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Analytical Perspectives on the Lexical Semantics of Antonyms

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Abstract:

This article examines the linguistic challenges encountered in selecting antonym pairs for educational dictionaries and highlights the crucial role of linguistic norms in overcoming these issues. In particular, it emphasizes the importance of scientific approaches to word selection criteria in the context of formal and semantic shifts in modern Uzbek. The study also explores the diversity of scholarly interpretations regarding antonyms and their lexical meanings, offering theoretical insights into their semantic opposition and lexicographic representation.

Keywords: antonymy, antonyms, educational dictionary, linguistic norm, selection criteria, lexical unit, semantic opposition

Introduction

Antonymy, one of the complex issues in linguistics, is a phenomenon that arises from the study of various types of oppositions in language and the relationship between logical and linguistic categories. Terms such as *antonymy*, *semantic opposition*, *opposition*, *antithesis*, and *contradiction* are used to describe this phenomenon. Diverse analytical perspectives on antonyms and their lexical meanings have emerged within linguistic scholarship. Although various dictionaries define the term *antonym* differently, all definitions converge on a common point: antonyms refer to a category of contradiction that expresses mutually opposing meanings.

The most widely used term to express the concept of *semantic opposition* is *antonym*, which was first introduced into scientific usage by the English lexicographer C.J. Smith in his 1867 work *Synonyms and Antonyms*. The term “antonym” itself derives from the French *antonyme* (1842) and the German *antonym* (1859), both of which originate from the Ancient Greek *anti* (“opposite”) + *ónuma* (“name”). According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, “an antonym is a word that means the opposite of another word.”

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines antonyms as words that stand in direct opposition to other words: “An antonym is a word that is the opposite of another word. An opposite can be the reverse of, or something contrary to anything, not just words. For example: *hot* is the antonym of *cold*, *up* is the antonym of *down*, and *happy* is the antonym of *sad*.”



Russian linguist K.A. Levkovskaya describes antonyms as “concepts set in opposition.” In general, the semantic opposition of words reflects the opposition of the concepts they express. The concept conveyed by a word corresponds to its core semantic component, though pragmatic components may also play a role in antonymic relationships.

Theoretical Perspectives on Antonymy

Despite extensive linguistic research, a universally accepted definition of antonymy has not yet been established. According to Ya.I. Gelbukh, *“the phenomenon of antonymy cannot be fully studied without first defining what is meant by it, and conversely, the term ‘antonymy’ cannot be defined without studying the phenomenon itself.”* Russian linguist I.B. Golub suggests that the term “antonym” should refer to “opposing words” rather than simply “opposing meanings,” emphasizing the lexical aspect of the phenomenon.

Various scholars have proposed different definitions of antonyms. In the 19th century, renowned linguist C.J. Smith described *antonyms* simply as the opposite of *synonyms*. However, this simplistic view led to debate, and by the 20th century, the concept of antonymy had become more precisely defined. In 1977, Lyons defined antonyms as *“word relationships based on contrast and opposition.”* For instance, the relationship between *big* and *small* illustrates antonymy.

Chinese linguist Hu Zhuanglin supports this notion, defining antonymy as a relationship based on contrast. Another scholar, Leech, distinguishes between the phenomenon and its participants: *“Antonymy is the relationship between opposing meanings, while antonyms are the lexical items that carry those meanings.”*

The fundamental notion in identifying antonyms is *opposition*. Some linguists attempted to avoid the ambiguity of the term “opposite” by using terms like “contrary,” “opposing,” or “polar.” However, these alternatives did not clarify the concept further. Russian linguist V.A. Ivanova concluded through experimental research that *for a concept to have an opposite, its semantics must be adequately reflected, strictly defined, and semantically delimited.*

N.M. Shansky described antonyms as *“words and concepts that are phonetically distinct yet express opposing meanings and remain semantically interrelated.”* V.G. Kostomarov defined antonyms as *“words belonging to the same part of speech that express opposing meanings.”*

These diverse scholarly perspectives demonstrate a shared understanding that not only the notion of “opposing words” but also that of “opposing meanings” exists. Thus, in defining antonymy, the concepts of “opposition” and “lexical meaning” are interconnected. Understanding the essence of this meaning helps clarify the broader issue of semantic opposition.



The challenge of identifying the lexical structure of meaning has long existed in linguistics, giving rise to a variety of approaches.

Discussion and Analysis

The phenomenon of opposition is primarily known in linguistics as *antonymy*. The terms *semantic opposition* and *antonymy* are often treated as absolute synonyms in formal linguistics, and they can generally be used interchangeably. However, a question arises: can these terms truly substitute for one another in all contexts? In Uzbek linguistics, terms such as *opposition*, *semantic opposition*, and *antonymy* are used side by side. The phenomenon of *opposition* is broader in scope than *antonymy*, which is considered a subset of it. The *category of contradiction* is studied not only in linguistic terms but also in logical and philosophical contexts.

The main condition for words to be antonyms is the presence of mutual semantic opposition. In some literature, *antonymy* is interpreted as the semantic contradiction of words — a characterization often associated with Turkic linguistics, including Uzbek. Linguist M. Mirtojiyev notes that *antonymy* is a branch of lexicology that studies words with semantically opposing meanings. A. Hojiyev further explains that *antonymy* refers to the phenomenon, while *antonyms* refer to the lexical units themselves. The term *antonymy* is sometimes used interchangeably with *antonymics*, as noted in Hojiyev's *Explanatory Dictionary of Linguistic Terms*.

In our view, the term *zid* (opposite) does not negate the meaning of *qarama-qarshi* (contradictory); rather, the two complement and enrich each other. Understanding the nuanced distinctions between these terms is crucial for the accurate lexicographic representation of antonyms and for developing scientifically grounded criteria for their inclusion in educational dictionaries.

Conclusion

Antonymy remains one of the most intricate and debated phenomena in linguistic theory. The absence of a unified definition underscores the complexity of semantic opposition and its diverse manifestations in language. Various scholarly perspectives — from Smith's early view of antonyms as "the opposite of synonyms" to Lyons' and Leech's semantic approaches — reveal the multifaceted nature of *antonymy*. The integration of logical, semantic, and pragmatic components into the study of antonyms enriches our understanding of their role in language structure and lexicography.

Ultimately, *antonymy* should be examined not only as a lexical phenomenon but also as a broader semantic category that bridges linguistic, logical, and philosophical dimensions. This comprehensive approach is essential for the scientific selection and lexicographic representation of antonyms in modern Uzbek educational dictionaries.



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