain feature.

The roots of many common language comparisons go deep into the past. Modern native speakers understand the meaning of phraseology, not paying attention to the image that once served as comparison basis. Manifesting concepts about the world, phraseological units turn into some sort of information “storage”. According to stereotypes of the world view, they not only imitate it, but also take part in its formation.

Figurative comparison takes on the comparison of two phenomena by a particular quality (shape, appearance, colour, character traits, etc.). In this case, it is most likely a metaphor. Metaphorization originated in ancient times, when a person compared objects of the world unknown to him with what was most well studied and familiar, thus transferring the characteristics of the human nature to the world. The metaphor is related to the comparison and even owes its origin to it, but it is not always equivalent to it.

In a religious text, the comparison is usually symbolic. In the Preface to the German edition of the symbols encyclopedia, Biedermann (1996), a well-known expert in symbolism, notes that the symbolic is

found “in the allegory of the religious spiritual world, in icons and ciphers of foreign and prehistoric cultures ... – wherever the “bearer of meaning” conveys something that goes beyond its banal external form” (Biedermann, 1996 p. 6). Biedermann (1996) goes on to quote Manfred Lurker on “symbol” concept: “the meaning of a symbol is not in itself, but indicates something more... For religious people, a symbol is a concrete phenomenon in which the thought of the Divine and Absolute becomes so immanent that it reaches a clearer expression than through words... Sacred history is a symbol, an expression of the continuous connection between the Creator and his creation... If separate images appear from the fullness of the divine type, they are in the proper sense symbols. The symbol is a mystery and a revelation at the same time...” (Biedermann, 1996, p. 8).

Religious symbolism is most clearly shown in the use of animal and vegetable world objects names. The idea of an indissoluble connection between man and animal is determined by the role that fauna plays in our cultural consciousness. These relationships are clearly reflected in religious texts and in Church art. Animals and birds names used in the Gospels are of undoubted interest for research. A considerable number of works have illustrated interpretation and analysis of the four Gospels, but this topic has not been sufficiently studied from a linguistic point of view, which undoubtedly determines the relevance of this article.

The source of the language material was the Gospels presented in the German translation of the New Testament. When selecting the German translation, the revised Elberfelder translation of the Bible was opted for. This translation, as noted in the Preface to the German-Russian New Testament, is “the most accurate and verbatim of the German translations of the Bible.” Examples in German are accompanied by a translation into Russian. German-Russian New Testament contains a Synodal translation, “since it is the most common translation of the Russian Bible and it literally conveys the Greek original” (German-Russian New Testament). All four Gospels tell the story of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Mutually complementing each other, they together constitute a single book – the four Gospels.

The symbolic meaning of comparisons should begin with the fact that symbolism permeates the entire biblical text. The symbol is historically enshrined to every Evangelist. The attribute of St. Matthew the Apostle was an angel, St. Mark the Apostle – a lion, St. Luke the Apostle – a Taurus, and St. John the Apostle – an eagle. Each symbol has a theological meaning and reveals the main idea of the gospel.

The Bible, as Kretschmer (2018) notes, is “the most important source of the origin of Christian figurative symbolism” (“Die wichtigste Quelle für die Genese der christlichen Bildsymbolik ist die Bibel”) (p.9). In the gospel stories, the following thematic groups of *wie*-comparisons are mainly presented: the animal world, man, and natural phenomena. The four-letter gospel in both German and Russian translations contains the names of more than ten animals and birds, but only some constitute comparative phrases. Animals names are used in this case not in a direct, but in a metaphorical sense. Let’s consider as an example comparisons with a dove, a sheep, and a snake. In detail, the meaning of animal names in the German biblical text is explored in the work of Smirnova (2017, pp. 446-448).

The comparison with the dove in Christianity is traditionally associated with the visible incarnation of the Holy Spirit. Manfred Lurker, studying the symbolism of the dove, notes that the dove of Noah in the Old Testament, which brought the olive branch and marked the flood end, is in the New Testament a type (“ein Vorbild”) of the Holy Spirit, descended on Christ at the time of his baptism in River Jordan (Lurker,

1973, p. 319). The fourth Gospel shows the sacrament of the Holy Trinity: the Lord receives baptism, the Spirit descends as a dove, and the voice of the Father is heard giving testimony about the Son. The Holy Spirit appears as a dove, since this bird is considered a symbol of meekness, kindness and purity. All four evangelists, when describing the Descent of the Holy Spirit, use the comparison *wie meine Taube (like a dove)*. Here is a story from the gospel of John:

“Und Johannes bezeugte und sprach: Ich schaute den Geist wie eine Taube aus dem Himmel herabfahren, und er blieb auf ihm” (Joh 1: 32) (And John testified, saying: I saw the spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and staying on Him).

From the appearance of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove the simplicity of these birds can be traced, so the Savior commands his followers: “*Sieh, ich sende euch wie Schafe mitten unter Wölfe; so seid nun klug wie die Schlangen und einfältig wie die Tauben*” (Mt 10: 16) (*Behold, I send you as sheep among wolves: therefore be wise as serpents, and simple as doves*).

The episode under consideration also contains the comparison *klug wie die Schlangen (wise as serpents)*. The snake is an important ancient symbol that combines contradictory meanings. In the preface to the Lexicon of symbols and attributes in art Kretschmer (2018) mentions that symbols, as a rule, do not have an unambiguous meaning, quite often they have ambivalent meanings (“*keine eindeutige, ja oft genug ambivalente Bedeutungen*”) (p. 8). So, on the one hand, the snake is a symbol of wisdom and prudence, and on the other, the embodiment of danger and threat. The most negative attitude to it as a personification of Satan is represented in the Old Testament. In the scene of the fall from grace, the serpent-tempter is the embodiment of evil, sin, and deception. In *wie*-comparison in the gospel of Matthew a positive connotation of this symbol is realized – Christ calls his disciples to take the example of the serpents.

Blessed Theophylact of Bulgaria explains Christ's choice of such a comparison as follows: a Christian “must be ... wise, knowing how to live among the mass of enemies. As the serpent puts its whole body under the blows, and protects its head, so the Christian must give everything to those who strike him, even his body, but the head, which is Christ and faith in Him, must be protected...” (Theophylact, 2000, Chapter 10).

In the above story, the comparison with a sheep is also used, which is not accidental, since the sheep belongs to the oldest of the animals tamed by humans. Analyzing the symbolic use of the word *sheep* in different gospel contexts, we can distinguish the following groups: sheep as a symbol of the apostles, sheep as a symbol of the people, sheep as a symbol of the righteous, and sheep as a symbol of a lost person.

In this gospel story, the sheep are represented as a symbol of the apostles, which is verbalized in the language by *wie*-comparison: *wie Schafe (like sheep)*.

By sending the apostles to preach the Word of God to the Jews, the Lord gives instructions related to the Apostolic Ministry. He warns them that they will feel as defenseless as sheep surrounded by wolves.

The following story in the gospel of Matthew contains a comparison of a crowd of people with sheep without a shepherd. In the Bible, sheep represent Christ's flock, believers who are attacked by “wolves”, devilish forces. The sheep, as a weak animal in need of protection, symbolizes helplessness, spiritual blindness and the herd mentality of the crowd. Therefore, in this case, Jesus Christ himself acts as a shepherd leading a witless flock.

“Als er aber die Volksmengen sah, wurde er innerlich bewegt über sie, weil sie erschöpft und verschmachtet waren wie Schafe, die keinen Hirten haben” (Mt 9: 36). (Seeing the crowds of people, He took pity on them, because they were exhausted and scattered like sheep without a shepherd).

In German translation, the *wie*-comparison *wie Schafe (like sheep)* is common in the subordinate determinative clause, which contains an explanation for this comparison: *die keinen Hirten haben (having no shepherd)*.

Common in the gospel texts are also comparisons with a man: *wie ein Mensch, wie ein Kind, wie die Kinder, wie sein Lehrer, wie sein Herr, wie der Hirte, wie mit einem König*. For example:

“Wahrlich, ich sage euch: Wer das Reich Gottes nicht aufnimmt wie ein Kind, wird dort nicht hereinkommen” (Mark 10: 15). (Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a child will not enter it).

“Ein Jünger ist nicht über dem Lehrer; jeder aber, der vollendet ist, wird sein wie sein Lehrer” (Luke 6: 40). (A disciple is not higher than his teacher; but, if he gets better, he will be like his teacher).

These examples show that in *wie*-comparisons the subject is usually anthropological in nature, and external or internal similarity acts as a motivating feature of comparison. Non-anthropological groups of comparisons in biblical texts are not so numerous, but they are also figurative.

The figurative character of religious vocabulary is clearly expressed in the use of comparisons with natural phenomena, for example: *wie das Licht, wie der Blitz, wie Schnee*.

The comparison with lightning occurs in the gospel texts three times: the fall of Satan from heaven, the appearance of the angel of the Lord, and the day when the Kingdom of God will come are compared with lightning. In the following gospel story Satan is compared to lightning:

“Er sprach aber zu ihnen: Ich schaute den Satan wie einen Blitz vom Himmel fallen” (Luke 10: 18). (He told them: I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning).

The gospel story “Die Frauen am leeren Grab-Erscheinung des Auferstandenen” (“Women at the empty tomb – the Appearance of the Risen one”) describes how the Angel of the Lord came down from heaven to announce that Jesus Christ had risen.

“Sein Ansehen aber war wie der Blitz und sein Kleid weiß wie Schnee” (Mt 28: 3). (...his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was white as snow)

Comparison of *wie der Blitz (like lightning)* likens the descent of an angel from heaven to a sudden flash of lightning, and the comparison *weiß wie Schnee (white as snow)* highlights the whiteness of his clothing.

In the gospel of Luke there is a plot “Das Reich Gottes und der Tag des Menschensohnes” (“The Kingdom of God and the day of the Son of Man”), which says that “the Kingdom of God will not come in a visible way”, the appearance of Jesus Christ is compared to lightning.

“Denn wie der Blitz blitzend leuchtet von einem <Ende> unter dem Himmel bis zum anderen <Ende> unter dem Himmel, so wird der Sohn des Menschen sein an seinem Tag” (Luke 17: 24). (...as the lightning that flashes from one end of the sky shines to the other end of the sky, so will the Son of Man in His day)

In the gospel of Matthew, the appearance of Jesus Christ is compared to the sun and his clothing to light.

“Und er wurde vor ihnen umgestaltet. Und sein Angesicht leuchtete wie die Sonne, seine Kleider aber wurden weiß wie das Licht” (Mt 17: 2). (...and he was transformed before them: and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light).

Metaphorical *wie*-comparisons are based not only on external similarities, but also on feelings and sensations caused by a particular natural phenomenon.

Such thematic groups of *wie*-comparisons as the plant world, inanimate objects and abstract concepts are presented in the biblical text as single examples.

“Und er sprach: Wie sollen wir das Reich Gottes vergleichen? Oder in welchem Gleichnis sollen wir es darstellen? Wie ein Senfkorn, das, wenn es auf die Erde gesät wird, kleiner ist als alle <Arten von> Samen, die auf der Erde sind” (Mk 4: 30-31). (And he said, "what shall we compare the Kingdom of God to?" Or what parable shall we use to represent it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown in the ground, is the least of all the seeds on the earth).

In the gospel of Luke, the scribes and Pharisees are compared to coffins.

“Wehe euch! Denn ihr seid wie die Gräfte, die verborgen sind, und die Menschen, die darüber hingehen, wissen es nicht” (Luke 11: 44). (Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you are like hidden coffins, over which people walk without knowing that).

Thus, *wie*-comparison in the gospel texts is a common language means of representing religious symbols. Along with this comparison, the verb *gleichen* (*to resemble, to be similar*) and other language tools are widely used.

In the gospel of Matthew we find the following comparisons of the Kingdom of Heaven:

“Das Reich der Himmel gleicht einem Senfkorn, das ein Mensch nahm und auf seinen Acker säte” (Mt 13: 31). (The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field).

“Das Reich der Himmel gleicht einem Sauerteig, den eine Frau nahm und unter drei Maß Mehl mengt” (Mt 13: 33). (The Kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and put in three measures of flour).

“Das Reich der Himmel gleicht einem im Acker verborgenen Schatz, den ein Mensch fand und verbarg“ (Mt 13: 44). (The Kingdom of heaven is also like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and then hid).

“Wiederum gleicht das Reich der Himmel einem Kaufmann, der schöne Perlen suchte“ (Mt 13: 45). (The Kingdom of heaven is also like a merchant looking for good pearls).

“Wiederum gleicht das Reich der Himmel einem Netz, das ins Meer geworfen wurde und <Fische> von jeder Art zusammenbrachte“ (Mt 13: 47). (The Kingdom of heaven is also like a net cast into the sea and seizing fish of every kind).

6. Findings

All the comparisons in the abovementioned stories contain a certain symbolic meaning, which is organically inherent in the biblical text. According to Eckhardt Bieger's (2011) figurative expression, “in the symbol the heavens and the earth are united“ (“im Symbol verbinden sich Himmel und Erde”) (p. 8). The study of *wie*-comparisons in the gospel texts presented in this article is a clear confirmation of this. Analysis of biblical stories containing comparisons also shows certain similarities in the German and

Russian translations of the Bible. According to the Bulgarian translators Vlahov and Florin (2012), among comparisons, first of all, stable comparisons “nationally coloured images are less common” (p. 218). This study of *wie*-comparisons in the German Bible text and the Russian translation confirms this statement. German *wie*-comparisons usually correspond to Russian phrases with “as”.

7. Conclusion

Currently, the lexicon of the religious and spiritual context is an actual subject of linguistic research, which is due to the significance of this aspect in the life of a modern man. Every research conducted on the material of individual languages and, especially, in a comparative plan involving data from different languages is important. This makes it possible to identify similarities and differences between the considered language phenomena, in other words, to establish the general cultural and national specific aspect. In conclusion, we quote the words of Schmidt (2007): “*Der Verlust von religiösem Grundwissen und die Komplexität der christlichen Gottesbilder in der darstellenden Kunst verhindern oftmals den inhaltlichen Zugang zu den Objekten*” – “the Loss of initial knowledge in the field of religion and the complexity of Christian images of God in the visual arts often prevent access to the content of objects” (p. 238). These words can be fully attributed to the study of the symbolic meaning of language phenomena, in this particular case, *wie*-comparisons.

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