



**ANTONYM-BASED INTERJECTIONAL AND MODAL PHRASEOLOGICAL
UNITS IN ENGLISH, UZBEK, AND RUSSIAN: A COGNITIVE AND
FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

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A B S T R A C T	K E Y W O R D S
<p>This article examines phraseological units that incorporate antonymic components in English, Uzbek, and Russian, with a particular focus on their interjectional and modal functions. Rather than treating antonymy as a simple lexical contrast, the study approaches it as a dynamic mechanism that contributes to meaning extension, emotional intensity, and speaker stance. Drawing on comparative and qualitative analysis, the paper demonstrates that antonymic pairs within fixed expressions tend to lose their literal opposition and develop unified, often abstract meanings. At the same time, the study reveals both shared tendencies across languages and distinct language-specific patterns shaped by structural and cultural factors.</p>	<p>Phraseology, antonymy, modality, interjection, contrastive linguistics, cognitive semantics</p>

INTRODUCTION

Phraseological units are not merely decorative elements of language; they represent condensed forms of cultural knowledge, emotional expression, and evaluative meaning. Among them, expressions built on antonymic opposition stand out for their ability to combine semantic contrast with communicative unity.

At first glance, combining opposite meanings within a single expression may appear contradictory. However, in natural language use, such constructions often serve the opposite purpose: they reduce ambiguity by generalizing meaning, intensifying emotion, or emphasizing inevitability. This paradox makes antonym-based phraseological units particularly relevant for linguistic analysis.

In English, Uzbek, and Russian, these units frequently function either as interjections—expressing emotional reactions—or as modal expressions—indicating the speaker’s attitude toward a situation. Despite belonging to different language families, these languages display striking similarities in how antonymic structures are used.

The present study aims to explore how antonymic components operate within phraseological units across these three languages. Special attention is given to their structural organization, semantic reinterpretation, and pragmatic role in discourse.

Literature Review

The study of phraseology has long been associated with the works of scholars who emphasized stability and idiomaticity as defining features of fixed expressions. Early classifications distinguished between different types of phraseological units based on the degree of semantic cohesion, highlighting how meaning may shift from literal to figurative.

In parallel, research on antonymy has evolved from viewing it as a simple binary opposition to understanding it as a conceptual tool that structures human cognition. Opposites such as *good–bad*, *alive–dead*, or *here–there* are not only linguistic categories but also reflect how people organize experience.

More recent approaches, particularly within cognitive linguistics, suggest that when antonyms appear together in a fixed expression, they often undergo semantic integration. Instead of maintaining contrast, they contribute to a new, unified meaning. This is especially evident in expressions conveying modality, where opposition gives rise to meanings such as inevitability (*whether you like it or not*) or approximation (*more or less*).

Comparative research has also shown that many languages employ similar structural patterns—such as correlative constructions or repetition—yet differ in frequency, stylistic value, and pragmatic nuance. However, the intersection of antonymy, modality, and interjection remains relatively underexplored, especially in a tri-lingual context involving English, Uzbek, and Russian.

Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative and comparative approach, combining elements of descriptive linguistics with functional analysis.

The material for analysis consists of phraseological units drawn from:

- monolingual and bilingual dictionaries,
- literary texts,
- examples of spoken discourse.

Only those expressions were selected that:

1. include clearly identifiable antonymic components,
2. function either as interjectional or modal units,
3. are relatively stable and recognizable within the language.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis was carried out in several stages:

- **Structural observation** – identifying recurring grammatical patterns;
- **Semantic interpretation** – examining how literal opposition transforms into idiomatic meaning;
- **Pragmatic analysis** – determining how the expressions function in communication;
- **Cross-linguistic comparison** – highlighting similarities and differences.

Research Perspective

The study integrates insights from phraseology, cognitive semantics, and pragmatics. This allows for a more holistic understanding of how meaning is constructed and interpreted in real usage.

Structural Organization

Across the three languages, antonym-based phraseological units tend to follow a limited number of structural patterns.

One common model is the use of coordinated opposites, as seen in expressions like *good or bad* or their equivalents in Uzbek and Russian. Another frequent pattern involves negative correlation (e.g., *neither... nor...*), which reinforces the sense of exclusion or neutrality.

A particularly interesting structure is repetition with variation, such as *like it or not* or its counterparts in Uzbek and Russian. Here, the opposition is embedded within a rhythmic, almost formulaic pattern that enhances memorability and expressive force.

Semantic Reinterpretation

A key observation is that antonymic elements rarely retain their literal meaning within these units. Instead, they contribute to broader semantic effects:

- In some cases, they signal **inevitability**, suggesting that all possible options lead to the same outcome.
- In others, they express **indefiniteness** or approximation, reducing precision rather than increasing it.
- They may also intensify emotional states, turning simple descriptions into vivid expressions.

This process can be described as semantic neutralization followed by refunctionalization, where opposition becomes a tool for unity.

Interjectional Usage

When functioning as interjections, these phraseological units convey immediate emotional reactions. For instance, expressions equivalent to “alive or dead” in different languages are not literal inquiries but signals of urgency or anxiety.

Similarly, constructions meaning “neither here nor there” often serve to dismiss information as irrelevant. In such cases, antonymy contributes to emotional coloring rather than logical contrast.

Modal Meanings

In modal contexts, antonym-based expressions frequently indicate:

- **inevitability**, where the speaker emphasizes that an outcome cannot be avoided;
- **certainty**, where contrasting possibilities are presented as ultimately equivalent;
- **evaluation**, where opposing attitudes are acknowledged but neutralized.

These meanings are closely tied to the speaker’s perspective and communicative intention, making such units highly context-dependent.

Cognitive and Pragmatic Insights

From a cognitive standpoint, the effectiveness of these expressions lies in their ability to activate contrasting concepts simultaneously while guiding the listener toward a unified interpretation.

Pragmatically, they serve to:

- strengthen the speaker’s position,
- simplify complex situations,
- and enhance rhetorical impact.

Thus, antonymy functions not as a barrier to meaning but as a resource for meaning construction.

Discussion

The comparison of English, Uzbek, and Russian reveals a balance between universality and specificity.

On the one hand, all three languages make use of similar strategies, such as pairing opposites or using correlative structures. This suggests that the underlying cognitive mechanisms are shared.

On the other hand, differences emerge in terms of preferred patterns and stylistic usage. Russian tends to favor negative constructions, Uzbek often employs repetition, and English relies heavily on conjunction-based forms.

These differences reflect not only grammatical structures but also broader communicative traditions.

Conclusion

Antonym-based phraseological units represent a productive and expressive area of language, where contrast and unity coexist. Their role in expressing emotion and modality highlights the close connection between language structure and human cognition.

By examining these units across three typologically different languages, this study demonstrates that antonymy can function as a unifying, rather than dividing, force in meaning construction.

Further research could expand the dataset, incorporate corpus-based methods, or explore additional languages to deepen our understanding of this phenomenon.

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