

## Semantic Typology of Oxymorons

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the semantic classifications of oxymorons, focusing on their explicit and implicit forms. By employing frequency-statistical analysis on 125 English and 95 Russian examples from various literary and media sources, we aim to understand the prevalence and nature of these rhetorical devices. Our findings reveal that explicit oxymorons are more common in both languages, suggesting a universal preference for vividly contrasting expressions. This research provides a deeper insight into the function and structure of oxymorons, enhancing our understanding of their role in enhancing speech expressiveness.*

**Keywords:** Oxymoron, semantic classification, explicit oxymorons, implicit oxymorons, rhetorical device, linguistic analysis, frequency-statistical analysis

### INTRODUCTION

Oxymorons, as a rhetorical device, present an intriguing paradox by combining contradictory terms to create a unique stylistic effect. This paper examines the semantic classifications of oxymorons, based on the frameworks proposed by Y. V. Massalskaya and E. A. Ataeva. Massalskaya's classifications include denotative and connotative, usual and occasional, antithetical and non-antithetical, and natural and artificial oxymorons. However, for this study, we focus on Ataeva's distinction between explicit and implicit oxymorons.

Explicit oxymorons are characterized by components that are clearly opposed to each other, creating a stark contrast that is immediately recognizable. Implicit oxymorons, on the other

hand, involve more subtle contrasts where the opposition is less overt. By analyzing the semantic structures of these types and their frequency in English and Russian, this study aims to shed light on the nuances of oxymoronic expressions and their impact on language.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology of this research is determined by a combination of methods including traditional-descriptive, structural-semantic, linguostylistic, and contextual analysis, as well as comparative-contrastive, statistical, and linguocultural analysis.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Semantic classifications of oxymorons represent an interesting and layered aspect of linguistic analysis, allowing for a deeper understanding of the nature of this rhetorical device. According to Y. V. Massalskaya, oxymorons can be classified from the perspectives of grammar and semantics. She identifies the following categories: denotative and connotative oxymorons; usual and occasional oxymorons; antithetical and non-antithetical oxymorons; natural and artificial oxymorons.

We decided to consider the semantic classification based on the principle of E. A. Ataeva, where she divides oxymorons into explicit and implicit. Below we present the results of our research based on the frequency-statistical analysis we conducted on two types of semantic oxymorons (explicit and implicit).

Oxymoronic combinations, whose components are clearly opposed to each other, are called explicit. According to our observations, I. R. Galperin was correct in saying that in such combinations, conceptual-objective and emotional-evaluative meanings contradict in the components. In most cases, the first component represents a positive emotional evaluation.

The oxymoronic combination “freezing fire” from Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* can serve as an ideal example for analysis. Analyzing this combination, it is clear that the components contradict each other. The exact antonym of the

word “freezing” would be boiling, scorching. Looking at the synonyms of “freezing,” we see the following words: cold, icy, frigid, cool; antonyms are boiling, scorching, burning, flaming, blazing, and fire.

	<b>Oxford Dictionary</b>	<b>Longman Dictionary</b>
Freezing	(also freezing cold) extremely cold	Extremely cold
	Having temperatures that are below 0° Celsius	Below the temperature at which water turns to ice
Fire	The flames, light and heat, and often smoke, that are produced when something burns	Flames that destroy things
	Flames that are out of control and destroy buildings, trees, etc.	Flames for heating/cooling
	A pile of burning fuel, such as wood or coal, used for cooking food or heating a room	Heating equipment

The emotional-evaluative meaning can take the following form: freezing (-) + fire (+)

Also, compare with the Russian title of the popular drama by L. N. Tolstoy, *Живой труп* (*The Living Corpse*).

	Словарь Ожегова	Словарь Ушакова
живой	Такой, который живет, обладает жизнью. Живое существо.	Такой, который живет, в котором есть жизнь. Против. мёртвый
	Подлинный, самый настоящий. Изобразить живых людей. Ж. пример героизма.	Обладающий жизнью, одушевлённый. Живая природа.
труп	Мертвое тело человека или животного. Переступить или перешагнуть через чей-н. т., шагать по трупам (также перен.: не пощадить чей-н. жизни, идти на все для достижения успеха, своих целей; неодобр.).	Мертвое тело человека или животного. Поле битвы усеяно трупами. Как труп (как мертвый), в пустыне я лежал.

An implicit oxymoron is a type of oxymoronic combinations where the relationship between the components resembles that

between contextual antonyms. Unlike an explicit oxymoron, the opposition of meanings in an implicit oxymoron is expressed less obviously. The semantic structure of an implicit oxymoron differs somewhat from an explicit oxymoron, and the opposition between conceptual-objective and emotional-evaluative meanings is softened. In such oxymoronic constructions, the first component may contain both positive emotional orientation (*hot ice* – the first component “hot” usually has a positive conceptual-objective meaning, while the second component “ice” usually has a negative conceptual-objective meaning) and negative (*happy pain* – may express complex emotional-evaluative aspects, for example, describing a state when a person experiences painful emotions but considers it necessary for achieving happiness).

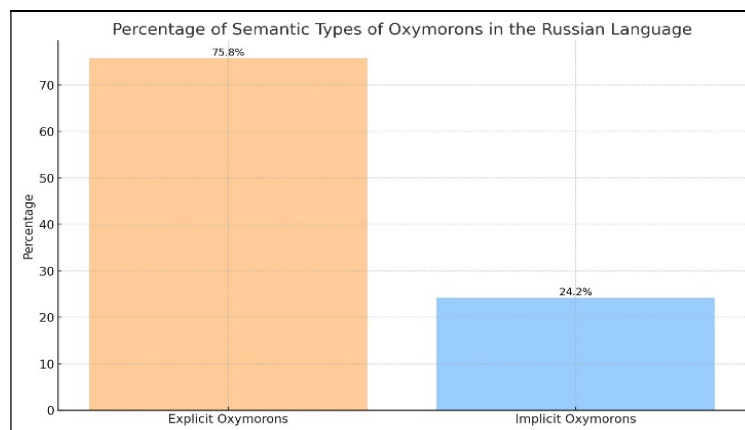
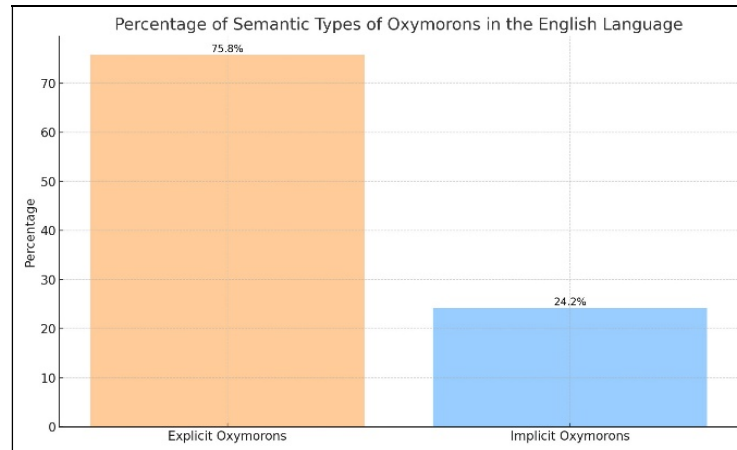
For a complete understanding, oxymoronic combinations can be analyzed in context: *He is known to **behave badly**.*

The oxymoronic combination “**behave badly**” does not consist of opposite words; they are only contrasting in context.

In this oxymoronic combination, the following conceptual-objective semantics are included: “to do things in a particular way” – “not in an acceptable way.” Here the opposition is felt, although the components are not antonyms. Where there is a conceptual-objective contrast, there is also an emotional-evaluative one. The first component is differential and expressed by an action verb carrying an emotional character, as well as the second (potential) component, expressed by an adverb: Behave(+) + badly(-).

In the given example, the emotional-evaluative semantic is extremely strong, which suppresses the emotional-evaluative semantic of the first component.

We conducted a frequency analysis of semantic types of oxymorons, based on data from a card index of 125 examples in English and 95 examples in Russian, collected from literary sources, film titles, and musical lines. The diagrams demonstrate the percentage ratio of oxymorons according to their semantic types. According to the presented information, in English, the proportion of explicit oxymorons accounts for 72.8%, while in Russian—75.8%. This similarity may indicate that in comparable languages, there is a more widespread tendency to use more vividly expressed contrasting expressions:



## CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion of the study dedicated to the exploration of oxymoron as a figure of speech can be formulated as follows: Oxymoron, being a combination of words that are opposite to each other, represents a unique stylistic phenomenon that enhances the expressiveness of speech without violating its communicative function.

Oxymorons are divided into explicit and implicit types, based on conceptual-subject and emotional semantics. Explicit oxymorons occur more frequently than implicit ones. Analysis of Russian examples (95 cases) shows that 75.8% of oxymorons belong to explicit semantic types, while 24.2% are classified as implicit. Among English examples (125 cases), 72.8% of oxymorons are explicit, and 27.2% are implicit.

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