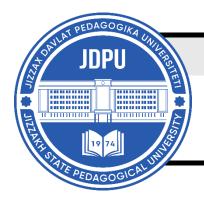# MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC – METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL

MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC – METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL

http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index

SEMANTIC FEATURES OF ENGLISH PROVERBS AND IDIOMS WITH ANTONYMOUS COMPONENTS

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ABOUT ARTICLE

Abstract: This article is devoted to the analysis of semantic features of English proverbs and idioms with antonymous components. The antonymous equivalents of proverbs and idioms in English language are given with their meanings.

Understanding semantic features of English proverbs and idioms with antonymous components is essential for analyzing and describing the meaning and relation between words in a language. They provide a framework for studying lexical semantics and contribute to a deeper understanding of language and its structure. These methods are used to do the research: 1) The method of description of phraseological units; 2) The method of semantic analysis of idioms, proverbs and sayings. From the results it is obvious that idioms as a form of figurative language, employ various semantic mechanisms such as antonym, hyperbole, irony, metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche to convey meaning in a concise and memorable manner.

Idioms are often used to replace a literal word or expression for stylistic or rhetorical purposes. Because they make the text richer, adding depth to the intended meaning. In short, although proverbs employ figurative language, they are more literal sayings that convey a general truth or piece of advice. On the other hand, idioms have a figurative or metaphorical meaning that is different from the meaning of the words used in the context. We think that the system analysis of antonyms used in English proverbs, idioms and sayings will

contribute to further research not only in the field of linguistics and literature, but also psycho-ethno-linguistics and even some pedagogical issues. It should be mentioned that the problems of antonym are not new in linguistics at present time.

INTRODUCTION

Semantic feature analysis illustrates how words which are both similar and different and emphasizes the uniqueness of each word. It draws on students' prior knowledge and uses discussion to elicit information about word meanings[1]. Semantics is the study of meaning in language. It can be applied to entire texts or to single words. For example, "destination" and "last stop" technically mean the same thing, but students of semantics analyze their subtle shades of meaning.

Semantic meaning can be studied at several different levels within linguistics. The three major types of semantics are formal, lexical, and conceptual semantics.

More clearly the following three subcategories include:

1.   Formal semantics is the study of grammatical meaning in natural language.

2.   Conceptual semantics is the study of words at their core.

3.   Lexical semantics is the study of word meaning.[2]

There are two types of semantics: logical and lexical. Logical semantics is the study of reference (the symbolic relationship between language and real-world objects) and implication (the relationship between two sentences). One of the problems that has to be dealt with by theorists of early language acquisition theory is the mismatch between semantic constructions, such as agent and subject. It is proposed that the linguistic system is based on semantic features that are more fine-grained than thematic roles, and that selection of subject and direct object can be accounted for by merely four semantic features. These features are conceived of as properties of participants in the lexical entries of verbs.

Thematic roles play a part only in the realization of certain arguments, notably, the oblique object. It is shown that this different treatment of direct and oblique objects permits a parsimonious explanation of certain linguistic regularities that have posed problems for other theories. Early language acquisition can be explained in terms of the acquisition of these semantic features. Semantics covers a very broad list of topics dealing mainly with a meaning and relationship between words. Most introductory linguistics courses focus on three basic areas: lexical semantics (word

[1] Fortus, R. Semantic relations in the acquisition of language: An analysis of one child's first word combinations. MA Thesis, Jerusa lem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem. 1996.
[2] Davis, A. R. Linking by types in the hierarchical lexicon. Stan ford, CA: CSLI Publications. 2001.

meaning and relatedness), phrasal or sentential semantics (sentential meaning and relatedness), and pragmatics (meaning in the context of discourse).[3]

One way in which the study of basic conceptual meaning might be helpful would be as a means of accounting for the "oddness" we experience when we read sentences such as the following:

The hamburger ate the boy

The table listens to the radio.

The horse is reading a newspaper.

We should first note that the oddness of these sentences does not derive from their syntactic structure. According to the basic syntactic rules for forming English sentences, we have well-formed structures.

This sentence is syntactically good, but semantically odd.

The boy ate the hamburger is perfectly acceptable, we may be able to identify the source of the problem. The components of the conceptual meaning of the noun hamburger must be significantly different from those of the noun boy, thereby preventing one, and not the other, from being used as the subject of the verb ate. The kind of noun that can be the subject of the verb ate must denote an entity that is capable of "eating." The noun hamburger does not have this property and the noun boy does.[4]

We can make this observation more generally applicable by trying to determine the crucial element or feature of the meaning that any noun must have in order to be used as the subject of the verb "ate". Such an element may be as general as "animate being." We can then use this idea to describe part of the meaning of words as either having (+) or not having (−) that particular feature. So, the feature that the noun boy has is "+animate" (= denotes an animate being) and the feature that the noun hamburger has is "−animate".[5]

This simple example is an illustration of a procedure for analyzing meaning in terms of semantic features. Features such as "+animate, −animate," "+human, −human," "+female, −female," for example, can be treated as the basic elements involved in differentiating the meaning of each word in a language from every other word. [6]

The semantic features of a word can be notated using *a binary* feature. A semantic property is usually specified in square brackets and *a plus (+) or minus (−) sign* and it indicates the presence or absence of that property as indicated in the examples below:

[3] Ovsianko O. Hlobalna struktura anhliiskykh prysliviv: typolohichni aspekty [Global structure of English proverbs: typological aspects]. 2015

[4] . Fernald J.Ch. English synonyms and antonyms. Osnova. 2009.

[5] Амосова Н. Н. «Основы английской фразеологии». - Л.: ЛГУ, 1963.

[6] . Abdullaeva N.E. Semantic and linguocultural features of English and Uzbek proverbs with concept of friendship / Problems of Modern

- *cat* is
  o   [+animate],
  o   [+domesticated],
  o   [+feline]
- *puma* is
  o   [+animate],
  o   [−domesticated],
  o   [+feline]
- *dog* is
  o   [+animate],
  o   [+domesticated],
  o   [−feline]
- *wolf* is
  o   [+animate],
  o   [−domesticated][7]
  o   [−feline]

Syntax Vs. Semantics

The hamburger ate the boy.

This sentence is syntactically good, but semantically odd.

Since the sentence The boy ate the hambur*ger* is perfectly acceptable, we may be able to identify the source of the problem.

The kind of noun that can be the subject of the verb "ate" must denote an entity that is capable of "eating."[8]

The noun" hamburger" does not have this property, but the noun "boy" does.

Such an element may be as general as "animate being."

We can then use this idea to describe part of the meaning of words as either having *(+) or not having (−)* that particular feature. So, the feature that the noun "boy" has is *"*+animate" and the feature that the noun "hamburger" has is "−animate."

Another couple of examples:

1.   The door kicked the boy. X
2.   The computer died. X

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[7] Bowerman, M., & Croft, W. The acquisition of the English causative alternation. In M. Bowerman, & P. Brown (Eds.), Cross linguistic perspectives on argument structure New York, pp. 279-307. 2008.

[8] Taranenko L. Zhanrovi osoblyvosti ta funktsionalne pryznachennia tekstu anhliiskoho pryslivia . Genre peculiarities and functional use of the English proverb text.

Door and *computer* lack the crucial features that are required to kick and die.[9]

Only living entities can perform the actions of *kicking* and *dying*.

METHODS

English proverbs and idioms with its antonymous have semantic features are required to follow certain principles, rules and criteria when researching English proverbs and idioms with its antonymus. The methods used for researching are divided into two basic categories:

- the collecting of information semantic features

- the analysis and interpretation of semantic features of English proverbs and idioms with its antonymous.

- The collection of semantic features of English proverbs and idioms with its antonymous includes: inscriptions, documents, onomastic -tax records, dictionaries, books, monographs, and websites, which are used afterward for mapping purposes.

- The analysis and interpretation of semantic features takes into consideration processing collection of the information gathered, which consists of semantic features of English proverbs and idioms with its antonymous.

Semantic rules show how the truth conditions of a sentence are based on the relationship between words.

It is well known that national mentality is manifested in people's everyday life, customs, history and culture, which are the basis of folk art. In our opinion, folklore is that kind of material that helps researchers not only to investigate some moral and ethical values of people, their life experience, world perception, but it is a huge platform for comprehensive study of the language.[10]

The problem of antonymic relations in English proverbs and sayings, chosen for the consideration in our scientific paper, has not been raised yet at the scientific level. Investigation of antonyms is of great importance for linguistics, as they are a significant part of language vocabulary which make it more expressive and multifarious, as well as influence communicational culture and speech pattern.[11]

Semantic features are utilized in the field of linguistic semantics, particularly in lexical semantics and lexicology, to explain word meaning by analyzing the relationships between words and their internal semantic structures. Semantic features help categorize words into semantic domains based on shared features.

On the other side of the coin are antonyms.[12]

[9]Chomsky, N. The generative enterprise: A discussion with Riny Huybregts and Henk van Riemsdijk. Dordrecht: Foris. 1982.

[10] Mieder W. International Proverb Scholarship. Garland Publishing, 1993.

[11] Jackendoff, R. The status of thematic relations in linguistic theory. Linguistic Inquiry, 1987, 369-411.

[12] Jackendoff, R. "On Larson's treatment of the double object construction. Linguistic Inquiry", 1990. P.427-456.

Although most conceive antonyms to have opposite meanings, they are actually words that share most semantic features, e.g., 'happy' and 'content', with one word bearing negative values for all/most features and the other bearing positive.

happy sad

[+emotional state] [+emotional state]

[+positive] [-positive]

There are three types of antonyms that one can come across in most textbooks.

Complementary pairs are words whose meanings exclude the possibility of co-existence and are not context-dependent. They are sometimes referred to as 'either-or.' For instance, an animate object is either dead or alive. It cannot be 'sort of dead' or "kind of alive".

Gradable pairs are words holding an opposite relationship to one another to varying degrees based on context. An elephant is 'large' compared to a rabbit, 'small'; however, a rabbit is 'large' compared to a field mouse, 'small'.

Converse opposite pairs are words that are defined in reference to each other. Reverse pairs refer to movement or opposite directions, such as "left/right", "up/down", and "east/west".

RESULTS

The research of the article is to study the specific features of antonyms.

It should be mentioned that some English proverbs and sayings consist of two symmetrical parts, in which certain phenomena are compared or contrasted:

Better glorious *death* than a shameful *life*.

Better wear out than rust out.

The bird is created for sight and the man is for work.

A separate group of English phrase is presented by those that include antonyms expressing the opposite orientation of actions, properties, qualities, names, etc:

The full ear rotates to the ground, and the empty hinges up.[13]

More haste, *less* speed.

Success has many fathers, while *failure* is an orphan.

A comprehensive analysis of antonyms in English proverbs and sayings, proposed in our work and carried out in the following directions: lexical, morphological, syntactical and cultural which will help to identify the peculiarities of phrases at the linguistic and mental levels. As Vorkachev said, "Language, culture and ethnos are inextricably connected and form the essence of the personality – the place of physical, spiritual and social conjunction"[14]. We consider antonyms as words with

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[13] Hoekstra, T. Aspect and Theta Theory. In I. M. Roca, Thematic structure: Its role in grammar. 1992. pp. 145-174.
[14] Starovoitova O.V. Koreliatsiia synonimiv ta antonimiv u systemi anhliiskoi movy [Correlation of synonyms and antonyms in the system of the English language]. Available at: https://dspace.udpu.edu.ua 2019.

opposite lexical meanings, which are combined with a certain common factor: ups and downs, thick and thin (state).

According to the semantic criterion we have distinguished the following groups of antonyms: gradual, contractual, complementary, converse and vector.

Gradual antonyms comprise sets of lexical items within which intermediate opposition can be observed (hot – warm – cool – cold). They express a qualitative opposite, and therefore, this group is often presented by antonyms expressed by qualitative adjectives, as well as adverbs derived from qualitative adjectives (with qualitative or temporal meanings):

Better late than never.

Cold hands, *warm* heart.

Promise *little,* but do *much*.

Complementary antonyms do not involve intermediate elements. They express the opposition of two aspects belonging to one gender (life – death, mother –

father, etc. This group mainly includes:

a) adjectives expressing absolute quality, or adjectives contrasted with the pronoun:

A full belly does not understand an empty one.

The full ear rotates to the ground, and the empty hinges up.

b) nouns with abstract and specific meanings:

Happiness runs, and *misfortune* lies.

This type of semantic relations is characterized by interdependence, adjacency, casual links between the elements, their reversal relationships.

Ask a *silly question* and you will get a *silly answer.*

Best *defense* is *offence*.

The *exception* which proves the *rule.*

Vector antonyms determine two opposite actions, phenomena, characteristics, directions, etc. They are presented in English proverbs and sayings as well and are mostly expressed by literal phrasal verbs:

If you *lie down* with dogs, you will *get up* with *fleas*.

What *goes up* must *come down*.

Depending on a part of speech we have distinguished the following groups of antonyms in the structure of proverbs and sayings:

1. Antonyms expressed by adjectives (in positive and superlative degree):

Hope for the best, but *prepare for the worst*.

A civil denial is better than a rude grant.

A *clean* fast is *better* than a dirty breakfast.[15]

This is the largest group, which can be explained by the fact that in proverbs and sayings certain statements are often based on the opposition of certain characteristics.

2. Antonyms presented by nouns. It should be mentioned that abstract names are normally used within this group:

Keep your *friends* close and your *enemies* closer.

A bad *compromise* is better than a good *lawsuit*.

A *friend's* frown is better than a *foe's* smile.

3. Antonyms expressed by verbs:

It's better to *give* than to *receive*.

Easy *come* easy *go*.

Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.

If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

You win some, you lose some.

4. Antonyms – adverbs. Adverbs of adjective origin are often present in this group: Better late than never.

More haste, less speed.

5. Antonyms – pronouns. The opposition 'defining pronoun and negative one' is dominant in this category:

Jack of all *trades* and master of *none*. [16]

Everybody's business is nobody's business.

Besides, we have found antonymic relations within certain topical sets of English proverbs and sayings, that is:

a) visibility and essence: A black hen lays a white egg.

The smallest axe may fell the hugest oak.

b) age: An *old* dog will learn no *new* tricks.

c) hope, expectation: An hour in the *morning* is worth two in the *evening*.

d) risk: Either to *win* the horse or *lose* the saddle.

e) family relationships: The *black* crow thinks her own birds *white*.

f) stubbornness: A *wise* man changes his mind, a fool never will.

g) indifference, irresponsibility: Everybody's business is nobody's business.

h) strength-weakness: *Little* strokes fell *great* oaks.

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[15] Evans, N., & Levinson, S. C. The myth of language universals: Language diversity and its importance for cognitive science. Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 2009.

[16] Starovoitova O.V. Koreliatsiia synonimiv ta antonimiv u systemi anhliiskoi movy [Correlation of synonyms and antonyms in the system of the English language].

In our opinion, antonyms in any given topical set of paroemiae make such a contrast that helps to emphasize people's evaluation of objective phenomenon of reality, national mentality, spirit and character, customs and morals, beliefs and superstitions, etc.[17]

Linguist Shmelev D.M. says: "The most complete opposition of words is regarded as antonym. Antonymic words can be recognized, which are contrasted with the most general and meaningful semantic sign, and are at the extreme points of the corresponding lexical-semantic paradigm"[18].

Taking into account these features, antonyms include words with various semantic meanings. We have identified the following lexical categories of antonyms in the structure of English proverbs and sayings:

1) a value of quality: *Big* fish eat *little* fish. Don't get *mad*, *get* even.

2) opposite coordinates: A good beginning makes a good ending.

If you lie down with dogs, you will get with fleas.

What goes up must come down.

3) time: Better late than never.

4) quantity: Everybody's business is nobody's business.

It is necessary to say that these models perform certain functions.[19]

"*Blood is thicker than water*"

People use this phrase when they mean to say that the relationships between family members are more important than the bonds created between people who are not related to each other. The original version of this phrase is actually "the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb" which was referring to the bond between armed forces soldiers, and that it is stronger than family alliance. This phrase is used positively when people realize they have had the same idea as someone else, usually at the same time as them.

"A rolling stone gathers no moss"

People use this phrase to mean that someone who is always working or doing something will not become lazy or bored. It's generally thought to be a good thing that people are always working.

The saying is said to date back to Roman times, and actually it was meant to be a negative when people were always on the go because this meant that they did not have time to set down foundations or form relationships.

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[17] Pinker, S. Language learnability and language development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1984.

[18] Taranenko L. Zhanrovi osoblyvosti ta funktsionalne pryznachennia tekstu anhliiskoho pryslivia [Genre peculiarities and functional use of the English proverb text].

[19] Pinker, S. Language learnability and language development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1984.

The idiom is incomplete, with the full phrase being 'great minds think alike, but foolish minds rarely differ'. This is rather insulting and essentially means that two people will come up with the same thought if they both have the same limited knowledge.[20]

DISCUSSION:

The line between proverbs and idioms may be hard to define, but there are key differences between them. While a proverb is a short and pithy saying that expresses a general truth or piece of advice, an idiom is a phrase or group of words that is different from the literal meaning of its individual components.

For example, *kick the bucket* means "to die." However, on their own, the words *kick* and *bucket* have nothing to do with death. Similarly, the idiom *break a leg* has nothing to do with fracturing a bone in your body, but is another way of saying "good luck."

The vocabulary of a language is enriched not only by words but also by phraseological units. Phraseological units are word-groups that cannot be' made in the process of speech, they exist in the language as ready-made units. They are compiled in special dictionaries. The same as words phraseological units express a single notion and are used in a sentence as one part of it. American and British lexicographers call such units «idioms». We can mention such dictionaries as: L.Smith «Words and Idioms» L.Smith «Words and Idioms» 1976, V.Collins «A Book of English Idioms» V.Collins «A Book of English Idioms» 1981 etc. In these dictionaries we can find words, peculiar in their semantics (idiomatic), side by side with word-groups and sentences. In these dictionaries they are arranged, as a rule, into different semantic groups. Phraseological units can be classified according to the ways they are formed, according to the degree of the motivation of their meaning, according to their structure and according to their part-of-speech meaning. Idiomatic expressions require a clear linguistic reference and a specific discourse context in order to perform their communicative function.

Furthermore, Al-Hannash argues that proverbs are always linked to a historical occasion reflecting a specific event, i.e. each proverb has its own story, which is not the case for idiomatic expressions. Reflecting on this point, Al-Anbar cites a problematic example. His efforts came to naught) and considers whether this should be categorized as a proverb or an idiomatic expression. For this expression requires a specific linguistic reference, like an idiomatic expression, but at the same time it is related to a specific event, like a proverb. Thus, Al-Anbar argues that idiomatic expressions require a doer or agent that can be interpreted from the context. This suggests the need for a demarcation line between what is currently considered to be proverbial, what was proverbial and was once commonly used as an idiomatic expression, and those expressions which are mainly

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[20] http://www.academypublication.com

based on the use of synecdoche or metonymy and whose meaning has become conventional, namely the idiomatic expression.

CONCLUSION

The idioms and phrases are an important part of the English language. The semantics of phraseologisms has complex features. It is required a special approach and analysis to determine degree of semantic complexity of each phraseological unit. Their meaning is completed by the value of the meanings of the components that carry minimal semantics. Nevertheless, this does not denote that the semantic structure of the phrase cannot be imagined as a microsystem in which the elements are closely interconnected and interdependent. In the studies on the semantic properties of phraseological units, their antonomy is almost always the center of attention. At the same time, the solution of this issue will create a basis for the practical use of the results obtained by a number of researchers. Otherwise, the work done is forgotten, and there is a need to search for phraseological units historically present in the language every time.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The results and examples of this article can help to distinguish some Semantic features of English proverbs and idioms in the examples of using contexts and also it helps to learn some peculiarities of antonymous components of them in English Lessons and Seminars at the University. It may be a good tool for the research.

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