

# On constructional synonymy: disentangling the Russian comparative constructions

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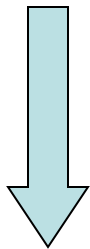
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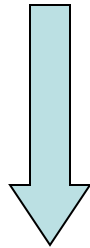
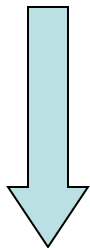
# Comparative constructions in Russian

## (1) Similative construction

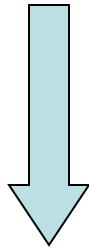
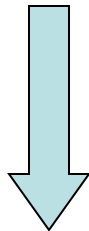
*Samolet letit kak strela.*



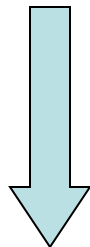
comparee



standard  
marker



standard



'The plane is flying like an arrow.'

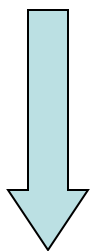
(Cuzzolin & Lehmann 2004;  
Haspelmath & Buchholz 1998)

# Comparative constructions in Russian

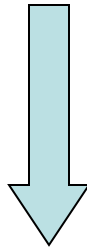
## (2) Instrumental of comparison (IoC)

*Samolet letit streloj.*

Plane flies arrow-INS  standard marker



comparee



standard

‘The plane is flying like an arrow.’

# IoC: formal realizations

- Stative nominal construction

*gubki bantikom*

lips bow-INS

‘lips shaped like a bow’

- Dynamic verbal construction

*letel kamnem*

flew stone-INS

‘dropped like a stone’

# IoC → similative

*grud' doskoj → grud' kak doska*

'breast as flat as a board'

*vyt' volkom → vyt' kak volk*

'howl like a wolf'

*sijat' zolotom → sijat' kak zoloto*

'shine like gold'

*smotret' barinom → smotret' kak barin*

'look on like a lord'

# Similative ≠> IoC

*drožit kak zajac vs. \*drožit zajcem*

‘trembles like a rabbit’

*obnjalis’ kak bratja vs. \*obnjalis’ bratjami*

‘embraced like brothers’

*zarydali kak deti vs. \*zarydali det’mi*

‘started crying like children’

# Research question

Why does Russian still use the instrumental case to express comparison if the more frequent (tokens, types) and more evenly distributed similative construction may take it over?



# Hypothesis

It is plausible that IoC has its own prototypical meaning that cannot be expressed by a simulative.



# Principle of No Synonymy

“If two constructions are syntactically distinct, they must be semantically and pragmatically distinct.”

(Goldberg 1995: 67, cf. Apresjan 1974, 2000; Kustova 2004; Paducheva 2004)

# Material

## Russian National Corpus

- ca. 185 million words
- Written (95%) and spoken (5%) parts
- Morphologically and semantically tagged

# Some problems

- High token frequency of nouns in the instrumental case: 4,806,843 tokens
- Low token frequency of the IoC
  - Subcorpus 1 (forum): no tokens of IoC per 1000 instances of instrumental nouns
  - Subcorpus 2 (fiction, 1960-2010): 19 tokens of IoC per 1000 instances of instrumental nouns

# Method

- Search for IoC-specific frequent frames (Rakhilina 2000)

motion verb + N-SG-INS

causative locative verb + N-SG-INS

N + N-SG-INS-animal

- Search for simulative counterparts
- Comparative analysis

# Main finding: IoC-specific meaning

Similarity in **shape** after position verbs, causative locative verbs and motion verbs.

E.g.

*ležat' stopkoj* 'be piled'

lie pile-INS

*složit' treugol'nikom* 'fold as a triangle'

fold triangle-INS

*tropa rasxodilas' vilkoj* 'the path forked'

path branched fork-INS

# Why shape?

Shape is a crucial cue to object categorization:

- Numeral classifiers, classificatory verbs, suffixes of locatives (Aikhenvald 2004; Friedrich 1970; Heine 1982; Serzisco 1982)
- Semantics of prepositions (Brugman 1981; Herskovits 1986; Talmy 2000; Vandeloise 1994)
- Novel noun extension (Landau, Smith & Jones 1988; Bornstein 1985)

The noun in the instrumental case is a quasi-comparative means of object categorization.

# IoCs beyond shape

1. Manner of motion

*letet' kamnem* 'drop like a stone'

2. Sound

*vyt' volkom* 'howl like a wolf'

3. Manner of looking

*smotret' barinom* 'look on like a lord'

4. Overall outlook

*vygljadet' Apollonom* 'look like Apollo'

# IoC-internal inheritance hierarchy

(cf. Goldberg 2006; Kay & Fillmore 1999; Langacker 1987)

1. Monotonicity
2. Cognitive contingency
3. Observability

# Monotonicity

Shape: only shape

Beyond shape: one parameter (e.g.  
spatial configuration, manner of  
looking, motion)

# Monotonicity (2)

*Konečno, on i teper' smotrel volkom, kosil na storonu i kak budto kogo-to s'est' sobiralsja.* (F.M. Dostoyevsky)

'Of course, now he was also looking daggers out of the corner of his eyes and it seemed like he was going to eat someone up.'

*Zdes' vse čužoe, vse vyloženo kamnjami, net ni odnoj travki. Steny smotriat, kak volki na jagnenka.* (E.L. Schwarz)

'Everything is strange here, everything is paved with stones, not a blade of grass. The walls look like wolves at a lamb.'

# Monotonicity (3)

## IoC

*Rb7. PRIXODITSJA lad'e metat'sja zajcem. (S. Shipov)*

'Rb7. The rook has to dash like a hare.'

## Similative

*Ljudi, zaxvačennnye poxot'ju, mečutsja, kak zajac v zapadne. (L.N. Tolstoy )*

'People captured by lust dash like a hare in a snare.'

*I kuda ja ni mečus', kak zajac na ugonkax ...vse to že, to že! (I.S. Turgenev)*

'And wherever I run like a hare chased after, it's all the same, it's all the same.'

# Cognitive contingence

A cognitive distance between a comparee and a standard is small

E.g. fold a serviette as a triangle



Proximity principle: conceptual distance is manifested in formal distance (Haiman 1980)

- IoC: grammatical government
- Similative: no grammatical dependence, conjunction

# Cognitive contingency (2)

## IoC

*Mnogie iz mužčin zastavili nas smejat'sja. Inoj voobražaet sebja puškoju i besprestanno palit rtom svoim; drugoj revet medvedem i xodit na četveren'kax. (N.M. Karamzin)*

‘Many of the men made us laugh. One thought he was a canon and was constantly firing with his mouth. Another one was roaring like a bear and walking on all fours.’

## Similative

*Čego reveš kak medved'? Ubegaj otsjudova podal'se. (Ju. Mamleev)*

‘Why are you roaring like a bear? Get away!’

# Observability

## IoC

*Stixija razygralas' protiv včerašnego, volny razbivalis' o granitnye naberežnye, vstavaja stenoj bryzg.* (A. Bitov)

'The storm broke as against yesterday. The waves were breaking against the granite quays and rising in a wall of splashes.'

## Similative

*Vspomni Kavkaz. Xrebtu stojat, kak steny.*

'Recall the Caucasus. The mountain ranges stand like walls.'

# Observability (2)

*\*greet pečkoj*

*gives.out.warmth stove-INS*

*\*utonul toporom*

*drowned axe-INS*

*\*begal ugoreloj koškoj*

*ran mad-INS cat-INS*

*\*drožal zajcem*

*trembled hare-INS*

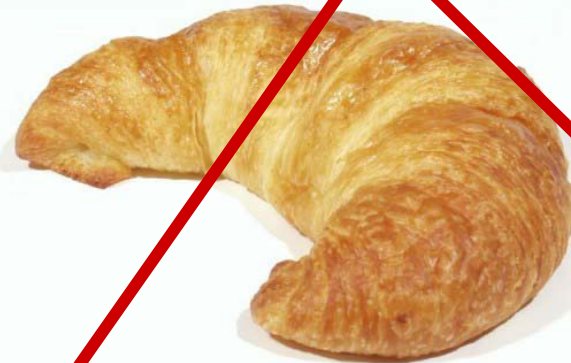
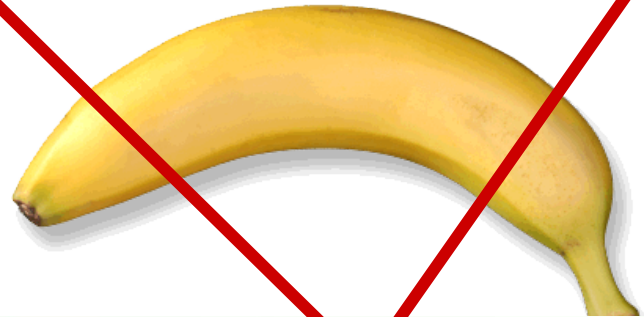
*gljadet' Napoleonom vs. voevat' kak Napoleon*

*look Napoleon-INS*

*fight like Napoleon*

# Observability (3)

Instrumental nouns have to denote standards of comparison with an established visual image.



# IoC in the instrumental family

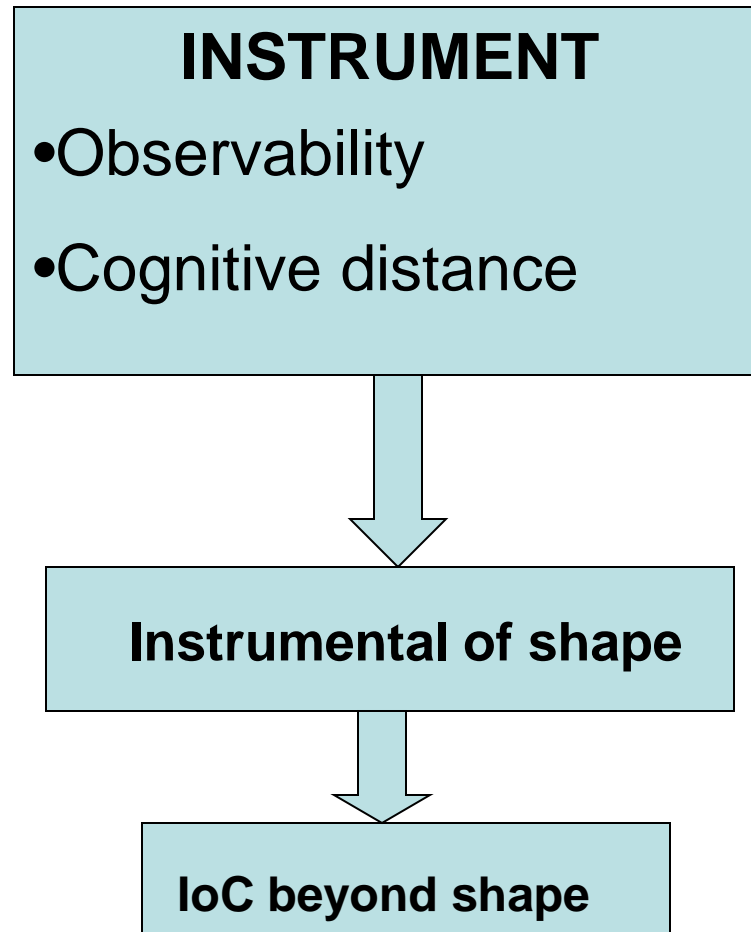
Central prototype of the instrumental case:

**INSTRUMENT**



(Janda 1993; Wierzbicka 1980)

# IoC-external inheritance hierarchy



# Observability

*rubil toporom* 'cut axe-INS'

**BUT**

\* *otomstil toporom* 'avenged axe-INS'

# Increasing cognitive distance

Nominative	Identity
Instrumental of main predication	Temporary identity
Instrumental of additional characterization	Neither comparison, nor identity
Instrumental of shape	One entity
Instrumental of quasi-comparison	Two distinct, but cognitively contingent entities
Similative	Two distinct entities

# Near-synonyms as vantanges

(MacLaury 1997)

- Two (or more) terms are available for the same conceptual domain.
- A co-extensive category is an arrangement of two vantanges (dominant and recessive).
- The prototypes of the two terms do not coincide.

# Vantage configuration

## Dominant vantage (similative)

- Focus towards the centre of the category
- Associated with emphasis on similarity
- Evenly distributed
- More frequent

## Recessive vantage (IoC)

- Focus skewed towards the margin of the category
- Associated with emphasis on difference
- Less frequent

# Conclusions

- The “instrumental of comparison” is rather quasi-comparative.
- Quasi-comparative instrumentals occupy an intermediate position between instrumentals of main predication and similatives.
- The similative is a dominant construction with a broad range of applications.
- The instrumental construction is a recessive vantage hinging on monotonicity, cognitive contingency and observability.
- Russian can grammatically encode topological types.

Thank you