



NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY
HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

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RUSSIAN METALINGUISTIC COMPARATIVES: A FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

BASIC RESEARCH PROGRAM

WORKING PAPERS

SERIES: LINGUISTICS

WP BRP 39/LNG/2015

This Working Paper is an output of a research project implemented within NRU HSE's Annual Thematic Plan for Basic and Applied Research. Any opinions or claims contained in this Working Paper do not necessarily reflect the views of HSE

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RUSSIAN METALINGUISTIC COMPARATIVES: A FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE²

The paper proposes a functional approach to Russian metalinguistic comparatives examined in a cross-linguistic perspective. Specifically, on the basis of the Russian National Corpus, it argues for that Russian exhibits three such comparatives derived as a result of lexicalization of the following items: *lučše* ‘better’, *skoree* ‘sooner’, and *bol’še* ‘more’. The paper demonstrates that semantically, the comparatives denote Preferentiality, Probablity, and Prototypicality respectively. Morphosyntactically, it shows that they are quite distinct from standard comparatives and also from each other.

Key words: comparatives, metalinguistic comparatives, corpus linguistics, semantic map, functional syntax

JEL Classification: Z

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² The results of the project “Corpus studies of language variation: from deviations to linguistic norm”, carried out within the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) in 2015, are presented in this work. The authors are grateful to Ekaterina Rakhilina and to the audience of the 11th Conference on Typology and Grammar for Young Researchers held in Saint-Petersburg (27 – 29.11.2014) for valuable comments on the earlier version of the paper. All mistakes are solely ours.

1. Introduction

It has been widely acknowledged that comparative structures can serve as a tool to make comparison between degrees of properties that belong to the at-issue meaning of an utterance, see (1), where the degree d_1 to which John is tall is compared to the degree d_2 to which Bill is tall and $d_1 > d_2$. This comparison reflects an objective state of affairs and does not seem to vary among speakers. However, there are comparative structures that are aimed at making comparison between propositions and are dependent upon someone's (usually speaker's) opinion, see (2). In (2), the speaker compares the proposition 'John is a syntactician' and 'John is a semanticist', conveying the idea that the former proposition is somehow more appropriate/ precise/ preferential³ than the latter one. This part of an utterance meaning operates on the non-at-issue level and involves the individual's (here speaker's) attitude towards the two propositions.

(1) *John is taller than Bill is.*

(2) *John is more a syntactician than a semanticist.* (McCawley 1998)

The comparative morpheme *-er* in (1) is usually coined as standard (regular or ordinary) degree comparatives, whereas *more* in (2) exemplifies metalinguistic comparatives (henceforth meta-comparatives) termed so analogous to metalinguistic negation (see Horn 1989 and McCawley 1991). Metalinguistic negation also involves the speaker's judgement, operates on the non-at-issue level of an utterance and rejects the content of the previous sentence by virtue of contrastive negation particle, see (3).⁴

(3) *It's not stewed bunny honey, it's civet de lapin.* (Horn 1989)

Metalinguistic comparatives are a relatively new area of linguistic research and have been touched upon in few papers so far (the most prominent are Giannakidou and Stavrou 2008, Morzycki 2010, Giannakidou and Yoon 2011). However, they have already been persuasively shown to be a well-spread phenomenon in genealogically related and unrelated languages, foremost in English, Greek, Korean (ibid.). There still remain more questions than answers and definitely more empirical data have to be employed.

The goal of this paper is investigate Russian metalinguistic comparatives, see (4) – (6), and propose a semantic account for Russian meta-comparatives in a functional perspective. As we

³ We list here a few options of semantic definitions that have been circulated in the literature, see also Section 3.

⁴ Some languages mark contrastive negation with a special word, e.g. Greek *oxi*, see Giannakidou & Stavrou (2009).

show, Russian exhibits three meta-comparatives formed on the basis of the following three distinct adverbs: *skoro* – *skoree* ‘soon – sooner’, *xorošo* – *lučše* ‘good – better’, and *mnogo* – *bol’še* ‘much – more’, that is to say, on the basis of adverbs of speed, quality and quantity. We argue that each of these three meta-comparatives contributes its own semantics to the meaning of an utterance. While doing that, we base our research on the data from the Russian National Corpus⁵ (further RNC).

- (4) *Ljudi xoteli skoree zatemnit’ čem raskryt’ rodoslovnuju* <...>
 people want.PST.PL rather hide.INF than uncover.INF family_line.ACC
 ‘The people wanted to hide rather than to uncover the family line.’
 V. Aksenov (2005)

- (5) <...> *lučše doždat’sja xorošego predloženija, čem soglašat’sja na ploxoje.*
 better await.INF good.GEN proposal.GEN than agree.INF on bad.ACC
 ‘I would rather await an advantageous proposal than agree to a disadvantageous one.’
 J. Višneveckaja (2009)

- (6) *Dlja Kramnika šaxmaty bol’še iskusstvo, čem sport.*
 for Kramnik.GEN chess.NOM more art.NOM than sport.NOM
 ‘For Kramnik, chess is more art than sport.’
 I. Zajcev (2004)

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses morphosyntactic properties of Russian standard comparatives and meta-comparatives. Section 3 makes an overview of existing semantic approaches to meta-comparatives, highlighting their advantages and shortcomings, and proposes a new semantic analysis for meta-comparatives in a nutshell. Section 4 elaborates on the new analysis, presenting empirical evidence for it. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Morphosyntactic Features of Russian Standard Comparatives and Meta-comparatives

a. Origins of Russian Meta-comparatives

Russian meta-comparatives are a result of the process of lexicalization of the three standard comparative forms, that is, *skoree*, *lučše*, *bol’še*. The original positives are *skoro* ‘fast’ (i.e. speed), *xorošo* ‘well’ (i.e. quality) and *mnogo* ‘much’ (i.e. quantity). It is crucial to know the lexical

⁵ The examples we give attribution for are borrowed from the National Russian Corpus.

semantics of the positives since we can establish cross-linguistic parallels at least with some other Indo-European languages, primarily with English, Greek, French and Romanian. Notably, English *more* and *rather* denote originally quantity and speed respectively: if the motivation for *more* denoting quantity seems to be trivial, the reason why *rather* denotes speed is not so, but thanks to dictionaries, we can reliably determine that *rather* goes back to *hræth* ‘prompt’ and *hrathor* ‘earlier, sooner’ (Stevenson and Vaite (eds.) 2011). Other meta-comparatives that originally denote speed can be found in French *plutôt*, Romanian *mai degrabă* (see Goncharov 2014). Giannakidou and Stavrou (2008) and Giannakidou and Yoon (2011) investigate Greek meta-comparatives that, like Russian, have original semantics of quantity, quality and speed: a more common synthetic *perissotero* ‘more’ (or its rarer analytic analogy *pjo poli*), *kalitera* ‘better’ and *malon* ‘rather’.

As for antonymous meta-comparatives, they do not exist in Russian: *medlennee* ‘slower’, *xuže* ‘worse’ and *men’she* ‘less’ (cf. English below) are standard comparatives and thus cannot be used in meta-comparative contexts, cf. (7) – (11).

- (7) *Zanimajas'* *tol'ko* *razvitijem* *sverxsposobnostej*, *vy* *skoree*
do.CVB only developing.INS superabilities.GEN you.NOM rather
stanete *ekstrasensom*, *čem* *bojtsom* <...>.
become.FUT.2PL extrasensory_individual.INS than fighter.INS
‘By developing superabilities only, you would get extrasensory perception rather than acquire martial arts.’

Bojevoe iskusstvo planety (2004)

- (8) # *Zanimajas'* *tol'ko* *razvitijem* *sverxsposobnostej*, *vy* *medlennee* *stanete*
do.CVB only developing.INS superabilities.GEN you.NOM more_slowly become.FUT.2PL
ekstrasensom, *čem* *bojtsom* <...>.
extrasensory-individual.INS than fighter.INS

- (9) <...> *lučše* *pust'* *budet* *žit'* *kto-nibud'* *iz* *svoix* *znakomyx*,
better let be.FUT.3SG live.INF someone.NOM from oneself.GEN acquaintances.GEN
čem *čužoj*.
than stranger.NOM

‘I would prefer someone from our acquaintances than a stranger to live with.’

J. Nikulin (1979)

- (10) # *Xuže* *pust'* *budet* *žit'* *kto-nibud'* *iz* *svoix* *znakomyx*,

worse let be.FUT.3SG live.INF someone.NOM from oneself.GEN acquaintances.GEN
čem čužoj.
than stranger.NOM

- (11) *Dlja menja daže xudožnik bol'se xranitel', čem tvorets.*
for I.GEN even artist.NOM more keeper.NOM than changemaker.NOM
'For me, even an artist is more of a keeper than a changemaker.'
P. Mejlaxs (2002)

Interestingly, Morzycki (2009, 2010) assumes that English *less* can be used meta-comparatively, although, unlike meta-comparative *more*, it shows syntactic restrictions, namely it only takes the position immediately left adjacent to the adjective, cf. (12) – (15).

- (12) *George is less crazy than dumb.*
(13) *George is more crazy than dumb.*
(14) **George is crazy less than dumb.*
(15) *George is crazy more than dumb.*

All said above implies that languages make use of (at least) three possible meta-comparatives which origins are quantity, quality and speed adverbs. They all seem to be semantically close enough but not identical. Remarkably, they exist in one language examined in this paper, that is, in Russian. Therefore, our hypothesis is that meta-comparatives of the origins of speed, quality and quantity should contribute three different meanings to the general interpretation of an utterance: Probability, Preferentiality and Prototypicality respectively.⁶

Be as it may, this hypothesis contradicts current approaches developed by Giannakidou and her coauthors (2008, 2011) as well as by Morzycki (2010). In sections 3 and 4, we take up this semantic issue more seriously. However, before doing so, we examine morphosyntactic properties of standard comparatives and meta-comparatives that appear to be crucial for the discussion of the semantic issue.

⁶ There is a need for a diachronic study of how exactly these meanings of meta-comparatives were developed from the original meanings of speed, quality and quantity. We leave this question for future research.

b. Types and Morphosyntax of Russian Standard Comparatives

There are two basic types of standard comparatives in Russian that we briefly overview here: adjectival and adverbial (Rakhilina 2014).

Adjectival comparatives are formed on the basis of adjectives and morphosyntactically can be of four types: indeclinable analytic (with the form *bolee / menee* ‘more / less’), indeclinable synthetic (with the suffix *-e/-ee*),⁷ and declinable synthetic (*bol’šoj – bol’šij* ‘big / bigger’, *malyj – men’šij* ‘small / smaller’, *xorošij – lučšij* ‘good / better’, *ploxoj – xudšij* ‘bad / worse’). Remarkably, synthetic forms are semantically identical to analytic *bolee*-forms. *Menee*-forms do not have synthetic counterparts, cf. (16) – (19).

- (16) *Infljatsija v Rossii vyše, čem tempy padenija rublja <...>.*
inflation_rate.NOM in Russia.LOC higher than speeds.NOM falling_down.GEN ruble.GEN
‘Russian inflation rate is higher than fall of the ruble.’

A. Skornjakova (2003)

- (17) *<...> finansisty bolee kompetentny, čem eks-programmisty, v vedenii biznesa <...>.*
financiers.NOM more competent.NOM than ex-programmers.NOM in do.NMLZ business.GEN
‘Financiers are more competent in business than ex-programmers.’

V. Auzan (2001)

- (18) *I togda ljuboj solist menee značim, čem orkestr <...>.*
and then any.NOM soloist.NOM less important.NOM than orchestra.NOM
‘And then any soloist is less important than an orchestra.’

S. Česnokov (2003)

- (19) *<...> na suše organizm životnyx stal podvergat'sja gorazdo
on land.LOC organism.NOM animals.GEN become.PST.SG experience.INF much
bol’šej nagruzke, čem v vode.
more.DAT.SG load.DAT than in water.LOC*

‘On land, animals were experiencing more load than in water.’

Znanie – sila (2003)

⁷Another variety of indeclinable synthetic comparatives has not only suffix *-e/ee* but also prefix *po-*, for example, *povyše*. In Knyazev (2007) and Sichinava (2013), it is coined as attenuative comparative since semantically it denotes a small degree of a given property.

Adverbial comparatives are synthetic or analytic comparative forms of adverbs analogous to adjectival ones. They are instantiated in (20) – (22) respectively. Again, analytic *bolee*-forms semantically have synthetic counterparts and *menee*-forms do not.

- (20) *Odnako i etot nedostatok WU i MG sposobny preodolevat'*
 however and this.ACC shortcoming.ACC WU and MG capable.NOM overcome.INF
gorazdo bystree, čem konkurenty.
 much faster, than competitor.NOM
 ‘However, WU and MG are capable to overcome this shortcoming much faster than competitors.’
Voprosy statistiki (2004)

- (21) <...> *eto nekij bufer dlja zagruzki informatsii, sposobnyj rabotat'*
 this a_sort_of.NOM buffer for storage.GEN information.GEN capable.NOM process.INF
s jejo obmenom bolee bystro, čem jejo osnovnoj nositel'.
 with she.GEN exchange.INS more fast than she.GEN original.NOM medium.NOM
 ‘This is a sort of buffer for information storage that is able to process information faster than the original medium.’
Compjuternaja metafora (2008)

- (22) *Ja <...> pokačala golovoj, pravda, na etot raz menee uverenno.*
 I shake.PAST.SG head.INS although on this time less confidently
 ‘I shook my head although this time less confidently.’
 O. Zueva (2004)

Both adjectival and indeclinable synthetic forms of adverbial comparatives allow for both *čem*-clauses and for genitive case, cf. (23) – (27), whereas declinable synthetic and indeclinable analytic forms of adjectivals as well as analytic forms of adverbials allow for *čem*-clauses only, cf. (17) – (19), (21), (22).

- (23) *Paša vyše Koli.*
 Pasha.NOM taller Kolya.GEN
 ‘Pasha is taller than Kolya.’

- (24) *Paša pridjot bystree Koli.*
 Pasha.NOM come.FUT.3SG sooner Kolya.GEN

‘Pasha will come sooner than Kolya.’

- (25) *Paša bolee vysokij čem Kolja.*
Pasha.NOM more taller than Kolya.GEN
‘Pasha is taller than Kolya.’

- (26) *Paša begaet bystree Koli.*
Pasha.NOM run.PRS.3SG sooner Kolya.GEN
‘Pasha runs faster than Kolya.’

- (27) *Paša begaet bolee bystro čem Kolja.*
Pasha.NOM run.PRS.3SG more sooner than Kolya.GEN
‘Pasha runs faster than Kolya.’

c. Morphosyntax of Russian Meta-comparatives

Russian standard comparatives and meta-comparatives exhibit several morphosyntactic parallels and distinctions. We start examining the features common for all the three types of meta-comparatives and then turn to the discussion of the features that allow to differentiate between them.

First, as was already said, standard (adjectival and adverbial) comparatives come in two varieties: synthetic (with the suffix *-ee/-e* attached to an adjectival or adverbial root) and analytic forms (*bolee / menee* ‘more / less’ + adjective or adverb), see (16) – (19) and (20) – (23) in section 2b meta-comparatives are either of three synthetic comparatives: *bol’she* ‘more’, *skoree* ‘faster’ and *lučše* ‘better’, cf. (4) – (6) in section 1. That is to say, meta-comparatives do not have analytic forms, cf. (28) – (30) and see translations for them in (7) – (9) respectively.

- (28) **Zanimajas’ tol’ko razvitijem sverxspobnostej, vy bolee skoro*
do.CVB only developing.INS superabilities.GEN you.NOM more fast
stanete ekstrasensom, čem bojtsom <...>.
become.FUT.2PL extrasensory.individual.INS than fighter.INS

- (29) <...>* *bolee xorošo pust’ budet žit’ kto-nibud’ iz svoix*
more well let be.PRS.3SG live.INF someone.NOM from oneself.GEN

znakomyx, čem čužoj.
 acquaintances.GEN than stranger.NOM

- (30) * *Dlja menja daže xudožnik bolee mnogo xranitel', čem tvorets.*
 for I.GEN even artist.NOM more much keeper.NOM than changemaker.NOM

Second, Russian has two complementizers *čem* and *neželi* (of the meaning ‘than’), both of which are compatible with standard comparatives and meta-comparatives. That is, in all examples discussed here both complementizers seem to be interchangeable, cf. (4) – (6) with *čem* and (31) – (33) with *neželi*.⁸

- (31) <...> *ono <normalnoje ekonomičeskoje neravenstvo> skoree ulučšajet <...>*
 it.NOM normal.NOM economical.NOM inequality.NOM rather improve.PRS.3SG
sotsial'nuju situatsiju, neželi povyšajet sotsial'nuju naprjažennost'.
 social.ACC situation.ACC than increase.PRS.3SG social.ACC tension.ACC
 ‘It <normal economical inequality> improves the social situation rather than increases social tension.’
Voprosy statistiki (2004)

- (32) *Lučše by mne umeret' s toboj, neželi odinokomu <...> žit' <...>.*
 better SUBJ I.DAT die.INF with you.INS than alone.DAT live.INF
 ‘I would rather die than live alone without you.’

⁸ The obvious difference between *čem* and *neželi* is that the latter is much rarer than the former. In the present paper, we use a subcorpus of RNC from 1950 to present days, which shows (very roughly) distribution of *neželi* and *čem* with the following various search queries summarized in the table:

	<i>čem</i>	<i>neželi</i>
a comparative form at distance of 1—5 to a complementizer (after comma)	50 614	2 115
a comparative form at distance of 1—3 to a complementizer (after comma)	45 851	1 618
a comparative form at distance of 1 to a complementizer (after comma)	32 322	550

Russian is developing a new complementizer, which is a result of the combination of *neželi* and *čem* (a more frequent variety is *neželi čem*, whereas *čem neželi* is less frequent), and both of the new constructs seem to co-occur with meta-comparatives. However, this is another topic that needs further investigation.

- (33) *Mne* <...> *kažetsja*, *čto ženš'ina bol'se čelovek, neželi mužčina.*
I.DAT seem.PRS.3SG that woman.NOM more human.NOM than man.NOM
'I think that woman is more human than a man is.'
A. Iličevski (2009)

Interestingly, Greek shows different complementizers in meta-comparatives and in standard comparatives, cf. *para* vs. *apoti* in Giannakidou and Stavrou (2008).

Third, besides *čem/neželi*-clause, Russian standard adjectival and adverbial comparatives allow for genitive case (cf. (34) – (35)), while meta-comparatives are absolutely impossible with genitive (cf. (36) – (38)).

- (34) *Paša vyše Koli.*
Pasha.NOM taller Kolya.GEN
'Pasha is taller than Kolya.'
- (35) *Paša pridjot bystree Koli.*
Pasha.NOM come.FUT.3SG sooner Kolya.GEN
'Pasha will come sooner than Kolya.'
- (36) **Skoree Paša pridjot Koli.*
sooner Pasha.NOM come.FUT.3SG Kolya.GEN
'Pasha will come rather than Kolya.' (intended reading)
- (37) **Lučše pust' Paša pridjot Koli.*
better let Pasha.NOM come.FUT.3SG Kolya.GEN
'Pasha would rather come than Kolya.' (intended reading)
- (38) **Paša bol'se lingvist filosofo.*
Pasha.NOM more linguist.NOM philosoph.GEN
'Pasha is more a linguist than a philosoph.' (intended reading)

Similarly, Greek preposition *apo* is possible in standard comparatives and is ruled out in meta-comparatives.

Fourth, *čem/neželi*-clause can be omitted, cf. (39).

- (39) *Ja ležal, pered snom, i <...> dumal... ili, skoree, tak, fantaziroval.*
 I.Nom lie.PST.SG before sleep.INS and think.PST.SG or rather just fantasize.PST.SG
 ‘I was lying or rather dreaming up before sleep.’
 E. Griškovets (2004)

Fifth, meta-comparatives can be used with *a ne* ‘but not’ instead of *čem*, cf. (40).

- (40) *A predstavlenije Smoktunovskogo o roli tsarja Fjodora skoree,*
 and conception.NOM Smoktunivsky.GEN of role.LOC tsar.GEN Fedor.GEN rather
skovyvalo aktjorov, a ne raskryvalo ih individual'nostej.
 impede.PST.SG actors.ACC and NEG free.PST.SG their.ACC individualities.ACC
 ‘Smoktunivsky’s conception of the role of Tsar Fyodor was impeding actors rather than
 enabling them to expose their individualities.’
 V. Davydov (2004)

Sixth, in RNC, we encountered with the following. *Skoree* and *lučše* meta-comparatives⁹ allow constituents of different sorts (see (41) – (42)), which, strictly speaking, sound ungrammatical (cf. Morzycki 2010 for a similar effect in English); we present here only some of them and believe that this is a separate valuable topic of research.

Converbial and finite verbal clauses

- (41) *<...> pisal on mehničeski, skoree [demonstriruja, čto pišet],*
 write.PST.SG he.NOM automatically rather demonstrate.CVB that write.PRS.3SG
čem [pisal].
 than write.PST.SG
 ‘He was writing automatically, demonstrating his writing rather than writing.’
 V. Solovjov (1975-1998)

Finite and infinitive clauses

- (42) *[Ja lučše sam pobegaju utrom], čem [tolpoju v desjat’*
 I.NOM better myself jog.FUT.1SG morning.LOC than crowd.INS in ten
čelovek narezat’ krugi po škol'nomu stadionu<...>].
 men.GEN run.INF rounds.ACC on school.LOC stadium.LOC

⁹ We have not found the examples on *lučše* that would sound ungrammatical.

‘I would rather jog in the morning than ten people would run around the stadium 5 km.’

Forum Fiz-ra (2005)

Last but not least, all the three meta-comparatives are prosodically unmarked and a subsequent word has a stress (we mark a stressed word with bold). If stressed, a sentence exhibits a standard meta-comparative, cf. (43) – (44) for *bol'she*.

(43) *On bolše **poterjal**, čem priobriol.*
he.NOM more lose.PST.SG than get.PST.SG
‘He has more lost than got.’

(44) *On **bolše** poterjal, čem Vasja.*
he.NOM more lose.PST.SG than Vasya.NOM
‘He lost more than Vasya.’

In what follows, we show that *bol'she* and *skoree* meta-comparatives morphosyntactically have much in common with few differences, whereas *lučše* forms another group.

Standard comparatives apply only to gradable adjectives or adverbs, whereas *bol'she* and *skoree* meta-comparatives show cross-categorial compatibility. To give an idea, they are perfectly combined with gradable and non-gradable APs¹⁰, AdvPs, NPs, VPs, PPs, CPs, see (45) – (57) below. English is parallel to Russian in this respect, see Morzycki (2010), except for CPs that Morzycki finds rather unnatural in English.

gradable APs

(45) *Devušku poznamomili s tjotuškinym synom, kotoryj pokazalsja*
girl.ACC acquaint.PST.PL with aunt.INS son.INS who.NOM seem.PST.SG
jej skoree [AP strannym], čem [AP interesnym].
ona.DAT rather strange.INS than interesting.INS
‘The girl was acquainted with the aunt’s son who seemed strange rather than interesting.’
J. Bujda (2003)

¹⁰ However, Glass (2013) convincingly shows that non-gradable adjectives, when combined with meta-comparatives, shift towards gradable ones.

- (46) *Vot takaja že, bolše [AP čornaja], čem [AP krasnaja], vplyvala <...> luna <...>.*
 PTCL such.NOM PTCL more black.NOM than red.NOM appear.PST.SG lune.NOM
 ‘The same lune, which was more black than red, appeared <...>’
 V. Grossman (1960)

non-gradable APs

- (47) *<...> mnenie o banke poka skoree [AP otritsatel'noe], čem [AP položitel'noe].*
 opinion.NOM about bank.LOC still rather negative.NOM than positive.NOM
 ‘The opinion about the bank is still negative rather than positive.’
 Forum 'Bank Russkij Standart' (2009-2011)

- (48) *Vaša dolžnost' bolše [AP tvorčeskaja], čem [AP nomenklaturnaja].*
 your.NOM position.NOM more creative.NOM than nomenclative.NOM
 ‘Your position is more creative than nomenclative.’
 L. Fattakhova (2004)

AdvPs

- (49) *<...> ono <razvitie> bylo <...> nepolnym, poskol'ku šlo*
 it.NOM <development.NOM> be.PST.SG insufficient.INS since go.PST.SG
skoree [AdvP sverxu], čem [AdvP snizu].
 rather from_above than from_below
 ‘The development was insufficient since it was manipulated by the government rather than by people.’
 R. Medvedev (2006)

- (50) *<...> vse svoi perevoroty ja soveršal kak-to bolše*
 all my.ACC changes.ACC I.NOM make.PST.SG somehow more
[AdvP neposredstvenno], čem [AdvP jasno soznatel'no].
 spontaneously than clearly consciously
 ‘I made all my changes more spontaneously than clearly consciously.’
 N. Zlatovratskij (1877)

NPs

- (51) *Portrety anglijskoj korolevy skoree [NP privyčka], čem [NP ljubov' k monarxii].*
 portraits.NOM English.GEN queen.GEN rather habit.NOM than love.NOM to monarchy.DAT
 ‘English Queen portraits are a habit rather than a love to monarchy.’
 D. Granin (1966)

- (52) *Ja po pervomu obrazovaniju jurist, no bol'she [NP psixolog],*
 I.NOM on first.DAT education.DAT lawyer.NOM but more psychologist.NOM
čem [NP jurist].
 than lawyer.NOM
 ‘My first education is a law but I am more a psychologist than a lawyer.’
 M. Akhmedova, R. Kadyrov (2009)

TPs

- (53) <...> *odna iz jejo tainstvennyx otluček, o kotoryx ona*
 one.NOM from her mysterious.GEN absence.GEN about which.LOC she.NOM
skoree [TP uvedomljala], čem [TP prosila].
 rather notify.PST.SG than ask.PST.SG
 ‘<...> She notified about her absence rather than asked permission.’
 L. Ulickaja (2000)

- (54) <...> *takie lampy gorazdo bol'she [TP grejut], čem [TP svetjat].*
 such.NOM lamps.NOM much more warm.PRS.3PL than light.PRS.3PL
 ‘Such lamps give more warm than light.’
 M. Dmitrijevskij (2008)

PPs

- (55) *Tolpa i im inogda podbrasyvaet den'gi,*
 crowd.NOM and oni.DAT sometimes give.PRS.3SG money.ACC
skoree [PP za geroizm], čem [PP za muzyku].
 rather for heroism.ACC than for music.ACC
 ‘The crowd sometimes give them money for their heroism rather than music.’
 F. Iskander (1999)

- (56) *Etot gorod <...> stroilsja bol'she [PP dlja priezžix],*
 this.NOM town.NOM build.PST.SG more for visitors.GEN
čem [PP dlja aborigenov].
 than for local_people.GEN
 ‘This town was built for visitors rather than for local people.’
 V. Solovjov (1975-1998)

CPS

- (57) *Skoree* [_{CP} *biznesmen podarit jeho <vino> svoej ljubovnitse*],
 rather businessman.NOM give.FUT.3SG it.ACC wine.ACC his.DAT lover.DAT
čem [_{CP} *molodaja para pazopjot u_sebja doma*].
 than young.NOM couple.NOM drink.FUT.3SG at_home home
 ‘A businessman rather gives the wine to his lover than a young couple drinks it at home.’
 V. Ljaporov (2003)

As for *lučše* meta-comparatives, they are expressed with one of the following forms used in both clauses of a sentence:

- 1st and 3rd person of indicative mood in the future form, cf. (58-59);
- subjunctive mood (also with *čtoby*-clause), cf. (60-61);
- infinitive form, cf. (62);
- NPs in nominative case, cf. (63);
- 2nd person imperative, cf. (64);
- *pust'*-imperative, cf. (65).

- (58) *Lučše* *ja perestraxujus'*, *čem nedosmotrju*.
 better I.NOM be_overcautious.FUT.1SG than overlook.FUT.1SG
 ‘I would rather be overcautious than overlook.’
 T. Ustinova (2002)

- (59) *Lučše* *on sejčas rešit situatsiju <...>*, *čem*
 better he now solve.PRS.3SG situation.ACC than
budet vosstanavlivat' <...> doma.
 be.FUT.3SG rebuild.INF houses.ACC
 ‘He would rather solve the problem than rebuild houses.’
 I. Rybin (2001)

- (60) *Konečno, lučše* *by kopil, čem nakaplival*.
 certainly better SUBJ save_up.PST.SG than accumulate.PST.SG
 ‘Certainly, he would rather save up than accumulate.’
 E. Popov (1997)

- (61) *Počemu lučše, čtoby ryba pogibla, čem pošla v pišču naseleniju?*
 why better in_order_to fish.ACC die.PST.SG than go.PST.SG for food.ACC people.DAT
 ‘Why is died fish worth a food?’

A. Plešakov, V. Kozlov (1990)

- (62) *On sčítal, čo lučše samomu ispytat'*
he.NOM thought.PST.SG that better himself.DAT experience.INF
nespravedlivost', čem pričiniť jeho drugim.
injustice.ACC than cause.INF it.ACC others.DAT
'He thought that he would rather experience injustice than cause it to others.'
A. Markovič (2003)

- (63) *Lučše sinitsa v rukax, čem žuravl' v nebe.*
better tomtit.NOM in hands.LOC than crane.NOM in sky.LOC
'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.'
V. Goljahovskij (1984-2001)

- (64) *Lučše vyzyvaj zavist', čem žalost'.*
better evoke.IMP envy.ACC than compassion.ACC
'Evoking envy is worth evoking compassion.'
M. Šiškin (2010)

- (65) *Lučše pust' on vyživet posle ploxoju operatsii,*
better let he.NOM survive.FUT.3SG after bad.GEN operation.GEN
čem umrjot posle xorošej.
than die.FUT.3SG after good.GEN
'He would rather survive after a bad operation than die after a good one.'
V. Tokareva (1964-1994)

As we argue in section 4b, *lučše* meta-comparatives convey Preferentiality: the speaker considers one proposition as more preferable than another one. In fact, Preferentiality seems to be closely related to the semantic zone of desire. Indeed, the grammatical forms of such meta-comparatives (probably except for NP strategy) are restricted to those that express desire (forms of modality and, in particular, irrealis), cf. Bybee et al. (1994) and Bybee and Fleischman (1995). However, following Giannakidou and her colleagues (see section 3), we coin *lučše* meta-comparatives as preferential.

To conclude this section, *skoree* meta-comparatives demonstrate less syntactic restrictions than *bol'se* and especially *lučše* meta-comparatives. They seem to have moved further on their way to a grammaticalized construction than *bol'se* and *lučše* meta-comparatives.

3. Previous Semantic Approaches to Meta-comparatives

Meta-comparatives have been paid little attention until recently. In the beginning of the 20th century, Jespersen (1924) pointed out that sentences *His speech was more eloquent than convincing* (with adjectives), *He spoke more eloquently than convincingly* (with adverbs), *He felt rather than saw her presence in the room* (with verbs) are distinct from standard comparatives *John is older than Tom*, *This house is bigger than ours*. It was conjectured that the former sort of comparison is stylistic rather than genuine. Other literature sources that dealt with meta-comparatives, are Bresnan (1973), Embick (2007) among others. These two papers are devoted to morphosyntactic divergence between various types of standard and metalinguistic comparatives within the generative framework. All of these papers might be regarded as prerequisites for two further theories of metalinguistic comparatives consolidated in this section.

To the best of our knowledge, the first series of papers that systematically and comprehensively tackled the semantic difference between standard comparatives and meta-comparatives were Giannakidou and Stavrou (2008), Giannakidou and Yoon (2009, 2011). They claim that Greek and Korean exhibit three semantic groups of meta-comparatives, namely Appropriateness Assessment, Preferentiality and Expressive Dispreferentiality.

The first variety of meta-comparatives, which is Appropriateness Assessment, is the speaker's attitude towards which of the two sentences is more appropriate for a given state of affairs. Giannakidou and her colleagues suggest applying Potts (2007)'s analysis of quotation to this variety of meta-comparatives. For instance, in Greek (66), the speaker prefers the sentence *Paul is a philologist* to the sentence *Paul is a linguist*. In Korean (69), the speaker prefers the sentence *Lee is bright* to the sentence *Lee is industrious*. In other words, the speaker assesses the degree of appropriateness of two sentences.

The second variety of meta-comparatives, which is Preferentiality, involves comparison of the content of two sentences, that is, of two propositions, from the part of the speaker. To illustrate, in Greek (67), the speaker prefers one situation to another, namely to go on trips than sit in front of the TV. Similarly, In Korean (70), the speaker prefers to stay home rather than go out with the addressee tonight.

As for the third variety, which is Expressive Dispreferentiality, it conveys a strong negative attitude of the speaker towards the content of the second proposition even though the content of the first proposition is normally inappropriate for any person at all. That is, in Greek (68) and Korean (71), the speaker prefers to die than marry a particular man, although dying is

normally viewed as something negative. However, the speaker treats it as if it were more preferable than what is conveyed in the first proposition.¹¹

GREEK

Appropriateness Assessment

- (66) *O Pavlos ine perissotero philologhos {para/apoti} glossologhos.*
 the Paul is.3SG More filologist than Linguist
 ‘Paul is more of a philologist than he is a linguist.’

Preference

- (67) *Kalitera na Pigheno ekdromes {para/#apoti}*
 better SUBJ go.1SG excursions than
na kathome brosta stin tileorasi!
 SUBJ sit.1SG in front to-the TV
 ‘I would rather go on trips than sit in front of the TV.’

Expressive Dispreference

- (68) *Kalitera na pethano {para/#apoti} na ton pandrefto.*
 better SUBJ die.1SG than SUBJ him marry.1SG
 ‘I would rather die than marry him.’

KOREAN

Appropriateness Assessment

- (69) *Lee-nun pwucirenha-ta-kipota¹² ttokttokha-ta.*
 Lee-TOP industrious-DECL-saying.than bright-DECL
 ‘Lee is more bright than industrious.’

Preference

¹¹ In Korean, Expressive Dispreference is lexicalized in a different way than Appropriateness Assessment and Preference.

¹² Following Sawada (2007), Morzycki (2010) observes that Japanese also has a metalinguistic comparative *iuyori* that is glossed in a similar manner as Korean *kipota*:

- (i) *Taroo-wa sensei-to iu-yori gakusya-da.*
 Taroo-TOP teacher-as say-than scholar-PRED
 ‘Taroo is more a scholar than a teacher.’

- (70) *Onulpam ne-wa naka-kipota cip-ey iss-keyss-ta.*
 Tonight you-with go out-saying.than home-LOC stay-will-DECL
 ‘I prefer to stay home rather than go out with you tonight.’ (because I am tired.)

Expressive Dispreference

- (71) *ku-wa kyelhonha-nuni (charari) nay-ka cwuk-keyss-ta.*
 him-DAT marry-rather than rather I-NOM die-will-DECL
 ‘I would rather die than marry him.’

The main idea of the approach proposed by Giannakidou and her colleagues is that preference is always present in the semantics of meta-comparatives and all the three semantic varieties established above are derived from it, cf.:

“Preference brings in an individual’s perspective towards the sentence, <...>; it is an ordering induced by the speaker in a given context and with respect to the specific communicative goal of the context. The communicative goal will determine if the preference will be preference of sentences as objects themselves, in which case we end up with the appropriateness judgments; or preference of the content of the sentence, in which case we can have the more emphatic statements” (Giannakidou and Yoon 2011: 624).

We generally agree with Giannakidou and her colleagues on Preference/ Expressive Dispreference analysis and extend it to Russian *lučše* (although we slightly modify the terms as Preferentiality / Expressive Dispreferentiality, see section 4a). However, Giannakidou and her colleagues do not provide any evidence for whether there is semantic difference between Greek meta-comparatives *perissotero* and *kalitera*. Relying upon the data from Russian, we show that a language might exhibit several classes of lexical meta-comparatives with each class having its own semantics.

Goncharov (2014) undermines uniform semantics of preference across languages proposed in Giannakidou and Yoon (2011) and, instead, argues for semantic cross-linguistic variation of meta-comparatives: Russian (and Romanian) meta-comparatives express epistemic probability, whereas French and English meta-comparatives convey preference. Goncharov (2014) suggests that the relation of comparison between two propositions can be lexicalized in different ways across languages. We accept Goncharov’s (2014) approach to Russian *skoree* in terms of Probability but we also propose Expressive Improbability as another semantic variety of *skoree*, which comes out as analogy to Giannakidou and Yoon’s Preference vs. Expressive Dispreference distinction.

An alternative analysis of meta-comparatives is provided in Morzycki (2009, 2010). Morzycki states that standard comparatives involve comparison along scales lexically determined by vague gradable adjectives. Meta-comparatives use a generally available scale of imprecision and can be modeled as pragmatic halos (cf. Lasersohn 1999). To give an idea, consider (72). As Morzycki states, there must be a degree of precision at which the halo around *dumb* contains something true of George and the halo around *crazy* does not. This can be modeled in terms of alternative sets such that a set of alternatives for *dumb* at the precision level, say, 0.9 (*dumb, ignorant, dopey, foolish, slow-witted*) does not include *crazy* among its alternatives.

(72) *He is more dumb than crazy.*

We believe that this approach cannot account for the following Russian example.

(73) *Spivakov bol'she dirižor, čem al'tist.*
 Spivakov.NOM more conductor.NOM than viola-player.NOM
 ‘Spivakov is more a conductor than a viola-player.’

Indeed, Spivakov is acknowledged to be a conductor and a viola-player, so both alternatives are true. That is, Russian *bol'she* seems to have a presupposition condition: *bol'she* alternatives have to have evidence for in the communicated state of affairs. *Skoree* does not impose such a condition on its alternatives. Moreover, it is infelicitous if both alternatives are true, cf. (74).

(74) *Spivakov skoree dirižor, čem al'tist.*
 Spivakov.NOM rather conductor.NOM than viola-player.NOM
 ‘Spivakov is a conductor rather than a viola-player.’

Sassoon (2015) proposes an account for *more*-constructions in terms of prototypicality, according to which, “an entity *x* classifies in the category to which prototype it resembles most”, i.e. an entity can be categorized both as *y* and *z* but it is closer to the prototype of *y* than of *z*. To illustrate, in (74), Spivakov can be called both as a conductor and a viola-player but he is closer to the prototype of a conductor than of a viola-player.

4. Semantics of Russian Meta-comparatives

Both morphosyntactically and semantically, Russian meta-comparatives come in three varieties: Probability, Preferentiality, and Prototypicality, each of which is marked with a special lexicalized comparative form: *lučše ... čem/neželi*, *skoree ... čem/neželi*, and *bol'she ... čem/neželi* respectively. The terms ‘Preferentiality’, ‘Probability’, and ‘Prototypicality’ were borrowed from Giannakidou and Yoon (2011), Goncharov (2014), and Sassoon (2015) for the three types of Russian meta-comparatives respectively. We discussed their morphosyntax in section 2c. In what follows, we talk about their semantics.

a. Preferentiality meta-comparatives

We conceptualize Preferentiality as evaluation¹³ of two alternative propositions made by the speaker: the speaker regards one proposition more preferable than the other. Preferentiality is lexicalized in Russian with *lučše ... čem/neželi* ‘better ... than’ (cf. correlates in other languages: *kalitera ... para* in Greek, *would rather ... than* in English). Following Giannakidou and her colleagues, we distinguish between Preferentiality in a narrow sense and Expressive Dispreferentiality. All the examples discussed in section 2c are instances of **Preferentiality in a narrow sense**.

As for **Expressive Dispreferentiality**, we view it as a negative emotion variety of Preferentiality in a narrow sense. In its case, the first proposition usually refers to the situation that is absolutely undesirable for the speaker. The second proposition usually refers to the situation that is normally inappropriate for the speaker (e.g., death or self-mutilation). However, the speaker expresses their willingness to accept it and, therefore, regards it as more preferable than the situation referred to in the second proposition that the speaker considers as absolutely inappropriate in a given context. Consider (75) – (82). All these sentences illustrate the same structures that are used in case of Preferentiality in a narrow sense (see (58) – (65) in section 2c).

- (75) *Ja lučše otrublju sebe pravuju ruku,*
I.NOM better cut_off.FUT.1SG myself right.ACC hand.ACC
čem napišu <...> 'dana v tom'.
than write.FUT.1SG given in that
‘I would rather cut off my right hand than write an absurd letter.’

¹³ According to Arutjunova (2008), meta-comparative *lučše* expresses evaluative modality, unlike its positive form *xorošo* ‘good’, antonym *ploxo* ‘bad’ and *xuže* ‘worse’.

K. Čukovskij (1962)

- (76) <...> *on lučše umrjot v tjur'me, čem na svobode*
he.NOM better die.FUT.3SG in prison.LOC than on liberty.LOC
uvidit takoe nesčšastje.
see.FUT.3SG such.ACC misfortune.ACC

He would rather die in prison than see such a misfortune at liberty.'

E. Radzinskij (1999)

- (77) *Lučše by, govorit, umerla v tot večer,*
better SUBJ say.PRS.3SG die.PST.SG in that evening.ACC
*čem perežit' vsjo, čto proizošlo.*¹⁴
than experience.INF all.ACC that happen.PST.SG

'As she says, she would rather die that evening than experience all that happened.'

A. Pristavkin (2005)

- (78) *Deduška Ivan stal žalovat'sja, čto <...>*
grandfather.NOM Ivan.NOM begin.PST.SG complain.INF that
lučše byt' slepym, čem videt' vsjo eto.
better be.INF blind.INS than see.INF all.ACC this.ACC

'The old man complained that he would rather be blind than see all this.'

L. Petruševskaja (1996)

- (79) <...> *lučše, esli tebjja otšivajut srazu <...>*,
better if you.ACC rebuff.PRS.3PL at_once
čem vot takie <...> ugryzenija.
than PTCL such.NOM conscience.NOM

'I would rather be rebuffed than feel pangs of conscience.'

G. Vladimov (1969)

- (80) *Lučše pulja, čem perežitij moj... net, naš pozor.*
better bullet.NOM than experienced.NOM my.NOM NEG our.NOM shame.NOM
'The bullet is worth experiencing shame.'

A. Pristavkin (2005)

- (81) *Lučše nastupi sebe na jazyk, čem na verevku!*

¹⁴ We have not found an example with syntactically parallel structures in the RNC; the same refers to examples (79) – (80).

better step.on.IMP yourself on tongue.ACC than on rope.ACC
 ‘Stopping talking is worth stepping a rope.’
 K. Serafimov (1994)

- (82) *Lučše pust' sovsem bez ottsa rastut, čem s takim.*
 better let at_all without father.GEN grow_up.PRS.3PL than with such.INS
 ‘They would rather live without father than with this.’
 S. Borisova (1979)

b. Probability meta-comparatives

Following Goncharov (2014), we suggest that *skoree* meta-comparatives express semantics of probability. Probability comes in two varieties that are entirely parallel to Preferentiality discussed in section 4a: Probability in a narrow sense and Expressive Improbability.

Probability in a narrow sense means that the speaker regards one situation more probable than the other. To illustrate, in (83), according to Mozart, it is more probable that the opera gains from throwing away a duet than loses.

- (83) <...> *Mozart* <...> *soobš'aet, čto rešil vybrosit'*
 Mozart.NOM say.PRS.3SG that decide.PST.SG throw_away.INF
tselyj duet, otčego opera skoree vyigraet, čem proigraet.
 whole.ACC duet.ACC therefore opera.NOM rather gain.FUT.3SG than lose.FUT.3SG
 ‘In one of his letters, Mozart says that he decided to throw away a whole duet, and because of that “the opera gains rather than loses”.’
Sovetskoe iskusstvo (1938)

Expressive Improbability is a negative emotion variety of Probability in a narrow sense. Semantically, the second proposition usually refers to the situation that is normally improbable. However, the speaker regards it as more probable than the situation referred to in the second proposition. To illustrate, in (84), the speaker views the situation of Tito’s resuscitation and Yugoslavia’s reunion as more probable than the situation that Tacho will have the same lot as his allies.

- (84) <...> *skoree Tito voskresnet i vossoedinit'sja*
 rather Tito.NOM resuscitate.FUT.3SG and reunite.FUT.3SG
Jugoslavija, čem eto slučitsja <...>.
 Yugoslavia.NOM than this.NOM happen.FUT.3SG

‘Tito resuscitates and Yugoslavia reunites rather than this happens.’

A. Braterskij (2002)

Structurally and semantically, Expressive Dispreferentiality resembles Expressive Improbability. We discuss this issue in the next section.

c. Expressive Dispreferentiality and Expressive Improbability

Skoree and *lučše* meta-comparatives are interchangeable in the contexts of the future forms with little semantic difference, cf. ex. (85) – (86) and their 3rd person modifications in (87) – (88).

(85) *Da ja lučše umru, čem jej priznajus!*
PTCL I.NOM better die.FUT.1SG than she.DAT confess.FUT.1SG
‘I would rather die than confess her.’

(86) *Da ja skoree umru, čem jej priznajus!*
PTCL I.NOM rather die.FUT.1SG than she.DAT confess.FUT.1SG
Translation is the same.

(87) *Da on lučše umrjot, čem jej priznajetsja.*
PTCL I.NOM better die.FUT.3SG than she.DAT confess.FUT.3SG
‘He would rather die than confess her.’

(88) *Da on skoree umrjot, čem jej priznajetsja.*
PTCL I.NOM rather die.FUT.3SG than she.DAT confess.FUT.3SG
Translation is the same.

Normally, dying is normally inappropriate for the speaker and is dispreferential. Consequently, there is a strong wish of the speaker to imagine it far from reality, that is, hypothetically, as something not very probable, perhaps even improbable. This results in that Expressive Dispreferentiality and Expressive Improbability are very close semantically in the above mentioned contexts and, presumably, Expressive Improbability contexts are derived from Expressive Dispreferentiality ones. A diachronic study is needed here to verify this hypothetical change that we leave for future research.

d. Prototypicality meta-comparatives

Borrowing the term ‘Prototypicality’ from Sassoon (2015), we call *bol’she* constructions as Prototypicality meta-comparatives. We believe that the idea of quantity (which is an original meaning of *bol’she*) is preserved in *bol’she* meta-comparatives: if an entity x is more y than z, it is supposed to exhibit more features of y than of z (as we argued in section 3, both alternatives y and z have to be present in an entity x). To put it differently, an entity x is closer to the prototype of y than of z. For instance, in (52) repeated here as (89), the speaker considers himself both as a psychologist and a lawyer; however, he thinks that he has more knowledge, experience, etc. as a psychologist than as a lawyer (the same applies to English translation, as well).

- (89) *Ja po pervomu obrazovaniju jurist, no bol’she [NP psixolog],*
I.NOM on first.DAT education.DAT lawyer.NOM but more psycologist.NOM
čem [NP jurist].
than lawyer.NOM
‘My first education is a law but I am more a psychologist than a lawyer.’
M. Akhmedova, R. Kadyrov (2009)

Properties of being a psychologist or a lawyer are social concepts in Sassoon’s terms and they are felicitous in Prototypicality meta-comparatives. Remarkably, in (90) – (92), natural concepts cannot be attributed to the very same entity and, consequently, Russian *bol’she*-constructions or English *more*-counterparts are not readily acceptable.

(90) ? *This tree is more an oak than a pine.*

- (91) ? *Eto bol’she utka, čem gus’.*
this more duck.NOM than goose.NOM
This is more a duck than a goose.’

- (92) ? *On bol’she brjunet, čem blondin.*
he.NOM more brunet.NOM than blond.NOM
He is more a brunet than a blond.’

We believe that Prototypicality account can be applied not only to noun constructions. For instance, encoded by verbal constructions, a situation P resemble two situations Q and R and, according to the speaker, a situation P is closer to the prototype of a situation Q than to the prototype of a

situation R. For example, in (54) repeated here as (93), what lamps do resembles giving more warm to a greater extent than light.

- (93) <...> *takie lampy gorazdo bol'she [TP grejut], čem [TP svetjat].*
 such.NOM lamps.NOM much more warm.PRS.3PL than light.PRS.3PL
 ‘Such lamps give more warm than light.’
 M. Dmitrijevskij (2008)

Last but not least, there is no Expressive Imprecision, at least in Russian.

5. Conclusion

The results of our investigation can be summarized with help of the following semantic map.

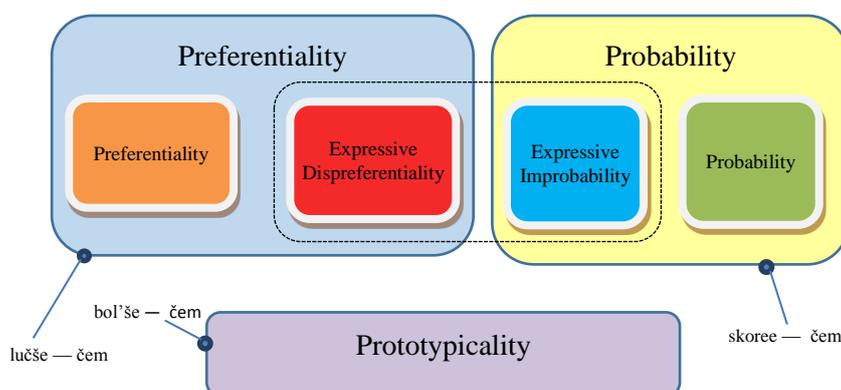


Figure 1. *Semantic map of Russian meta-comparatives*

As Figure 1 shows, Russian meta-comparatives divide into three groups that demonstrate their individual morphosyntactic and semantic features. Such features help distinguish them, on the one hand, as a class from standard meta-comparatives and, on the other hand, from each other.

To conclude, in this paper, first, we show limitations of the previous semantic approaches to meta-comparatives and tried to override them keeping some valuable ideas. Second, we take a functional perspective and propose a semantic map of meta-comparatives in Russian establishing some cross-linguistic parallels. All said above, meta-comparatives constitute a separate domain of Russian grammar and of the grammars of some other languages, as well. More work is required ending up in a comprehensive cross-linguistic survey.

Abbreviations

1 first person
2 second person
3 third person
ACC accusative
COMP complementiser
FUT future
GEN genitive
CVB converb
IMP imperative
INF infinitive
INS instrumental
LOC locative
NOM nominative
NEG negation
NMLZ nominalization
PASS passive
PL plural
PRS present
PST past
PTCP participle
SBJV subjunctive
SG singular
TOP topic

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