

Cultural Characteristics of Antonymic Units

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Abstract

This article examines antonymic pairs through the lens of their cultural and cognitive characteristics. Based on data from Uzbek, Russian, and English, the study applies cognitive frame theory, associative surveys, and corpus analysis to explore how antonyms reflect not only semantic opposition but also national worldviews, ethical values, and cultural codes. The findings highlight how antonymy serves as a cognitive and evaluative tool for expressing identity and reconstructing a language speaker's cultural mindset.

Keywords: antonymy, cognitive frame, national worldview, evaluative function, associative analysis, corpus research, Uzbek language, Russian language, English language, cultural semantics.

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INTRODUCTION

Antonymy represents a lexical form of oppositional relations in language and reflects not only semantic inequality but also the dichotomous worldview present in human cognition [1, 17]. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, antonyms are considered a universal mechanism for expressing the world in polarized concepts within human consciousness [2, 42]. However, this universality does not imply uniformity in meaning across languages; rather, antonyms in each language are shaped by specific cultural focal points [3, 115]. For instance, antonym pairs like "white – black," "wise – foolish," "brave – coward" encompass both semantic opposition and culturally embedded values and modes of thinking.

While these antonym pairs may be formally similar across languages, their cognitive loads differ depending on their cultural and national framing [4, 81]. Antonyms express human attitudes towards society, morality, nature, and temporality, which vary by cultural tradition [6, 63]. Though antonyms function as opposites at the lexical level, their perception, associative load, and impact are closely intertwined with culture [7, 25]. Thus, antonyms must be analyzed not only semantically but also from cultural and cognitive perspectives.

Modern linguoculturology considers the study of antonymic units' national traits essential not only for lexicology but also for understanding national mentalities [9, 121]. Antonymic pairs express values through contrast: society's collective mindset is reflected in pairs such as "truth – falsehood," "friend – enemy," "prosperity – ruin." In Uzbek, certain antonyms convey religious, ethical, and customary meanings. Russian examples similarly reflect cultural-religious dichotomies. English antonym pairs such

as "right – wrong," "pure – corrupted," "true – false" express philosophical and legal categories. These oppositions are reinforced through cultural stereotypes, social institutions, and educational systems, enabling us to reconstruct the speaker's cultural portrait.

This study analyzes antonymic units through the lens of national-cultural characteristics. The main goal is to identify cultural-cognitive differences in antonymic pairs across Uzbek, Russian, and English.

METHODOLOGY

This research integrates cognitive linguistics, linguoculturology, and corpus analysis to identify the national-cultural features of antonymic units. In the first stage, widely used antonymic pairs were selected from the three languages [1, 24]. The selection covered ethical, social, spiritual, physical, and spatial categories based on literary texts, dictionaries, and news media. A semantic-cultural criterion was used to determine how universal or culturally specific the meaning opposition is [2, 42].

Each antonym pair was analyzed cognitively, marking semantic opposition, mental framing, evaluative category, and emotional load [3, 67]. In the second stage, the pairs were examined within a linguocultural framework, including their function in national consciousness, socio-cultural context, and expression in literary and historical texts [4, 86]. Uzbek examples were studied through proverbs, folklore, literary works, and religious texts [5, 59]; Russian examples through national folklore, ideology, and media [6, 105]; English through literary texts, public discourse, and cultural values [7, 28].

In the third stage, corpus analysis was performed using Google Books, COCA, Russian National Corpus, and the Uzbek National Corpus. The research identified the usage patterns of antonymic pairs by genre, context, and semantic environment, leading to the construction of a national cultural activity index [8, 91]. The index revealed differences in contextual frequency across cultures [9, 63]. An associative survey was also conducted with participants from five linguistic groups, who responded with their first associated word upon hearing a prompt. This demonstrated the cultural loading of associations. Cognitive frame models were then created for each pair, identifying polarity, function (evaluative/emotional), and stereotype elements. These models served as methodological bases for cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparison.

The aim of this approach was to understand national cognition through the semantics of antonyms and to analyze the value dichotomies encoded in language.

RESULTS

The results confirmed that antonymic pairs function not only as semantic opposites but also as mental structures that reflect a nation's worldview. In Uzbek, antonyms such as "halal – haram" and "brave – coward" encode deep ethical and customary meanings [1, 36]. In Russian, antonyms reflect Orthodox values, social morality, and historical mentality [2, 92]. In English, oppositions like "good – bad," "rich – poor," and "right – wrong" are based on a philosophical-rational value system and are often contextualized legally and socially [3, 41].

Corpus analysis showed that Uzbek antonyms are more common in proverbs, aphorisms, and didactic texts, while Russian and English antonyms appear more in media and analytical discourse [4, 108]. Specific pairs like "white – black" were found to have different cultural associations across languages [5, 73; 6, 57]. Associative data showed variation in the emotional and cultural responses to antonyms. This indicates that cultural experience influences the perception of antonyms.

Frame analysis showed that antonyms encode not only semantic polarity but also conceptual dichotomies such as "accepted – rejected," "virtue – vice," etc. In Uzbek, antonym pairs reflect moral and religious codes. In Russian, they are linked with social norms and behavior. In English, they appear in moral, hygienic, and political discourses. Frame components in Uzbek show strong emotional connotations tied to personal, familial, and ethical values, whereas in Russian and English, the connotations are more logical or structural. The national cultural frame index showed that 68% of Uzbek antonyms carried a moral-ethical load, compared to 52% in Russian and 44% in English [10, 111].

DISCUSSION

The study confirmed that antonyms reflect not only semantic contrast but also the worldview, value system, and cultural encoding methods of a nation. Antonymic framing shapes how speakers interpret reality in a dichotomous way. The same opposition may be semantically equal across languages but culturally diverse in framing and impact. Antonyms serve as markers of evaluation in language, shaping perceptions through culturally ingrained models. Frame analysis showed that the perception and activation of antonyms are strongly tied to cultural stereotypes.

For example, antonym pairs in Uzbek often activate moral, religious, or social frames; in Russian, they are shaped by ideological and behavioral norms; in English, by capitalist or individualist frameworks. Such frames determine the emotional strength and evaluative direction of each word. Uzbek antonyms often include empathy, respect, and social emotion; Russian and English antonyms are more rationally coded.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed how antonymic pairs serve to express national cognition, cultural stereotypes, and moral values. Antonyms are not just lexical items but part of a nation's cognitive and classificatory structure. The same semantic oppositions are framed differently in each language depending on cultural norms. The study emphasizes the need for a combined linguocultural and cognitive approach in antonymy research. Frame modeling and associative surveys helped uncover the value-laden functions of antonyms.

Corpus-based analysis confirmed that antonyms manifest differently across genres and contexts, reflecting cultural identity and ethical worldview. Therefore, antonyms should be studied as core units in cognitive and cultural linguistics.

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