

THE PHENOMENON OF ANTONYMY AND SYNONYMY IN IDIOMS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract

This article investigates the phenomena of synonymy and antonymy in idiomatic expressions in English and Uzbek languages from a comparative perspective. Idioms, as stable and figurative language units, demonstrate semantic relations similar to lexical units, including synonymy and antonymy. The study analyzes how synonymous and antonymous idioms function in both languages, highlighting their structural, semantic, and cultural peculiarities. The research shows that while both languages share universal semantic patterns, their idiomatic expressions are strongly influenced by national and cultural contexts.

Keywords: Idioms, synonymy, antonymy, phraseology, semantics, comparative linguistics.

Introduction

Idiomatic expressions represent one of the most expressive and culturally loaded layers of any language. They reflect not only linguistic structures but also the worldview, traditions, and historical experiences of a speech community. In both English and Uzbek, idioms play a significant role in enriching speech, making it more vivid, emotional, and stylistically diverse. In modern linguistics, the study of semantic relations such as synonymy and antonymy has primarily focused on lexical units. However, these relations are also characteristic of phraseological units. Idioms can form semantic networks where different expressions share similar meanings (synonymy) or express opposite meanings (antonymy). Understanding these relationships is essential for both theoretical linguistics and practical applications such as translation and language teaching. Despite numerous studies on phraseology, the phenomena of synonymy and antonymy in idioms, especially in a comparative English-Uzbek framework, remain insufficiently explored. Therefore, this study aims to analyze these semantic relations in idiomatic expressions and identify their similarities and differences across the two languages. The research is based on the following methods: **comparative, semantic, contextual analysis, descriptive method** for classification and interpretation

The data includes commonly used idioms selected from dictionaries and everyday language usage in both languages.

Synonymy in idioms refers to the presence of two or more phraseological units that express identical or closely related meanings despite differences in their lexical composition and structural form. Unlike lexical synonymy, idiomatic synonymy is more complex due to the figurative and culturally bound nature of idioms. In such cases, semantic equivalence is

determined not by individual components but by the overall meaning of the expression as a whole [3].

Idiomatic synonymy demonstrates that speakers have multiple expressive means to convey similar ideas, emotions, or evaluations. This variability enhances the stylistic richness of language and allows speakers to choose expressions depending on communicative intention and context [1].

Examples in English:

1. **Be over the moon** – extremely happy
2. **On cloud nine** – very happy
3. **Walk on air** – feel extremely joyful

Examples in Uzbek:

1. **Og‘zi qulog‘ida** – very happy
2. **Boshi osmonda** – extremely happy
3. **Sevinchdan yuragi yorilay dedi** – overwhelmed with joy

These idioms differ structurally but convey the same emotional state. English idioms often rely on spatial metaphors, whereas Uzbek idioms tend to reflect physical or emotional reactions, which indicates the influence of cultural and cognitive models on phraseological meaning [7].

Although synonymous idioms share a core meaning, they differ in: degree of intensity, stylistic coloring, emotional expressiveness. For instance, **on cloud nine** expresses a neutral positive state, while **be over the moon** indicates a stronger emotional intensity. Similarly, Uzbek idioms demonstrate variation in expressiveness depending on context. This confirms that absolute synonymy in phraseology is rare, and most cases represent partial or contextual synonymy [2]. Synonymous idioms may differ structurally while maintaining semantic equivalence. They can appear as: verbal phrases, nominal constructions, clause-like expressions. This demonstrates that in phraseology, meaning is not strictly tied to grammatical structure but rather to semantic unity [6]. Idiomatic synonymy is also context-dependent. Certain expressions function as synonyms only within specific communicative situations. Therefore, context plays a crucial role in determining semantic equivalence between idioms [4].

Antonymy in idioms refers to the semantic opposition between phraseological units that express contrasting or opposite meanings. Similar to lexical antonymy, idiomatic antonymy reflects binary oppositions in human cognition; however, it is more complex due to the figurative and metaphorical nature of idioms. In phraseology, antonymic relations are established at the level of the whole expression rather than individual components [3]. Idiomatic antonymy plays an important role in enhancing expressiveness and contrast in speech. It allows speakers to emphasize differences in emotional states, actions, or evaluations, thereby enriching communicative effectiveness [1].

Examples in English:

1. **Keep one’s head** – remain calm
2. **Lose one’s head** – panic

3. **In high spirits** – cheerful
4. **Down in the dumps** – depressed

Examples in Uzbek:

1. **O‘zini bosmoq** – remain calm
2. **O‘zini yo‘qotmoq** – panic
3. **Kayfi chog‘** – cheerful
4. **Tushkunlikka tushmoq** – depressed

These idiomatic pairs demonstrate clear semantic opposition while differing structurally. In both languages, antonymy is often expressed through contrasting emotional or psychological states, reflecting universal human experiences.

Also, idiomatic antonymy can be classified into several types:

1. Gradual antonymy

This type involves opposite ends of a semantic scale, where intermediate stages are possible.

Example:

In high spirits ↔ **Down in the dumps**

Kayfi chog‘ ↔ **Tushkunlikka tushmoq**

These idioms represent varying degrees of emotional states rather than absolute opposites.

2. Complementary antonymy

In this type, the opposition is absolute, and no intermediate state exists.

Example: Alive and kicking ↔ **Dead as a doornail**

Such antonymy reflects binary distinctions, although it is less frequent in idiomatic expressions.

3. Relational antonymy

This type is based on oppositional relationships within a specific context.

Example: context-based oppositions in actions or roles. In idioms, this type is less explicit but may appear in discourse depending on usage [2].

One of the distinctive features of idiomatic antonymy is that opposition is not always marked by direct lexical contrast. Instead, it emerges from the overall figurative meaning of the expressions. For example, in **keep one’s head** vs. **lose one’s head**, the antonymy is partially supported by lexical opposition (**keep/lose**), but the idiomatic meaning goes beyond the literal interpretation. In Uzbek, antonymic idioms often rely on verbs expressing psychological states (**bosmoq** vs. **yo‘qotmoq**), which further emphasizes emotional contrast. Idiomatic antonymy is highly context-dependent. The same idiom may have different antonymic counterparts depending on the communicative situation. Therefore, identifying antonymic relations requires careful contextual analysis [4]. The analysis also reveals that cultural factors influence the formation of antonymic idioms. While some oppositions are universal (e.g., calm vs. panic), others are shaped by national worldview and linguistic traditions [7].

The results of the study clearly demonstrate that synonymy and antonymy are not confined solely to lexical units but are also fundamental semantic relations within phraseological

systems. Idiomatic expressions, as stable and figurative units, actively participate in the formation of semantic networks where equivalence and opposition are realized at a higher, more abstract level. This confirms the view that phraseology represents an independent and semantically rich subsystem of language.

The analysis further reveals that idiomatic synonymy and antonymy significantly contribute to the expressive and stylistic potential of both English and Uzbek. Through synonymous idioms, speakers can select from a range of expressions to convey similar meanings with varying degrees of intensity and emotional coloring. Conversely, antonymic idioms enable speakers to construct sharp semantic contrasts, thereby enhancing rhetorical impact and communicative precision [1]. However, unlike lexical synonymy and antonymy, their idiomatic counterparts are characterized by a higher level of complexity. This complexity arises from several interrelated factors:

1. Figurative meaning. Idioms are based on metaphorical and symbolic interpretations, which often obscure direct semantic relations and make equivalence less transparent.
2. Cultural specificity. Idiomatic expressions are deeply rooted in the cultural and historical experience of a speech community, which limits cross-linguistic correspondence.
3. Contextual dependency. The meaning and function of idioms depend heavily on context, which affects their interpretation and potential synonymic or antonymic relations [4].

These features have important implications for translation. The study confirms that the translation of idiomatic synonymy and antonymy presents significant challenges. In many cases, direct equivalents are unavailable, requiring translators to apply adaptive strategies such as paraphrasing, substitution, or cultural adaptation. Successful translation, therefore, depends not only on linguistic competence but also on the translator's ability to interpret cultural nuances and pragmatic meanings.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis highlights both universal and language-specific tendencies. While basic emotional oppositions (e.g., joy vs. sadness, calmness vs. panic) are common across languages, their idiomatic realization varies considerably. English idioms tend to employ metaphorical imagery based on spatial or abstract concepts, whereas Uzbek idioms more frequently reflect physical states and culturally embedded imagery. This observation underscores the close relationship between language, cognition, and culture [7].

Our study has demonstrated that synonymy and antonymy are essential semantic phenomena not only at the lexical level but also within the domain of phraseology. Idiomatic expressions in both English and Uzbek exhibit well-developed systems of semantic relations that reflect the richness and diversity of linguistic expression.

The findings indicate that idiomatic synonymy expands the expressive resources of language by offering multiple ways to convey similar meanings, each with its own stylistic and emotional nuances. At the same time, idiomatic antonymy enhances contrast and opposition in discourse, thereby increasing communicative effectiveness and stylistic impact [3]. Despite structural and cultural differences between English and Uzbek, both languages reveal comparable semantic patterns in their idiomatic systems.

In conclusion, the investigation of synonymy and antonymy in idioms contributes to a deeper understanding of the semantic structure of language and its interaction with culture. Further

research may focus on corpus-based analysis, quantitative approaches, or the exploration of idiomatic relations in other language pairs, which would provide a broader empirical foundation for phraseological studies.

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