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CANONICAL AND NON-CANONICAL ANTONYM PAIRS AS A SEMANTIC PHENOMENON IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Annotation: Antonymy is one of the fundamental lexical-semantic relations through which languages organize and express conceptual opposition. Although antonyms are traditionally understood as words with opposite meanings, contemporary semantic research demonstrates that opposition is not a uniform phenomenon. Antonymy” is the “oppositeness of meaning between lexemes.” Antonyms are “words which are opposite in meaning.” (Lyons, J. 1977. *Semantics (Vol. 1). Cambridge University Press.*)

Some antonym pairs represent highly conventionalized and cognitively salient oppositions, whereas others acquire their oppositional interpretation through context, discourse, morphology, lexical association, or particular conceptual domains. This article examines the distinction between canonical and non-canonical antonym pairs in English and Uzbek from a comparative semantic and cognitive perspective. The study draws on established approaches to lexical semantics and antonymy, particularly the work of Cruse, Lyons, Jones, Murphy, and Paradis and Willners. Canonical antonyms are treated as conventionalized oppositional pairs that display a strong semantic association and recurrent use as alternatives, whereas non-canonical antonyms are understood as context-dependent, morphologically derived, converse, coordinated, or otherwise less prototypical oppositions. The comparison demonstrates that English and Uzbek share several basic conceptual patterns of antonymy, including gradable, complementary, and relational oppositions, but differ in the lexical and morphological means through which oppositional meanings are constructed. The study argues that antonymy should be viewed not as a simple binary relation between isolated lexical items but as a structured semantic category with different degrees of canonicity.

Keywords: *antonymy; canonical antonyms; non-canonical antonyms; lexical semantics; English and Uzbek; cognitive semantics*

Introduction

Antonymy occupies a central position in the study of lexical semantics because opposition provides one of the most recognizable ways in which lexical meanings are organized. Words such as *good–bad*, *big–small*, *alive–dead*, and *buy–sell* demonstrate that lexical meaning cannot always be understood independently of other lexical items. The semantic interpretation of one member of an oppositional pair is frequently reinforced by its relation to another member. Consequently, antonymy is not merely a relationship between two words but a mechanism through which speakers conceptualize contrast, alternatives, scales, states, and relations.

Traditional descriptions generally define antonyms as lexical units expressing opposite meanings. However, this definition becomes problematic when different types of opposition are compared. For example, *hot–cold* differs semantically from *alive–dead*, while *buy–sell* differs from both. In the first pair, intermediate values such as *warm* are possible; in the second, the meanings are normally treated as mutually exclusive states; in the third, the two verbs describe complementary perspectives on the same commercial event. Such differences indicate that antonymy constitutes a heterogeneous semantic phenomenon.

The distinction between more prototypical and less prototypical antonyms has become particularly significant in modern approaches to lexical semantics. Cruse’s treatment of lexical relations emphasizes the diversity of oppositeness, while Lyons distinguishes different logical and semantic types of opposition. Jones’s corpus-based investigation further demonstrates that antonymy should be studied through actual language use rather than exclusively through dictionary definitions. His research examined 56 antonymous pairs in contemporary newspaper language and investigated their syntactic and discourse behaviour.

The present article applies this broader understanding to English and Uzbek. Its principal aim is to clarify the semantic distinction between canonical and non-canonical antonym pairs and to demonstrate how this distinction can be used for comparative analysis of the two languages.

Antonymy as a Lexical-Semantic Relation

Antonymy is traditionally placed among the major paradigmatic relations of the lexicon, together with synonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, and related semantic relations. Cruse’s research (Cruse, D. A. 1986. *Lexical semantics*. Cambridge University Press.)

provides an influential systematic treatment of lexical relations and includes several forms of oppositeness within the description of lexical meaning.

An important consequence of this approach is that antonymy cannot be reduced to the simple formula “A means the opposite of B.” Different oppositional relations involve different semantic structures. Consider the following English examples:

hot – cold/ young – old/ alive – dead/ present – absent/ buy – sell/ above – below

The first group represents dimensions in which values can vary along a scale. A person or object can be *warm*, *cool*, or *lukewarm* without necessarily being either *hot* or *cold*. The

second type involves mutually exclusive states, while the third expresses a reciprocal or converse relationship.

Similar distinctions can be observed in Uzbek:

katta – kichik “big – small”/ *uzun – qisqa* “long – short”/ *issiq – sovuq* “hot – cold”

tirik – o‘lik “alive – dead”/ *bor – yo‘q* “present/existing – absent/non-existing”

olmoq – bermoq “take/receive – give”

These examples suggest that English and Uzbek share important conceptual principles of opposition. At the same time, the lexical realization of these principles is language-specific.

Murphy argues (Murphy, M. L. 2003. *Semantic relations and the lexicon: Antonymy, synonymy, and other paradigms*. Cambridge University Press.) that semantic relations such as antonymy are closely associated with the organization of lexical and conceptual knowledge rather than being simply lists of fixed word-to-word relationships. This perspective is especially relevant to a comparative study because the same conceptual opposition can be lexicalized differently in different languages.

Canonical Antonym Pairs

For the purposes of this study, **canonical antonym pairs** are defined as highly conventionalized oppositional pairs whose members are strongly associated with each other in the mental lexicon and in recurrent linguistic usage. Canonality is therefore not understood as an absolute property but as a degree of semantic conventionalization.

Typical English examples include:

Type	Canonical pair	Semantic relation
Gradable	<i>hot – cold</i>	scalar opposition
Gradable	<i>big – small</i>	scalar opposition
Complementary	<i>alive – dead</i>	mutually exclusive states
Complementary	<i>true – false</i>	mutually exclusive alternatives
Relational	<i>buy – sell</i>	converse relation

Comparable Uzbek examples include:

Type	Canonical pair	Semantic relation
Gradable	<i>katta – kichik</i>	scalar opposition
Gradable	<i>issiq – sovuq</i>	scalar opposition
Complementary	<i>tirik – o‘lik</i>	mutually exclusive states
Complementary	<i>rost – yolg‘on</i>	opposing truth values
Relational	<i>olmoq – bermoq</i>	converse relation

Canonical pairs normally have several recognizable characteristics. First, they are highly familiar to speakers. Second, their members tend to occur as semantic alternatives. Third,

they can frequently be coordinated in discourse: *young and old, rich and poor, katta va kichik, yaxshi va yomon*. Fourth, their relationship is relatively stable across contexts.

Jones’s corpus-based research (Jones, S. 2002. *Antonymy: A corpus-based perspective*. Routledge.) is important in this respect because it demonstrates that antonymy can be identified and investigated through recurrent patterns of actual usage. His study examines antonym pairs in newspaper discourse and develops a corpus-oriented typology based on the ways antonyms occur in syntactic environments.

Thus, canonicity can be regarded as a combination of semantic opposition, lexical association, conventionality, and discourse recurrence.

Non-Canonical Antonym Pairs

Not every opposition encountered in language possesses the same degree of conventionality. Some pairs become oppositional only under particular contextual or conceptual conditions. These can be referred to as non-canonical antonym pairs.

Non-canonical antonymy may include several patterns:

1. morphologically derived oppositions;
2. contextually constructed oppositions;
3. converse or relational oppositions that do not exhibit scalar structure;
4. coordinated oppositions;
5. discourse-specific or domain-specific contrasts;
6. oppositions whose relationship is weaker or less lexicalized than that of canonical pairs.

For example, English *happy – unhappy* expresses opposition through the negative prefix *un-*. Uzbek similarly employs derivational morphology in pairs such as *foydali – foydasiz* “useful – useless” and *baxtli – baxtsiz* “happy – unhappy.” In such cases, the oppositional meaning is partly produced through morphological structure.

This distinction is important because the relationship between *good – bad* and *happy – unhappy* is not identical. The former is a highly conventional lexical opposition, whereas the latter can be analyzed as an opposition involving a base lexical item and its morphologically negated counterpart. Non-canonicity may also arise from context. Two words that are not normally treated as dictionary antonyms can acquire an oppositional relationship within a particular discourse. For example:

“The discussion was not about theory but practice.”

Here *theory* and *practice* are presented as contrasting conceptual alternatives. Their opposition is meaningful in the discourse even though they do not necessarily constitute a canonical antonym pair in the same way as *good–bad* or *hot–cold*.

The same phenomenon occurs in Uzbek:

“Bu masala faqat nazariya emas, balki amaliyot bilan ham bog‘liq.”

The contrast between *nazariya* “theory” and *amaliyot* “practice” emerges from their conceptual relationship in the particular discourse.

Jones’s work is particularly useful for understanding such cases because his corpus approach moves beyond a fixed dictionary-based conception of antonymy. His classification includes classes of antonymy that extend traditional categories, demonstrating that antonymy can be manifested through different textual and syntactic configurations.

Canonicity as a Continuum

A major theoretical implication of the canonical/non-canonical distinction is that antonymy should not necessarily be represented as a strict binary division.

A more adequate model can be represented as follows:

Canonicity continuum

Highly canonical → relatively canonical → intermediate → weakly canonical → context-dependent

At the highly canonical end are pairs such as: *good – bad/ big – small/ hot – cold/ yaxshi – yomon/ katta – kichik/ issiq – sovuq*

These pairs are strongly conventionalized and readily recognized as opposites.

At an intermediate level are pairs whose relationship is semantically clear but belongs to a particular type of opposition: *alive – dead/ buy – sell/ tirik – o‘lik/ olmoq – bermoq*

At the less canonical end are contextually constructed contrasts: *theory – practice/ city – village* in a particular sociological context *nazariya – amaliyot/ shahar – qishloq* when constructed as contrasting social spaces.

The continuum approach is compatible with cognitive-semantic research. Paradis and Willners propose a cognitive-semantic account in which antonymy has a conceptual basis and some lexical items acquire a particularly strong status as dimensional representatives or “protagonists” of oppositional domains.

This view provides a useful theoretical foundation for the study of canonicity. A canonical antonym is not simply a word that happens to have an opposite meaning; rather, it occupies a highly salient position within a conceptual dimension.

For example, the dimension of *SIZE* may be represented by:

BIG ←————→ SMALL

Similarly: GOOD ←————→ BAD

and in Uzbek:

KATTA ←————→ KICHIK

YAXSHI ←————→ YOMON

The two poles become cognitively prominent because speakers repeatedly use them to conceptualize and communicate variation along the relevant dimension.

Comparative Perspective: English and Uzbek

The comparison of English and Uzbek indicates considerable similarity in the conceptual organization of antonymy. Both languages distinguish scalar, complementary, and relational opposition.

Gradable antonymy can be represented as: English: *large – small, high – low, young – old*. Uzbek: *katta – kichik, baland – past, yosh – qari*

These pairs denote opposing positions on a conceptual scale rather than completely separate categories.

Complementary opposition is represented by: English: *alive – dead, present – absent*

Uzbek: *tirik – o‘lik, bor – yo‘q*

In these cases, the semantic structure is more categorical because the two terms tend to exclude each other within the relevant conceptual domain.

Relational opposition is represented by: English: *buy – sell, give – receive*

Uzbek: *olmoq – bermoq, bermoq – olmoq*.

The two members describe the same event from different participant perspectives.

However, the languages may differ in the extent to which morphology contributes to the creation of oppositional meaning. English frequently uses prefixes such as *un-*, *in-*, *im-*, *dis-*, and *non-*: *happy – unhappy/ possible – impossible/ agree – disagree/ essential – non-essential*

Uzbek also possesses productive morphological resources for expressing opposition and negation: *foydali – foydasiz/ baxtli – baxtsiz/ tartibli – tartibsiz/ umidli – umidsiz*

These examples demonstrate that a contrastive investigation should distinguish lexically established antonymy from morphologically constructed opposition.

The Uzbek lexical system also provides an important basis for systematic investigation. Contemporary Uzbek lexical resources explicitly document antonymic relations, and specialized digital resources list Uzbek words together with their antonyms.

Consequently, a bilingual study should not simply translate English antonym pairs into Uzbek. Instead, it should determine whether the translated pair possesses the same semantic type, degree of conventionalization, morphological structure, and discourse behaviour.

Cognitive-Semantic Interpretation

From a cognitive-semantic perspective, antonymy can be interpreted as a means of structuring conceptual space. Speakers use oppositional pairs to divide experience into dimensions, boundaries, alternatives, and perspectives.

Consider the conceptual dimension of TEMPERATURE:

HOT ←————→ **COLD**

The opposition is scalar because intermediate values are possible. By contrast, the conceptual domain of LIFE contains two strongly contrasting states: **ALIVE** ↔ **DEAD**

The domain of COMMERCIAL TRANSACTION involves two perspectives:

BUY ↔ **SELL**

The Uzbek language organizes these conceptual domains in comparable ways:

ISSIQ ←————→ **SOVUQ** **TIRIK** ↔ **O‘LIK**

OLMOQ ↔ **BERMOQ**

The cognitive-semantic interpretation therefore allows antonymy to be understood as more than a relation between dictionary entries. It is a way of structuring human conceptualization.

Murphy’s approach is relevant here because it connects lexical relations with the organization of linguistic and conceptual knowledge and treats antonymy as part of a broader

system of paradigmatic relations. Paradis and Willners likewise argue for a conceptual foundation of antonymy and emphasize differences in the degree to which lexical items function as prominent representatives of oppositional dimensions.

This approach provides a theoretical explanation for why some antonym pairs are immediately recognized by speakers while others require contextual interpretation.

Towards a Corpus-Based Model of Canonicity

A corpus-based approach can make the canonical/non-canonical distinction empirically testable. Following the methodological direction of Jones, antonym pairs can be investigated according to their frequency, co-occurrence patterns, syntactic frames, discourse functions, and ordering preferences. Jones’s study demonstrates that corpus evidence can reveal regularities that are not necessarily visible through dictionary definitions alone.

For English and Uzbek, the following parameters can be used:

Parameter	Canonical tendency	Non-canonical tendency
Lexical association	Strong	Weak/moderate
Conventionality	High	Variable
Context dependence	Low	High
Co-occurrence as a pair	Frequent	Less frequent
Morphological dependence	Usually low	Often higher
Cognitive salience	High	Variable
Semantic relation	Stable	Context-sensitive
Corpus recurrence	High	Variable

This model can subsequently be tested against English and Uzbek corpora. Such an investigation would make it possible to determine whether apparently equivalent antonym pairs have comparable degrees of canonicity in both languages.

The corpus perspective is particularly important because antonymy is not limited to the semantic properties of isolated lexical units. Antonyms perform discourse functions such as comparison, contrast, categorization, intensification, and rhetorical polarization. Research following Jones has subsequently applied corpus-based antonymy analysis to numerous languages, demonstrating the cross-linguistic potential of this methodology.

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that antonymy in English and Uzbek should be understood as a multidimensional lexical-semantic phenomenon rather than as a simple binary relationship between words. Canonical antonym pairs represent highly conventionalized oppositions that are strongly associated in the lexicon and readily recognized by speakers. Non-canonical antonym pairs, by contrast, may depend more heavily on morphology, conceptual relations, discourse context, or particular communicative purposes. The comparison of English and Uzbek shows that both languages possess comparable conceptual categories of opposition, including gradable, complementary, and relational antonymy.

Nevertheless, differences emerge in the lexical and morphological realization of these oppositions. Therefore, direct lexical translation cannot by itself establish equivalence between antonym pairs in the two languages. The article proposes that canonicity should be treated as a continuum rather than as a rigid binary category. This perspective makes it possible to account for highly conventional antonym pairs as well as weaker, context-dependent oppositions within one analytical framework.

From a cognitive-semantic perspective, canonical antonyms can be viewed as particularly salient lexical representatives of conceptual dimensions, while non-canonical oppositions occupy less stable positions within those dimensions. From a corpus-linguistic perspective, their differences can be investigated through frequency, co-occurrence, syntactic frames, discourse functions, and ordering patterns.

Thus, the study of canonical and non-canonical antonym pairs in English and Uzbek provides a productive meeting point between lexical semantics, cognitive linguistics, corpus linguistics, and contrastive linguistics. Further research based on balanced English and Uzbek corpora can empirically test the proposed canonicity continuum and identify language-specific patterns in the formation and use of antonymic relations.

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