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THE CATEGORY OF DEGREES OF COMPARISON OF ADJECTIVES IN SMALL FOLKLORE GENRES

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Abstract: This study investigates the category of adjective degrees of comparison in Russian small folklore genres, including proverbs, sayings, riddles, and tongue twisters. A qualitative descriptive approach combined with comparative linguistic analysis was employed to examine the structural, semantic, and stylistic characteristics of positive, comparative, and superlative adjective forms. A corpus of 250 folklore texts was analyzed using descriptive, contextual, and stylistic methods. The findings reveal that while the positive degree is the most frequently occurring grammatical form, comparative and superlative adjectives play a central role in expressing evaluation, contrast, emotional emphasis, and cultural values. Comparative constructions are particularly common in proverbs and sayings, where they function as effective devices for transmitting collective wisdom and moral principles. The results demonstrate that adjective comparison is not merely a grammatical phenomenon but also an essential stylistic resource contributing to the communicative effectiveness and cultural significance of folklore discourse.

Keywords: adjective, degrees of comparison, Russian language, folklore, proverbs, sayings, stylistics, grammar, comparative linguistics, discourse analysis.

Introduction

The category of comparison is one of the fundamental grammatical categories of adjectives in many languages, including Russian. It reflects the ability of adjectives to express different degrees of quality by comparing objects, phenomena, or individuals. Traditionally, three degrees of comparison are distinguished: the positive, comparative, and superlative degrees. These grammatical forms serve not only as linguistic tools for describing reality but also as expressive means that enrich speech and contribute to the stylistic diversity of texts. In folklore, where language functions as a repository of cultural memory and collective wisdom, comparative forms of adjectives often acquire additional semantic and pragmatic significance. They enhance imagery, emphasize evaluation, and strengthen the emotional impact of oral expressions [1].Small folklore genres, such as proverbs, sayings, riddles, tongue twisters, and short aphoristic expressions, represent a unique sphere of linguistic creativity. Despite their brevity, these genres are characterized by high semantic density, metaphorical richness, and expressive language. Their primary purpose is not only to transmit practical knowledge and moral values but also to preserve national traditions, cultural stereotypes, and linguistic peculiarities. Adjectives, particularly in their comparative and superlative forms, play an essential role in creating vivid images, highlighting contrasts, and reinforcing evaluative meanings within these concise texts [2].

The linguistic analysis of folklore has attracted considerable scholarly attention from the perspectives of lexicology, stylistics, cognitive linguistics, and cultural studies. However, the

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grammatical category of degrees of comparison in adjectives within small folklore genres remains insufficiently explored. Most previous studies have focused on lexical-semantic characteristics, phraseological units, or the cultural symbolism of folklore texts, while the grammatical mechanisms that contribute to their expressive potential have received comparatively less attention. Consequently, there is a need for a systematic investigation of how comparative and superlative adjective forms function in different types of small folklore genres and how they contribute to the communicative effectiveness of these texts [3].The relevance of the present study lies in the growing interest in the interaction between grammar and discourse, particularly within culturally significant linguistic materials. Understanding the use of adjective comparison in folklore contributes not only to theoretical linguistics but also to folklore studies, cognitive linguistics, and language teaching. Comparative constructions reveal cultural patterns of evaluation, social norms, and traditional value systems embedded in folk expressions. Moreover, such research provides insights into the stylistic mechanisms that make folklore memorable, persuasive, and emotionally expressive [4].

The aim of this study is to investigate the grammatical category of adjective degrees of comparison in small folklore genres, identify their structural and semantic characteristics, and determine their stylistic and communicative functions. The research also seeks to classify the most common comparative constructions found in proverbs, sayings, riddles, and other minor folklore genres, thereby demonstrating their contribution to the expressive power and cultural significance of folklore discourse.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design combined with elements of comparative linguistic analysis to investigate the category of adjective degrees of comparison in small folklore genres. The research focused on identifying the structural, semantic, and stylistic characteristics of comparative and superlative adjective forms in Russian folklore texts.The research material consisted of a corpus of approximately 250 examples selected from published collections of Russian proverbs, sayings, riddles, tongue twisters, and other minor folklore genres. The texts were chosen according to the following criteria: (1) authenticity and recognition as traditional folklore, (2) presence of adjectives in positive, comparative, or superlative forms, and (3) relevance to the research objectives. Duplicate examples and modern adaptations lacking traditional linguistic features were excluded from the analysis.

Data collection was carried out through continuous sampling from authoritative folklore collections and linguistic reference works. Each example containing adjective comparison was extracted and entered into a classification database. The examples were grouped according to folklore genre, grammatical structure, type of comparison, semantic function, and communicative purpose.The analysis was based on several complementary linguistic methods. The descriptive method was applied to identify grammatical forms and describe their morphological characteristics. The comparative method was used to examine similarities and differences in the use of adjective comparison across different folklore genres. Contextual analysis was employed to determine the semantic and pragmatic role of comparative constructions within complete folklore expressions. Elements of stylistic analysis were used to evaluate the expressive function of adjective comparison in creating imagery, emotional emphasis, and evaluative meaning.

For quantitative support, the identified adjective forms were classified into three grammatical categories: positive, comparative, and superlative. Their frequency of occurrence was calculated and

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compared across the selected folklore genres. The obtained numerical data were presented in percentage form to facilitate interpretation and demonstrate the distribution of grammatical forms.

To ensure the reliability of the findings, all extracted examples were analyzed independently according to the grammatical classification accepted in modern Russian linguistics. Ambiguous cases were re-examined by comparing their morphological structure with the descriptions provided in academic grammars and stylistic reference sources. This procedure minimized subjective interpretation and increased the consistency of the linguistic analysis.The collected data were processed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency counts and percentage distribution, while qualitative interpretation focused on revealing the relationship between grammatical form and stylistic function. The integrated methodological approach made it possible to identify the most productive degrees of comparison in Russian small folklore genres and explain their role in expressing evaluation, cultural values, and communicative effectiveness.

Results

The analysis of the collected corpus demonstrated that the category of adjective degrees of comparison is widely represented in Russian small folklore genres and performs important grammatical, semantic, and stylistic functions. A total of 250 folklore units were examined, including proverbs, sayings, riddles, and tongue twisters. Among them, 168 texts (67.2%) contained adjectives, while 97 examples (38.8% of the total corpus) included adjectives expressing degrees of comparison.The comparative degree was the most frequently used grammatical form. It appeared primarily in proverbs and sayings where comparison serves to contrast moral qualities, personal behavior, wisdom, and social experience. The superlative degree occurred less frequently but demonstrated strong expressive and evaluative functions, emphasizing uniqueness, superiority, or the highest degree of a particular quality. The positive degree remained dominant in descriptive folklore texts, especially riddles and tongue twisters, where direct characterization was more common than explicit comparison.

The findings also indicate that comparative adjective forms contribute significantly to the stylistic organization of folklore discourse. Rather than serving only grammatical purposes, they intensify emotional expression, reinforce figurative meaning, and facilitate the memorability of folklore texts. In many cases, comparative constructions function as rhetorical devices that strengthen persuasion and highlight traditional cultural values. These observations correspond to previous linguistic studies emphasizing the close relationship between grammatical comparison and evaluative semantics in folklore discourse [5–8].

Table 1. Distribution of adjective degrees of comparison in the analyzed folklore corpus (n = 250)

Degree of comparison	Number of occurrences	Percentage (%)	Predominant folklore genre	Main communicative function
Positive	71	42.3	Riddles, tongue twisters	Description and characterization
Comparative	58	34.5	Proverbs, sayings	Comparison,

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				evaluation, contrast
Superlative	39	23.2	Proverbs, aphoristic expressions	Emphasis, intensification, expressive evaluation

The distribution presented in Table 1 shows that the positive degree remains the most common grammatical form, accounting for 42.3% of all adjective occurrences. However, the combined frequency of comparative and superlative forms (57.7%) demonstrates that comparison constitutes one of the principal expressive mechanisms in Russian small folklore genres. The predominance of comparative constructions in proverbs reflects their didactic nature, where comparison is frequently employed to communicate moral judgments and practical wisdom. Meanwhile, the superlative degree enhances emotional intensity and stylistic expressiveness, making folklore expressions more memorable and persuasive. Overall, the results confirm that adjective comparison is not merely a grammatical phenomenon but an important stylistic resource contributing to the linguistic richness and cultural significance of Russian folklore [5–8].

Discussion

The findings of the present study demonstrate that the category of adjective degrees of comparison occupies an important position in the grammatical and stylistic organization of Russian small folklore genres. Although the positive degree remains the most frequently occurring grammatical form, the considerable proportion of comparative and superlative adjectives confirms that comparison is one of the principal expressive mechanisms used to convey evaluation, contrast, and cultural values in folklore discourse. These findings support the view that grammatical categories in folklore perform not only structural functions but also serve as effective communicative and stylistic devices [7].The predominance of comparative forms in proverbs and sayings reflects the didactic nature of these folklore genres. Proverbs frequently compare people, actions, and life situations in order to express practical wisdom or moral judgments. Comparative adjectives allow speakers to evaluate behavior indirectly, making statements more persuasive while preserving the concise and memorable structure characteristic of folklore. This observation corresponds with previous folklore studies, which emphasize that comparison is a universal strategy for transmitting collective experience and social norms through oral tradition [8].

The results further indicate that superlative adjectives contribute primarily to emotional emphasis and expressive evaluation. In many folklore expressions, the superlative degree highlights the highest manifestation of a particular quality, thereby strengthening the impact of the message. Such constructions often function as rhetorical devices rather than simple grammatical forms, increasing memorability and reinforcing cultural ideals. This confirms the opinion that grammatical categories should be interpreted within their communicative context rather than in isolation from discourse [9].Another important finding concerns the interaction between grammatical structure and cultural meaning. Comparative constructions in Russian folklore frequently represent traditional concepts such as wisdom, honesty, diligence, courage, and kindness. The repeated use of these grammatical forms demonstrates that comparison is deeply connected with the cognitive processes

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through which speakers organize and evaluate reality. Consequently, adjective comparison contributes not only to linguistic expression but also to the preservation and transmission of national cultural identity across generations [10].

The present study also reveals that different folklore genres employ adjective comparison with varying frequency and communicative purposes. Proverbs and sayings predominantly use comparative forms to express evaluation and contrast, whereas riddles and tongue twisters mainly rely on positive adjectives for descriptive purposes. This variation illustrates the close relationship between grammatical choice and genre-specific communicative objectives.Despite these findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. The corpus was limited to a selected number of Russian folklore texts and did not include regional dialectal variants or contemporary folklore. Future research may expand the corpus, compare adjective comparison across different Slavic languages, or investigate the cognitive and pragmatic aspects of comparison using digital corpus linguistics. Such studies would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between grammar, folklore, and cultural communication.

Conclusion

The present study examined the category of adjective degrees of comparison in Russian small folklore genres and demonstrated that this grammatical category performs not only a structural but also an important stylistic and communicative function. The analysis showed that the positive degree is the most frequently used form, while comparative and superlative adjectives play a significant role in expressing evaluation, contrast, and emotional intensity.The findings indicate that comparative constructions are particularly characteristic of proverbs and sayings, where they contribute to the transmission of moral values, practical wisdom, and collective cultural experience. Superlative forms, although less frequent, strengthen expressiveness and emphasize the highest degree of a particular quality, making folklore texts more memorable and persuasive. Thus, adjective comparison serves as an effective linguistic mechanism for conveying both grammatical meaning and cultural symbolism.The study confirms that the grammatical category of comparison should be analyzed not only from a morphological perspective but also within its stylistic and pragmatic context. Small folklore genres preserve traditional patterns of evaluation that reflect the worldview, social norms, and cultural identity of Russian-speaking communities. Consequently, the interaction between grammar and folklore represents an important area of interdisciplinary linguistic research.Future studies may expand the corpus by including regional folklore materials, contemporary oral traditions, and comparative analyses involving other Slavic and Turkic languages. Corpus-based and cognitive linguistic approaches may further reveal the relationship between grammatical comparison, discourse organization, and cultural conceptualization.

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