

Semantic and Pragmatic Functions of Antonyms in French and Uzbek Literary Dialogue

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ABSTRACT

The article offers a comparative analysis of the semantic and pragmatic functions of antonymic oppositions in French and Uzbek literary dialogue. Antonymy is treated not as a purely lexical-semantic relation but as a discourse mechanism that regulates relations between characters, reveals subtext and shapes communicative strategy. The material is drawn from French drama (Molière, Hugo, Beaumarchais) and from Uzbek prose and drama (Cho'lpon, A. Qahhor, Said Ahmad). The placement of antonymic pairs in dialogue is described at the micro-, meso- and macro-levels, and their functions in free speech and in aphoristic and phraseological patterns are identified. The findings confirm that in both languages antonyms serve as a universal means of managing dialogic tension, while differing in their formal realisation and cultural motivation.

Keywords: Antonymy, literary dialogue, linguopragmatics, illocutionary force, implicature, aphorism, contextual antonym, French, Uzbek, comparative analysis.

INTRODUCTION

For a long time linguistics studied antonymy as a logical opposition between lexical units, that is, at the level of word pairs taken out of context. In recent decades, however, attention has shifted to the behaviour of antonyms in text and discourse, and in particular to their co-occurrence within a single sentence or

stretch of conversation. This approach has shown that opposite words do more than mark a difference in meaning: they organise the structure of speech, steer its argumentative direction and regulate the relationship between speakers.

Literary dialogue provides especially rich material for such analysis, because in it meaning is built not from the sum of individual words but from the alternation of turns, from silence, irony, allusion and layers of indirect meaning. When one character offers a positive evaluation, another turns it towards the negative pole; when one stresses closeness, the other widens the distance. In this way antonyms form the semantic skeleton of dialogue and govern the inner tension between turns. In French discourse analysis antonymic opposition is usually seen as a factor that intensifies argumentative turns and implicature, whereas from the standpoint of literary stylistics it serves to build character portraits and to shape textual rhythm.

Comparative studies devoted to antonymy in French and Uzbek literary dialogue are still very scarce. This article therefore combines the perspectives of linguopragmatics and the stylistics of literary discourse in order to examine, on the material of the two languages, the placement of antonymic pairs in dialogue, their functions in free speech and in fixed patterns, and their national-cultural motivation. The aim is to describe antonyms as a mechanism that regulates socio-psychological relations between interlocutors in literary dialogue, and to identify what is shared and what is language-specific in the way this mechanism operates in French and Uzbek.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The semantic nature of antonymy was described on a logical basis – through the relations of contrariety, contradiction and converseness – in the work of J. Lyons and D. A. Cruse [1: 371; 2: 310]. L. A. Novikov treated antonymy as a universal semantic category of the lexical system and gave a detailed account of its semantic structure and its types in speech [3: 290]. These studies revealed the paradigmatic properties of antonyms in depth, but

paid comparatively little attention to how antonyms interact within a text.

The systematic study of the discourse functions of antonymy began with S. Jones's corpus-based investigation. Analysing cases in which antonyms co-occur within a single sentence in British newspaper texts, he distinguished about ten functions; the most frequent proved to be ancillary antonymy – where one pair of opposites reinforces the contrast between another pair in the same sentence – and coordinated antonymy – where the two poles are joined so as to cover the whole scale [4: 193]. This classification was later supplemented with the interrogative and simultaneity functions [5: 178].

M. L. Murphy and her co-authors applied Jones's method to Swedish and reached an important conclusion: although the discourse functions of antonyms are the same across languages, their proportions differ markedly, and these differences stem partly from linguistic idiomaticity and partly from cultural values. In particular, the Swedish value of moderation and compromise is reflected in the more frequent use of constructions that attribute two opposite qualities to the same object at once [6]. This observation shows that the cultural factor must be taken into account in any comparative study of antonymy.

Working on French material, M. Steffens analysed the co-presence of antonyms through predicate–argument relations, reduced Jones's ten functions to six semantico-referential ones, and singled out two general cognitive mechanisms – the dimension effect and the binarity effect. In her view, the co-presence of two antonyms compels the hearer to search for the semantic dimension they share, while binarity can become a tool of manipulation by concealing intermediate states [7]. A. Mettinger, for his part, stressed that every opposition rests on a common ground – a semantic dimension – and interpreted antonymy as a unity of similarity and difference [8: 205].

From a pragmatic perspective the effect of antonyms in speech is explained within O. Ducrot's theory of argumentation [9: 237] and H. P. Grice's concept of implicature [10: 394]: opposed units shape not only what is said but also what is implied.

In Uzbek linguistics the study of antonymy has its own tradition. R. Shukurov produced the first monographic description of Uzbek antonyms, classifying them by semantic type and part of speech and drawing attention to contextual antonyms that arise only in speech [11: 88]. The explanatory dictionary of Uzbek antonyms compiled by Sh. Rahmatullayev, N. Mamatov & R. Shukurov systematised the antonymic pairs of the language and illustrated their use in literary texts [12: 232]. The stylistic functions of antonyms – above all antithesis and paired words – were examined in the collective work on Uzbek stylistics by A. Shomaqsudov and his co-authors [13: 248]. The pragmatic dimension of Uzbek speech was later developed by Sh. Safarov, who laid the theoretical foundations of Uzbek pragmalinguistics and described the illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects of utterances [14: 318], and by M. Hakimov, who applied pragmatic categories to Uzbek dialogue and examined the interaction of speech acts, presupposition and implicature in the national material [15: 176]. Nevertheless, the pragmatic essence of antonymy in literary dialogue, and especially its comparison with French, has not yet been the subject of a dedicated study.

METHODOLOGY

The material comprises, from French drama, Molière's *Le Misanthrope*, V. Hugo's *Ruy Blas* and Beaumarchais's *Le Mariage de Figaro* [16: 192; 17: 256; 18: 288], and, from Uzbek literature, Cho'lpon's novel *Kecha va kunduz* (Night and Day), A. Qahhor's story 'Bemor' (The Patient) and his novella *Sinchalak*, and Said Ahmad's comedy *Kelinlar qo'zg'oloni* (The Revolt of the Daughters-in-Law) [19: 288; 20: 464; 21: 144]. Dramatic works were chosen because in them antonymic oppositions surface most clearly through the relations of turn and counter-turn, negation and affirmation, hidden and overt meaning. The analysis combines contextual-semantic, linguopragmatic and comparative-typological methods; for each antonymic pair its denotative meaning, its syntagmatic position

in the dialogue, its illocutionary force and its perlocutionary effect were established.

ANALYSIS

Theoretical premises of dialogic antonymy in literary dialogue antonyms operate on two levels. On the denotative level they name the two poles of a feature; on the interpersonal level they express power, status, closeness or hostility between speakers. At the same time the author of a literary text is not confined to ready-made lexical oppositions: depending on a character's worldview and emotional state, words that are not normally antonyms are raised to the status of opposing poles. In French classical comedy pairs such as *paraître – être* (to seem – to be) and *amour – jalousie* (love – jealousy) express contrasts of social behaviour, whereas in Uzbek prose conceptual pairs such as *uy – ko'cha* (home – street), *ichkari – tashqari* (inside – outside) and *ota-ona ra'yi – farzand ixtiyori* (parents' will – child's choice) become the centre of textual conflict.

Another important property of antonyms in speech is that they do not always express direct contradiction; often they mark the linguistic boundary of negation. The famous line *Je ne vous hais point* (I do not hate you) from Corneille's *Le Cid*, or the Uzbek *Sizni yomon demoqchi emasman* (I do not mean to speak ill of you), both built on litotes, do not directly express love or approval, yet by bringing the negative pole into the discourse they create a particular pragmatic field. This shows that negated antonymy in Jones's classification [4] acquires a special expressive load in literary speech.

According to the distribution of opposition in the architecture of the text, three levels can be distinguished. At the micro-level opposed units stand side by side within a single speech act; the antithesis is compact and sharp and concentrates the illocutionary force of the utterance in one point. At the meso-level antonyms call each other forth in successive turns; this configuration is the principal means of bringing out cognitive or emotional conflict between interlocutors. At the macro-level opposed units are spread across an entire episode or work as thematic poles and

become a compositional leitmotif. Cho'lpon's *Kecha va kunduz* is a vivid example: the opposition *kecha* – *kunduz* (night – day) is not merely a title but the semantic axis that defines the ideological and emotional structure of the whole novel.

Analysis 1: The meso-level: sincerity/hypocrisy and old/new

In Molière's *Le Misanthrope* the exchange between Alceste and Philinte is built on the polarity *sincérité* – *hypocrisie*. Philinte argues that living in society requires the outward civilities that custom demands, whereas Alceste rejects this “cowardly method” and insists that no word should leave the lips unless it comes from the heart [16]. Here the dialogic opposition is not between two characters but between two pragmatic strategies: Philinte's lexis of “paying in the same coin” serves to preserve social face and soften conflict, while Alceste's *sincère*, *homme d'honneur*, *cœur* function as a verbal attack on false norms of communication.

A comparable meso-level opposition in Uzbek literature is found in *Kecha va kunduz*, in the conversation between Miryoqub and the district chief Akbarali, which polarises around *eski* – *yangi* (old – new). Explaining who the Jadids are, Miryoqub repeats the word *yangi* – “new schooling, new schools, new customs, new clothes” – and the chief immediately defends himself with “what harm is there in the old way?” before adding ironically “a new district chief, a new judge too, I suppose” [19: 288]. The repeated *yangi* signals the changes forcing their way into society, while the chief's clinging to the old way betrays the ruling class's fear of losing its position. In both examples the antonyms perform Jones's ancillary function: the A-pair (sincerity/hypocrisy, old/new) activates the contrast between the B-pair (Alceste/Philinte, Miryoqub/the chief) [4: 193; 7].

Analysis 2: Aphoristic antonymy as an expression of social stratification

In literary dialogue characters often turn to the ready-made layers of language – aphorisms and phraseological units – in order to heighten illocutionary force and to back their position with

collective experience. Whereas antonyms in free dialogue vary with the situation, antonyms embedded in fixed patterns carry a compressed opposition imprinted in national-cultural memory. In Hugo's *Ruy Blas*, the letter of a humble servant to the queen contains the line *qui se meurt en bas quand vous brillez en haut* (who dies below while you shine above); here the pairs *en bas* – *en haut* and *se meurt* – *briller* do not merely indicate location: they materialise the unbridgeable social gulf between servant and queen and carry the power to arouse pity in the hearer [17]. At the climax the line *J'ai l'habit d'un laquais, et vous en avez l'âme* (I wear a lackey's coat, and you have his soul) sets *habit* – *âme* (outer – inner) against each other, overturning the social hierarchy and reducing the nobleman to the level of a moral slave.

In A. Qahhor's 'Bemor' the helplessness of Sotiboldi is encoded through a polarity typical of folk paremiology: "at such times the thick stretches, the thin snaps" [20: 464]. Two antonymic axes intersect in this micro-text – size (*yo'g'on* – *ingichka*, thick – thin) and dynamic state (*cho'ziladi* – *uziladi*, stretches – snaps). The linguistic opposition goes beyond a description of the hero's material condition and exposes the merciless hierarchy of society: the survival of the wealthy and the ruin of the poor is here not a mere statement but a veiled protest against the injustice of the whole order. In the same author's *Sinchalak*, the "philosophy" that Eshon inherited from his father – "be neither the tip of the stake nor its head, be the middle" – rests on the opposition *uch* – *bosh* (tip – head), which denotes not a geometric measure but an entire social strategy: to be at the bottom means to be crushed, to be at the top means danger and responsibility. The character uses this aphorism to justify his cowardice and his wish to stay "in the middle," while the antonyms convey his moral shallowness to the reader with sharp irony. When the French and Uzbek examples are compared, aphoristic antonyms in both languages emerge as the most condensed pragmatic means of expressing social stratification and human tragedy.

Analysis 3: Comedy discourse: antonyms that overturn hierarchy

In the comic genre, antonymy within fixed units is not confined to laughter; it becomes a cognitive-pragmatic mechanism that exposes and explodes hidden hierarchy. In Said Ahmad's *Kelinlar qo'zg'oloni* the revolt of the daughters-in-law against the "absolute rule" established by Farmon bibi is conveyed through folk polarities. Bashorat's line "don't call us small – I'll lift you up and throw you down" rests on the opposition *kichkina* – *ko'tarib urmoq* (small – to lift and throw), which asserts that a daughter-in-law at the lowest rung of the hierarchy has the power to overturn the laws of the matriarch; the distance between the opposed units raises both the comic irony and the illocutionary force of the revolt to their maximum. *Farmon bibi's* aphoristic "I am good to the good and bad to the bad," built on the dichotomy *yaxshi* – *yomon*, serves as a linguistic shield guaranteeing her status as an absolute judge who punishes and rewards [21].

In Beaumarchais's *Le Mariage de Figaro* the revolt of the subordinate class against the ruling one is likewise built around aphoristic antonyms. Figaro's fifth-act monologue reproaches the Count with having "taken the trouble to be born, and nothing more"; beneath this lies a conceptual opposition between *naître* (hereditary privilege, inaction) and *déployer de la science* (to deploy knowledge and wit, ceaseless striving), while the *foule obscure* (obscure crowd) is set against the nobleman's brilliant rank [18: 288]. Just as the small daughter-in-law triumphs over the great mother-in-law by her wit, the servant Figaro dismantles ossified social rules through intellectual, aphoristic oppositions. In both works the antonyms display the binarity effect described by Steffens [7]: the world is divided into "those who were born" and "those who worked," into "small" and "great," and intermediate states are deliberately hidden, which lends the social revolt its rhetorical sharpness.

DISCUSSION

The results allow the function of antonyms in literary dialogue to be summarised from three angles. First, in both languages antonymic opposition emerges as a universal mechanism for

managing tension between turns. Jones's ancillary, coordinated, negated and idiomatic functions [4: 193; 5: 178] occur equally in French and Uzbek dialogue, but in literary speech they carry a dramatic rather than a statistical load: ancillary antonymy serves the polarisation of characters, negated antonymy serves litotes and irony, and idiomatic antonymy conveys collective judgement. The hypothesis of Murphy and her co-authors that the ancillary and coordinated functions may be the most frequent uses of antonyms in all languages [6] is thus borne out by the material of literary dialogue as well.

Second, the dimension effect and the binarity effect identified by Steffens [7] acquire special pragmatic significance in literary dialogue. When two antonyms co-occur, the reader is compelled to look for the semantic dimension they share; in Hugo's *en bas/en haut* or Qahhor's *yo'g'on/ingichka* this dimension is reinterpreted not as a spatial or physical feature but as social standing. The binarity effect, in turn, sharpens a character's speech rhetorically: Farmon bibi's "good/bad" and Figaro's "birth/wit" dichotomies exclude any third possibility and force the hearer to choose. Steffens's observation that these mechanisms are actively exploited in manipulative discourse is mirrored in the strategies of influence that characters use on one another in literary discourse.

Third, the form in which antonymic oppositions are expressed differs between the two languages in national-cultural terms. In French, contrast is most often clarified through parallelism and laconic antithesis: models such as *tôt ou tard*, *bon gré mal gré*, *ni chaud ni froid*, *tout... rien* are typical. In French literary dialogue lexical oppositions are directed chiefly at creating rhythmic symmetry between turns and at word-play (*jeu de mots*). In Uzbek, by contrast, paired words and reduplicative patterns occupy the central place in the expression of antonymic relations: *kecha-kunduz*, *bor-yo'g'i*, *yaxshi-yomon*, *issiq-sovuq*, *yosh-u qari*, *oldi-berdi*. Such morphological-syntactic constructions preserve lexical antonymy while adding meanings of generality, duration, totality and strong expressive colouring. Consequently, antonymic series in Uzbek dialogue appear mostly as stable pairs and phraseological patterns,

whereas in French dialogue they appear within interactive speech as individual word-play.

This difference is consistent with what Murphy and her co-authors showed for Swedish and English: the discourse functions of antonyms are universal, but the construction through which a given function is realised, and how often, is determined by the idiomatic system and cultural values of the language [6]. The predominance of paired words in Uzbek may be linked to a generalising, collective worldview, and the predominance of laconic antithesis in French to a tradition of individual argumentation; this link, however, should be recorded as an observed tendency rather than a strict causal relation.

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of French and Uzbek literary dialogue has shown that antonymy breaks out of the shell of purely lexical-semantic opposition and functions as a linguopragmatic mechanism that regulates complex socio-psychological relations between interlocutors and brings the subtext to the surface. In both languages antonyms form the semantic skeleton of dialogue and play a leading role in expressing the polarisation of characters, social stratification and revolt against hierarchy; antonyms embedded in aphoristic and phraseological patterns raise individual conflict to the level of collective judgement and bring illocutionary force to its maximum.

At the same time the formal expression of antonymic oppositions differs in national-cultural terms: French dialogue favours parallelism, laconic antithesis and word-play, whereas Uzbek dialogue favours paired words and reduplicative patterns. The distribution of oppositions across the micro-, meso- and macro-levels, as a factor defining characters' communicative strategies, proves to be a universal property of both languages. Future research should test these observations quantitatively on a larger corpus and establish how the proportions of antonymic functions depend on genre and period.

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