

## Antonyms and the Linguistic Nature of Opposition

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### Abstract

*In the numerous studies centred on antonyms in English and Albanian language, it is noted that there are many foci linguistic debates about what constitutes antonyms, in contrast to inconsistency, negation, scaling etc. In the problematic perspective of the nature of antonyms through this paper we will illustrate the problems that arise in the study of antonyms in respect to incompatibility and negation. Different linguists have different perspectives in such debates and through a qualitative research we will be able to analyze so of the key points in this perspective. The value of such a research is established in the nature of the study, more specifically, the literature used, which is a blended information source from both Albanian and English most popular authors in linguistics.*

**Keywords:** nature of opposition, antonyms, incompatibility, negation

### 1. Introduction

In the numerous studies centred on antonyms in English and Albanian language, it is noted that there are many foci linguistic debates about what constitutes antonyms, in contrast to inconsistency, negation, scaling etc. In the problematic perspective of the nature of antonyms through this paper we will illustrate the problems that arise in the study of antonyms in respect to incompatibility and negation. Different linguists have different perspectives in such debates and through a qualitative research we will be able to analyze so of the key points in this perspective. We will first deal with the research results in the nature of antonyms compared to incompatibility, and later we will focus on negation and antonyms.

### 2. Incompatibility and Antonyms

Some researchers see antonyms different from *incompatibility*. Different words have different meanings, but some of them have different meanings which are related between them through some common elements. It is interesting how some linguists analyse common features and opposites that contain words in their semantic structure. De Saussure highlighted "value" that bear the words within the common system. An example of this system in the language is that of colours, which share the same field but have their values that opposition relations that appear to be incompatible. Another feature of discordant words is that they cannot be sorted naturally but is used to listing them alphabetically. And Saussure sees colours as an "*unordered set of terms that are incompatible*". Helmsley tried to see colours in the intensity ratio between them based on physical characteristics of colours but this cannot be expressed linguistically.

Efforts have been made to define linguistics antonyms through diagnostic tests such as: experimental research Kay, Cruz, Lyons<sup>1</sup> etc., who study minimal incompatibility structures within sentences as follows:

*The bread is fresh.*  
*The bread is stale.*

From such approaches can identify pairs of words incompatibly distinguished but not those words which have

incompatible reference only those that are countering the antonyms. They fail to appreciate the antonym canonical lexical opposition, some Antonyms (canonical) couples constitute "*better*" compared with other pairs of opposing words such as "*alive / dead*" is a better couple than "*alive / expired*"

### 3. Antonyms and Negations

Problematic issues in antonym reveals also the inclusion of negative particles or not, with negative prefixes as formative tools. M. Samara states that "the relationship between the limbs of an antonymic couple there is an element of denial of the meaning of the other sentence structure, but here the denial shall be understood as a linguistic phenomenon, characteristic of words in this structure and integral part of the couple".<sup>2</sup> So *bad* deny *the good* word. But here we must distinguish between denial and denial carried in traverse through grammatical forms, such as negative particles. In the English language there are some tools to express denial that can distinguish negative particle "*not*" (*is good- is not good*), negative prefix "*free*" (*drinking-undrinkable*), negative style "*no*" (*drinkable- not drinkable*), negative sequence *s'* (*is married – isn't married*).

In terms of negative particles (*not* in English and *not / not / do not / s'*) we see that as in English and Albanian language they do not form antonym pairs, as they are morphologically unrelated to the negative prefixes. But, there are other languages, like Russian, where negative particles and negative prefixes are homonymous. While in Albanian and English with the use of negative particles, we are dealing with a denial syntactic and not by a lexical antonym. It can be concluded that in use in the sentence can replace a denial syntax through a particle with a negative derivative using a prefix antonym and will notice that the latter has a higher expressive power, emphasizing the opposition as the following example:

*I am sorry to inform you that we are not at all satisfied with your sister. We are very much dissatisfied with her.*  
(Ch.Dickens)  
(Sorry informs you that we are not satisfied with your sister. We are very unhappy with her.)

Most Albanian scholars agree here with the idea that negative particles are not word-formation elements and as such do not form as they only traverse meanings, deny another word without asserting itself. Given the definition, it is important to underline that the antonymic word originally confirm its meaning then negate the other. So particles do not meet this criterion such as type examples of "*safe / not safe*" are not a couple but simply negate the other antonym without asserting itself. M.Samara<sup>3</sup> distinguishes assertion and negation within antonym couples in sentence structure and says that "affirmative meaning of one word relates to the meaning of the word that it denies". So each lexical unit asserts something and carries a sense of denial and lies within this understanding as an integral part. J.Thomai asserts that "*there is no repudiation created between a word and its negation of particles s', no, not, don't*".<sup>4</sup> In dealing with negation, the first word is not to assert the opposite. J.Thomai thinks that "negation has content wider than the denial of a word."<sup>5</sup> Thus, e.g of *hot / not hot*, with the latter not only means that could be something cool but can also be warm, tepid, cool, etc.. Also M.Samara<sup>6</sup> states that particles *do not*, and *s'* word-elements don't serve as word-formation elements, then we are not dealing with antonyms but *logical negation*. He recognizes how word-prefix "*un*" helps in formation of antonym couples type: *married / unmarried*. In view of this Samara distinguishes between two types of antonymic couples:

- a) Repudiation antonyms or build upon lexical negation (*married / unmarried*)
- b) Antonym or counter which builds on the basis of lexical assertion of opposite meanings between two words with different roots (*married / single*).

Kh.Gosturani which broadly addresses the issue of denial in Albanian language, states that "predication with the syntactic form of negation, with affirmative content of a word with a negative particle (*not*, *s'*, *no*, *no*, *no*) in Albanian is only for certain closely related to stylistic context ... or when we don't want to call things by their name, etc.."<sup>7</sup> He distinguishes cases when two negations can give a predication. Samara rejects this view because he thinks in a semantic and structural context of the word cannot put semantic signs of reconciliation between predicative meaning expressed with two particles and the negation expression of a word with the prefix "*un*" + a negative particle. He continues his reasoning by noting that words have negative prefix structures and semantic features which give denial of this type different values compared with the negation particle expressed that he states again negative prefix expressed in the lexical meaning of the word, so it is a lexical negation while with negative particle is considered as syntactic and sentence negation. Samara believes that the claim made in Albanian activities through denial opposite meaning of the word by *non-particle* is not characteristic of popular spoken language.

*Last year I was not bad prepared.*

In the above example, Xh. Gosturani claims that is made by denying the opposite sense of the word *sorry* but we cannot say it "was not bad preparation" means "were well prepared," that we are dealing with negation word but not an assertion word. Samara distinguishes two types of characteristics for the negation in the Albanian language:

1. 1 Negation of speech by *not* negative *particles*, *s'*, *no*, and *not* (before the verb) and rarely expressed with *no* (behind surname)
2. 2 Denial by denying extensions to function as such *without* -, *none*, *non*, *S*, (adjectives + verbs)

Of these two types of negation characteristic, Albanian language has only the second type, i.e. through submissions denying character is closely related to the antonymic meaning of words. While in the first case we are not dealing with lexical antonym (lexical traverse) but with syntax traverse.

I. Goci<sup>8</sup> illustrates the rejection ratio as well as suffixes through the opposing negative schemes as follows:

- Scheme of denial: "A" / "non-A" "Beautiful" / "not nice" where members exclude each other. Also, you can build with the verb negation *am* + adjective, the models which contain an affirmative copula verbs associated with a predicative adjective in the first limb, and the negative particle "not" plus surname in the second modelled "He is good" / "it is not good").
- Meanwhile, opposition emerges scheme extended in comparison with that of denial: "A" / "not A + B", "handsome" / "beautiful + not ugly". So, as seen from the above scheme, opposition contains denial as part of the above scheme, but not limited to include the assertion after the second antonymic term, who denies the couple to assert itself as well.

Goci during his study in depth on Albanian antonyms, analyses the relationship between denial, opposition, and controversy. He notes that negation and opposition cannot be no way the same thing as negation does not constitute a formative tool, and as such cannot form antonymic pairs or traverse.

Typical negative prefixes in Albanian: *non*, *not*, *without*. (*Strong-weak*). Apart from prefix negation antonyms there happens to be also another form of word which stands opposite antonyms in the class of adjectives as in the case above where the "*powerless*" can be replaced with "*weak*" which indicate the antonymic couple "powerful" / "weak". Regarding the relationship of "*weak*" and "*powerless*" it's worth mentioning that there may be no way synonymous or the same sense as "*helpless*", which is not necessarily "*weak*" because there is a state intermediate between them.

Regarding verbs with a negative prefix in Albanian is "ç" like the "ç'bëj". The term of the counter "ç'bëj" can be discussed in relation to another form of non-controversial, but simply in negation as "s'bëj". In the second case we have not committing to action and then return to the first form, but failure to act. In connection with verbs, Samara distinguishes those couples that express verbal antonyms counteracting the mutual relationship where denial of the meaning of one word lies within the meaning of another word but is not enough to assert the contrary. For example, the couple *love* / *hate* fancy verb used in denial *does* not necessarily *fancy* reminds us *hate* (the verb).

In conclusion, we can summarize the opinion that antonyms are not a simple denial of semantic features of a word, because they complement each other. It's said that antonyms stay in a unity of negation and affirmation of oppositional perspective. Antonymic couple structures as a result are distinct, are similar as well as a component which opposes to each other.

#### 4. Antonyms and Degrees of Adjectives

*The degree of opposition* is an important factor in determining the semantic opposition. Scaling refers to the degree of relationship of opposition between two or more objects, phenomena, qualities or actions opposed. So for example "cold" and "hot" are two opposite ends of the same semantic field, which is the temperature. It should be emphasized that these two words are easily identifiable as opposites but cannot say the same for the terms that stay closer to the middle of the field of temperature such as "fresh" and "warm" which undoubtedly expresses contrast and is difficult to have the same value as the controversial couple "cold / warm". Justeson and Katz claim that "*surnames can be less or more but not just antonymic and non-antonymic*".<sup>9</sup> These examples of adjectives according S. Jones "*clearly explain the fact that what we think of as traverse must be verified through semantic reference*."<sup>10</sup> So adjectives constitute one of the parts of speech which does not have a simple definition of antonyms.

Types of traverse are:

- *full*,
- *intermediate*
- *modified*

Typology of the traverse is determined depending on the subjective position of the speakers. Antonyms are complete when they oppose most basic meanings. Here we are dealing with pure traverse, out of context. Examples *give / take, break / fix up, do good / bad bend*, etc... They are studied mainly from the antonym corps in dictionaries, because the context is not important in this analysis. We can say that they have ontological source, i.e. related to coverage of the real world, and as I. Goçi states "are not numerous and are independent values, unlike those contextually conditioned by mutual understanding of two antonyms".<sup>11</sup> If left in the limits of logical definition of antonyms, could not we be in a position to discuss the traverse modification as logic relying entirely on objective reality, nature, and know that nature has rigid boundaries for traverse extreme ends. Thus we say that there is a polarity of such extremes and antonyms are opposites such as "*good / bad*", "*old / new*", "*near / far*", "*sweet / bitter*", "*insists / defer*", "*save journey / scoundrel*" etc...

On the other **hand**, opposing partial antonyms only in some of their meanings, have a relaxation of the notion of polarity, besides not to extreme ends, and here we talk just for a counterpoint to soften. Example of *clean / unclean* face couple of *clean-dirty / filthy*. Here note that the words "*unclean*" and "*dirty / filthy*" do not constitute between them synonyms. They form synonyms such as "*unclean, defiled*" or "*dirty, filthy*." All these counteracting enter into fully or partly in correlation with the word "clean".

Leech refers to the complete opposition with the term "*binary taxonomy*"<sup>12</sup>. Other linguists such as Palmer<sup>13</sup>, Carter<sup>14</sup>, and Jackson<sup>15</sup>, prefer to use the term "*complementarity*". Kampson prefers the term *simple binary opposition* and calls them "*true antonyms*"<sup>16</sup>. This view faces the opposite opinion of Lyons<sup>17</sup> and Cruz<sup>18</sup> who do not recognize the complementary forms as antonymic and believe that "*antonyms should be limited to couples scalable*".

The logic that is used to pin such antonymic pairs is the formula wherein X, which is a *man* cannot be a *woman* as an X, which is *married* can be *single*, uses the method etc. Leech uses components analysis of a word to break down its meaning. Thus for example the word *man* he elaborates on three components namely "man" + "adult" + "male". On the other hand, he breaks down the word *woman* analysing the components of speech as opposed to *woman* to *man* as the word "man" + "increase" + "not male". This type of analysis justifies countering semantic components analysis of the meaning of the word *woman* and *man*, which traverse this accomplished through two common semantic elements and an element of contrast. Two common semantic elements (and *one adult*) semantic opposition out of other words such as cars. So we can say that these two words (man and woman) carry in themselves the terms "human" and "adult".

Kampson also uses semantic analysis components in his antonymic analysis and notes that this strategy is effective when dealing with certain antonymic couples, especially those dealing with gender and kinship. However, the explanatory power of this kind of analysis seems to have its limits. Although Kampson believes that "*an analysis of ingredients is the most obvious way to characterize the relationship ...*"<sup>19</sup> (and we accept that it is a useful tool to describe only some antonymic couples) cannot say that this analysis is always so useful and accurate.

In another sense it is Jackson who doubts the existence of a concept type of unmodified traverse through highlighting the fact that "every non-gradable antonym can be used as gradable" (1988: 76). He further calls into question the opposition between the words "female" and "male" based on the fact that nowadays performed sex change operations and research in the field of chromosomes.

For more can refer to several examples of literary extracts as follows:

*"But I feel more alive when I'm acting- rest of life becomes much more interesting"*

*Josh Logan (Josh Logan) had understood that he was everything a filmmaker could have hoped: tall, with sense of humour, terribly masculine"*

*Margot at the time was pregnant with Hector and we ate dinner and discussed later in the night.*

The above examples may be rare and questioning what we call technically "alive" or "dead". However if we will be able to derive the implied meaning of the word "more alive" "terribly masculine" and "very pregnant" will come to understand the purpose of using these "*quantitative*" (*more, and very extremely*). As Lyons stresses "in the above examples we modify second meanings of their words or connotations."<sup>20</sup> He continues with his argument that emphasizes the fact that there is a possibility of escalation to unmodified antonyms. This does not mean that there is a clear distinction between unmodified antonym and linguistic system.

## 5. Conclusions

From the above, we can say that antonymic couple structure is not easy to determine because the study requires good understanding of the components of these structures. Depending on the subjective position of the speaker sometimes, we can counter a couple of antonyms from one type of opposition in its next type. However, there can be no rigid

boundaries in linguistics. Modification is interesting to study as it helps to analyse the meanings and couples reporting antonymic to partial opposition while full antonym is seen in primary meaning.

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