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THE ANTHROPOCENTRIC NATURE OF ANTONYMOUS PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The article investigates the anthropocentric nature of antonymous phraseological units in the English language from the perspectives of cognitive linguistics, phraseology and linguoculturology. Particular attention is given to the ways in which phraseological oppositions represent human qualities, emotional states, behavioural patterns, social relationships, and moral values. The study considers phraseological antonymy not merely as a linguistic phenomenon based on semantic opposition but also as a cognitive mechanism through which speakers conceptualize and evaluate human experience.

Keywords

anthropocentrism, phraseological antonymy, conceptual opposition, human experience, linguistic worldview.

Introduction. Contemporary linguistics increasingly focuses on the human being as the central element of linguistic research. This tendency is associated with the development of the anthropocentric paradigm, which considers language in its relationship with human consciousness, perception, experience, and cultural environment. Within this paradigm, language is regarded not simply as a system of signs but also as a means of interpreting and conceptualizing the surrounding world.

Phraseological units occupy a particularly important position in this process because they preserve collective experience, cultural knowledge, emotional attitudes, and traditional ways of evaluating reality. Unlike free word combinations, phraseological expressions frequently possess figurative and evaluative meanings that cannot be fully understood through the meanings of their individual components.

An important aspect of phraseological semantics is antonymy, which reflects the human tendency to perceive reality through contrasting categories. People frequently

interpret the world by distinguishing between positive and negative qualities, emotional satisfaction and dissatisfaction, success and failure, strength and weakness, as well as other opposing phenomena.

In this respect, antonymous phraseological units represent an interesting linguistic phenomenon because they demonstrate how conceptual oppositions are expressed through stable figurative combinations.

Methods. The research employs an integrated methodological approach combining semantic, cognitive, descriptive, and linguocultural methods.

The descriptive method is used to identify and characterize phraseological units that express contrasting meanings. Componential analysis makes it possible to determine the semantic features underlying phraseological oppositions.

Cognitive-semantic analysis is applied to investigate the conceptual structures represented by antonymous expressions. Through this approach, phraseological units are interpreted as linguistic manifestations of broader conceptual categories.

Contextual analysis is used to examine how phraseological expressions function in discourse and how their meanings are influenced by communicative situations.

The linguocultural approach helps identify the human values, social attitudes, and cultural associations reflected in phraseological expressions.

For analytical purposes, antonymous phraseological units are grouped according to the following anthropocentric dimensions:

1. Human character and personality.
2. Intellectual abilities and mental characteristics.
3. Emotional and psychological states.
4. Human behaviour and activities.
5. Social relationships and interpersonal communication.
6. Moral and ethical evaluation.

It is important to distinguish between phraseological antonyms and phraseological units containing lexical antonyms. In the present study, the primary focus is on separate phraseological expressions that establish contrasting meanings within a particular semantic context.

Results. The analysis of the anthropocentric dimension of English phraseological antonyms makes it possible to distinguish several major conceptual domains.

Human character and personality. Human character represents one of the most productive domains in phraseological conceptualization. English phraseological expressions frequently describe contrasting personality traits and behavioural tendencies. For example:

A heart of gold – a very kind and generous person.

A heart of stone – a person who is emotionally cold or unkind.

These expressions illustrate the conceptual opposition between kindness and cruelty or emotional sensitivity and insensitivity.

The contrast is constructed through the metaphorical conceptualization of the heart as the centre of human emotions and moral qualities. Gold symbolizes value and goodness, whereas stone suggests hardness and emotional coldness.

Therefore, these phraseological expressions demonstrate how abstract human characteristics are conceptualized through concrete objects and culturally recognizable associations.

Intellectual abilities and mental characteristics. Another anthropocentric domain concerns human intelligence and cognitive abilities. English phraseology contains expressions that characterize different levels of intellectual competence. For instance:

To have a good head on one's shoulders – to be intelligent and sensible.

To have rocks in one's head – to behave or think foolishly.

These expressions establish a contrast between intelligence and foolishness.

The conceptualization of intelligence through the human head reflects the close relationship between physical experience and abstract cognition. The head functions as a symbolic location of rational thinking, knowledge, and judgement.

Such expressions demonstrate the anthropocentric character of phraseological meaning because human intellectual abilities serve as the basis for semantic evaluation.

Emotional and psychological states. Emotions constitute another important conceptual domain in English phraseological antonymy. Phraseological expressions frequently represent contrasting psychological conditions:

To be on cloud nine – to feel extremely happy.

To be down in the dumps – to feel unhappy or depressed.

These expressions illustrate the conceptual opposition between happiness and sadness. Their semantic structures reveal the role of spatial and orientational metaphors in emotional conceptualization. Happiness is associated with upward movement and elevated positions, while sadness is represented through downward movement and low spatial positions.

This pattern demonstrates how physical experiences influence the linguistic representation of psychological states.

Human behaviour and activities. Behavioural oppositions also play an important role in the anthropocentric organization of phraseological meaning. For example:

To get down to business – to begin working seriously.

To sit on one's hands – to remain inactive when action is necessary.

These expressions can establish a contextual opposition between activity and passivity. The contrast reflects the importance of human action in social and professional life. Productive activity is generally evaluated positively, whereas unnecessary inactivity may receive a negative evaluation. The expressions therefore demonstrate how phraseological meaning incorporates social expectations concerning human behaviour.

Social relationships and interpersonal communication. Human beings exist within social environments, and phraseological units reflect different forms of interpersonal relationships. For example:

To be on good terms with someone – to have a friendly relationship.

To be on bad terms with someone – to be in serious disagreement with someone.

These expressions illustrate the opposition between harmony and conflict in interpersonal communication. The anthropocentric dimension becomes evident through the representation of human interaction, cooperation, disagreement, and social distance. Phraseological expressions in this category reveal how social experience becomes embedded in language through figurative meanings.

Moral and ethical evaluation. Moral values represent another significant aspect of the anthropocentric nature of phraseological antonyms. English phraseological units

frequently express judgements concerning honesty, dishonesty, generosity, selfishness, and other ethical characteristics. For example:

To tell the truth – to communicate honestly.

To tell a pack of lies – to communicate dishonestly.

These expressions demonstrate the opposition between truthfulness and dishonesty. The moral dimension of phraseological antonymy reflects the role of collective ethical standards in shaping linguistic meaning. The use of such expressions allows speakers not only to describe human behaviour but also to evaluate it according to socially established values.

Discussion. The results indicate that the anthropocentric nature of English antonymous phraseological units is closely connected with the human ability to categorize reality through opposing conceptual structures.

From a cognitive linguistic perspective, antonymy represents more than a relationship between contrasting linguistic meanings. It can also reflect fundamental cognitive strategies through which individuals distinguish and evaluate phenomena.

The opposition between kindness and cruelty, intelligence and foolishness, happiness and sadness, or activity and passivity illustrate how human experience provides the conceptual foundation for phraseological meaning.

The findings are consistent with the broader principles of cognitive linguistics, particularly the idea that language is closely related to human experience and conceptualization.

Lakoff and Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphor provides a useful theoretical explanation for expressions such as *on cloud nine* and *down in the dumps*. These examples demonstrate how abstract emotional experiences are structured through spatial and physical concepts. Similarly, the expressions *a heart of gold* and *a heart of stone* reveal how bodily and material experiences are used to conceptualize moral and emotional characteristics.

Consequently, the study of phraseological antonymy requires an interdisciplinary approach that combines traditional phraseological analysis with cognitive and anthropocentric interpretation.

Conclusion

The investigation of the anthropocentric nature of antonymous phraseological units in English demonstrates that phraseological opposition is closely associated with the conceptualization of human experience. The analysis identifies six major anthropocentric domains: human character, intellectual abilities, emotional states, behaviour, social relationships, and moral evaluation.

The study establishes that English phraseological antonyms should be examined not only as linguistic units expressing semantic contrast but also as cognitive and cultural instruments through which speakers interpret human existence.

Thus, the anthropocentric approach provides additional opportunities for understanding the relationship between phraseological semantics, human cognition, and the linguistic worldview.

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