

## Neutralization in Antonymic Sets

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### Abstract

This paper attempts at outlining the process of neutralization in antonymic pairs. The issue at stake is whether neutralization operates at paradigmatic or at syntagmatic level. Normally, what happens to counter-numbers of antonymic set in case of neutralization or to what extent does polarization reduce between the two extremes of an antonymic pair.

The paper explores antonymic sets occupying lexical environment in text. By analyzing lexical environment of antonymic pairs we could define outer and inner factors of context maturing neutralization of antonyms.

The data at our disposal showed that neutralization can be of two types: complete and non-complete.

**Keywords:** Neutralization, antonymic set, complete neutralization, non-complete neutralization

### Introduction

Antonyms make a wide range for their great variety of modification and that's why have been studied from different angles.

In the frame of this article we are interested in the process of neutralization of antonymic pairs: how does neutralization work (operate) in antonymic pairs. Is it spread within the all paradigm of antonymic pairs or does it act only in specific modifications of antonymic pairs? Here is a range of questions that are to be raised in the frame of this article. That's why, firstly, we should give the classification of antonyms adopted by linguists, secondly, give our own understanding of this linguistic phenomenon; thirdly, define the process of neutralization and fourthly, study this process in speech in the system of antonymic pairs.

**Methodology.** Theoretical background is based on the theory of opposition and to say it with Arnold: "This is done with the help of the principle of opposition, i.e. by studying partly similar elements the difference between which are functionally relevant..." (Arnold, 1973).

Alongside with this concept neutralization lays at the basis of our research. In the words of Blokh: "In various contextual conditions one member of an opposition can be used in the position of the other" (Blokh, 1983).

The relation of antonymy is also derivable by a relational principle which states that a lexical contrast set includes only concepts of words that have all the same contextually relevant properties but one (Murphy, 2003).

Antonyms have been traditionally defined as words of opposite meaning: "Antonyms may be defined as two or rarely more words of the same language belonging to the same part of speech, identical in style and nearly identical in distribution, associated and used together, so that their denotative meanings render contrary or contradictory notions" (Arnold, 1973).

Worthy of note are utterances where antonymic opposition is not expressed explicitly and is implied in deep structures. Such specific modification is hidden under the veil of sentences with an emphatic stylistic colouring of irony as: *You are a good friend* (implies a bad quality when it is pronounced with exclamatory mark. The antonymic pair lives at deep

structure). Thus, antonymy may be implied both *explicitly and implicitly*.

It has been widely documented by various scholars that are distinguished two types of antonyms – canonical pairs that are fixed in dictionaries and non-canonical antonyms that are not fixed in dictionaries; they are context-driven and are most likely to have *limited functional occurrence*. In reference to systematic language relations they are termed by us as *paradigmatic and syntagmatic antonymic pairs*. This is the first main distinction between them. The difference lies also in their *semantic dimension*; in some cases of syntagmatic (horizontal) antonymic pairs one member of the opposition is semantically overloaded in relation to the other member of the opposition as in the antonymic set *good – horrible*, where the right member (*horrible*) has more extreme value than the other member; they are semantically polarized. Whereas in the case of paradigmatic (vertical) antonyms the two opponents in antonymic pairs are equally charged in semantics as in the opposition *good- bad*. A question then should be posed whether paradigmatic and syntagmatic antonymic relations stand in isolation or there is a correlation between them. If so, what type of correlation is it? There is a strong correlation between paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations; they function as two sides of the same coin. To study the properties of antonymic pairs at syntagmatic level means to study the correlation of antonymic opposites in their linear relation – in a definite linguistic environment; a context becomes a flourishing soil for the growth of linear meaning. Moreover, a word creates an antonymic contrast in the given context due to its paradigmatic relation – due to its semantic potential. Syntagmatic (horizontal) oppositions are modifications from general to concrete and horizontals – from concrete to general to something very abstract. In the result of which few functional occurrences gain a systematic status in the given language, that is dictated by the norms of the language, i.e., by its semantic, synthetic possibilities. Thus, functional occurrence becomes a norm for the given language and is portrayed at vertical level as a current use of contextual meaning. That's why antonyms should be studied in relation to opposition. Logically the next question we will address in this paper is how neutralization functions in opposition.

In the words of Blokh “In various contextual conditions one member of an opposition can be used in the position of the other counter - member. This phenomenon should be treated under the heading of oppositional reduction or oppositional substitution. The first version of the term (“reduction”) points out the fact that the opposition in this case is contracted, losing its formal distinctive force. The second version of the term (“substitution”) shows the very process by which the opposition is reduced, namely, the use of one member instead of the other (Blokh p.31).

As hinted above the terms “reduction” and “substitution” are used interchangeably. As a type of binary opposition each antonymic pair comprises two sets. The contraction of these sets runs in two directions – either a weak member of an opposition replaces the strong member (substitution) or the weak member is substituted by a strong member (transposition). Thus, the terms “substitution”, “transposition” imply the product of reduction, whereas the term “neutralization implies the process itself.

The “eye” of our research is the process in its generic sense that can result either in substitution or in transposition.

In case of neutralization two contrary properties (two opponents) come closer and begin to function as equal members of the equation; the main distinctive feature disappears and the two members obtain an independent status getting closer and closer to each other. The borderline between them melts due to a broader context; broader context is a context comprising the sentences following and preceding the key sentence where the antonymic pair reigns. These contexts help to understand that the battle between the two opponents has yielded to compromise and they have gained equal rights.

It is obvious that in the sentence “*Being seriously ill he looked healthy that day*” there is no opposition, consequently the opponents *ill – healthy* have regained their status of independence as there is no semantic correlation between the two members; their meanings have no common semes.

Combinability with other words can bring to complete (or absolute) neutralization or weaken the level of contradiction giving birth to neutralization (non-complete or non- absolute). Accordingly two types of neutralization can be outlined – absolute (complete) when contradiction disappears and suspension completely gives in and non - complete neutralization when the grade of contradiction weakens losing its governmental power within the two sets.

The implication is that absolute neutralization runs swiftly while non- absolute neutralization is like a small boat dancing gently above the sea in warm evening breeze.

**Complete (paradigmatic) neutralization:** the grade of contradiction between the two members of opposition sharply reduces when the antonymic pair is combined with negatively charged syntactic construction “neither”... “nor” which besides transferring negative sense to the implied information, plays also the role of an operator connecting two constituents of an antonymic set, bringing them closer and emphasizing the process of contraction, as.

1. There was neither real sorrow in it nor real joy. (O.Wilde, p. 203)
2. He maintained a hard, careless deportment, indicative of neither joy nor sorrow. (E.Bronte, p. 299).

3. The wise man gave his testimony to this, as the standard of felicity, when he prayed to have neither poverty nor riches. (D. Defoe,p. 4)
4. Consulted neither father nor mother any more, nor so much as sent them word of it; but leaving them to hear of it as they might, without asking God’s blessing or my father’s. (D. Defoe, p. 9).

The main function of this pattern is to restore lasting peace between the two antonymic opponents. And what about the status of antonyms in these combinations. Do they lose their oppositive character? Surely, no. The components of contradiction continue living in the paradigm of language, maintaining their position of antonymic set.

The data at our disposal show that derivationally patterned antonymic sets very often undergo the process of neutralization as in the pair *happy – unhappy*. Generally such pair members have much in common in their denotational semes and differ only in one parameter; the marked member morphologically bears a negative affix. Due to the morphological and semantic contradiction neutralization emerges.

#### **Non – complete (syntagmatic) neutralization**

Of interest are cases where “neither...nor” construction can potentially bring to non – complete reduction in speech. Only in this case the construction *neither... nor* gains another status – a status of a modal word that is called to reduce the tensity of contradiction to some extent, minimizing its oppositive charge.

- Catherine’s cup was never filled: she could neither eat nor drink. (E. Bronte, p. 154)
- The spirit which served her was growing intractable: she could neither lay nor control it. (E.Bronte, p. 180)
- She lingered, and resisted my persuasions to departure a tiresome while; but as he neither looked up nor spoke, she finally made a movement to the door, and I followed. (E.Bronte p. 385)
- “But what do you mean by a change, Mr. Heathcliff?” I said, alarmed at his manner: though he was neither in danger of losing his senses, nor dying, according to my judgment. (E. Bronte p. 518)
- It might be about twelve feet over, but in no manner of shape, neither round nor square, no hands having ever been employed in making it but those of mere Nature. (p. 284)

Neutralization arises particularly as a result of intermediate contrast of negative verbal meaning with the construction “either...or”.

- My master bid me tell his sister that she must not expect either a letter or a visit from him at present. (E.Bronte p. 236)
- It was no concern of mine either to advise or complain, and I always refused to meddle. (E.Bronte p. 469)
- There are few of us who have not sometimes wakened before dawn, either after one of those dreamless nights that make us almost enamoured of death, or one of those nights of horror and misshapen joy, when through the chambers of the brain sweep phantoms more terrible than reality itself, and instinct with that vivid life that lurks in

all grotesques, and that lends to Gothic art its enduring vitality, this art being, one might fancy, especially the art of those whose minds have been troubled with the malady of reverie. (O Wilde, p.164)

While in the linguistic environment of affirmative verbal predicate (negative particles) the constructions either ... or is called to reveal semantic relations bridging counter - members in the sense of

**a) Contradiction**

- I piled all the empty chests and casks up in a circle round the tent, to fortify it from any sudden attempt, either from man or beast. (D. Defoe, p. 87)
- I knew they had neither pen nor ink. (D. Defoe, p. 397)
- Hareton was impressed with a wholesome terror of encountering either his wild beast's fondness or his madman's rage; for in one he ran a chance of being squeezed and kissed to death, and in the other of being flung into the fire, or dashed against the wall; and the poor thing remained perfectly quiet wherever I chose to put him. (E. Bronte p. 115)

She had the vague, distant look I mentioned before, which expressed no recognition of material things either by ear or eye. (E. Bronte p. 252)

The first day or two my charge sat in a corner of the library, too sad for either reading or playing; in that quiet state she caused me little trouble. (E. Bronte p. 306)

It is either an unfortunate accident, or an unpleasant result of temperament. (O Wilde, p.48)

**b) in the sense of choice**

- He fixed his eye on me longer than I cared to return the stare, for fear I might be tempted either to box his ears or render my hilarity audible. ((E.Bronte p. 21)

Either Joseph, the preacher, or I had committed the 'First of the Seventy-First,' and were to be publicly exposed and excommunicated. (E.Bronte p. 35)

- Nelly, if it be not too late, as soon as I learn how he feels, I'll choose between these two: either to starve at once—that would be no punishment unless he had a heart—or to recover, and leave the country. (E.Bronte p. 193)
- Yet, after some time, he wearied of them, and would sit in his box at the Opera, either alone or with Lord Henry, listening in rapt pleasure to "Tannhäuser," and seeing in the prelude to that great work of art a presentation of the tragedy of his own soul. (O Wilde, p. 171)

Functionally *either ...or* is often emphasized by intensifiers *so many, so few* etc.

- Whenever I have gone there, there have been either so many people that I have not been able to see the pictures, which was dreadful, or so many pictures that I have not been able to see the people, which was worse. (O.Wilde, p. 4)

The best way of demonstrating the contractive value of antonyms is to contrast them in relation to coordinative conjunction "or" in interrogative sentences where the contradiction between the two members is highly emphasized

and they continue functioning as opposites but with a grade of extreme polarity:

- Do you want tea or coffee?

Though counter- members are connected with coordinative conjunction "or, they are not equal terms. The difference lies in the type of correlation of the two members of the opposition. The relation is contradictory by its nature and not contrary.

This naturally does not apply to declarative sentences" I'll take tea or coffee.

In such utterances the two opponents collapse gaining their independence, no antonymic set at all.

The polarity of antonymic members reduces in utterances where the antonymic pair is preceded by a syntactic construction "both... and"

- I went, directed by Heaven no doubt; for in this chest I found a cure *both for soul and body*. (D. Defoe, p. 148)
- At present, indeed, they were well supplied *both with news and happiness* by the recent arrival of a militia regiment in the neighbourhood. (Austen, p. 40).

Bingley, she had likewise seen for an instant, and in that short period saw him looking *both pleased and embarrassed*. (Austen, p. 508)

Neutralization is more often dictated by a wider context. Antonymic set in the frame of outer and inner factors of a context can yield to non- absolute contraction.

I don't care whether its white or black.

It isn't important whether its good or bad.

Word combinations " it isn't important, I don't care whether "bring closer counter – members of opposition by reducing their polarity.

To sum up, antonymic pairs are given birth on the crossroads of horizontal and vertical relations. Emerging in a very flourishing linguistic environment, the two members of opposition become semantically independent and the semantic contradiction yields to neutralization.

Neutralization can be vertical by its nature and horizontal in its character according to *language level*. According to the parameter of completeness are distinguished two types of neutralization: absolute or complete and non-absolute or deficient.

Antonymic opposition completely discharges at paradigmatic level. The overwhelming majority of non-complete reduction is specific for the system of the language.

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