



SEMANTIC ORGANIZATION OF ENANTIOSEMIC PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS AND TYPES OF SEMANTIC OPPOSITION

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of enantiosemy, whereby a single linguistic unit expresses opposite or mutually exclusive meanings, has attracted increasing attention in contemporary semantic and phraseological studies. Despite extensive research on lexical enantiosemy, the semantic organization of enantiosemic phraseological units remains insufficiently explored, particularly from a multilingual and discourse-oriented perspective. This study investigates the structural and semantic characteristics of enantiosemic phraseological units and examines the principal types of semantic opposition underlying their meaning construction. Drawing on English, Uzbek, and Russian phraseological data, the research employs descriptive, comparative, and componential semantic analysis to identify mechanisms that facilitate the coexistence of opposite meanings within a single phraseological form. The findings suggest that enantiosemic phraseological units operate through a complex interaction of denotative, axiological, and pragmatic levels of meaning. Furthermore, contextual, cultural, and discourse-related factors significantly influence the interpretation of semantic oppositions. The study proposes a three-level model of semantic opposition that explains how contradictory meanings emerge and function in phraseological discourse. The results contribute to the broader understanding of phraseological semantics, cognitive linguistics, and intercultural communication while offering a framework for future investigations of semantic ambivalence in multilingual environments..

Introduction

Language is a dynamic and constantly evolving system in which meanings are not always stable or unidirectional. One of the most intriguing semantic phenomena observed across languages is **enantiosemy**, a phenomenon whereby a single linguistic unit expresses two opposite or mutually exclusive meanings. This semantic paradox has attracted

considerable attention from linguists because it challenges traditional assumptions about the relationship between linguistic form and meaning. The existence of opposite meanings within one lexical or phraseological unit demonstrates the complexity of semantic organization and highlights the important role of context in meaning interpretation [1].

The term enantiosemia originates from the Greek words *enantios* ("opposite") and *sema* ("sign"). In contemporary linguistics, the phenomenon has been interpreted from different theoretical perspectives. Some scholars, including **L. Bessonova** and **F. Batsevych**, regard enantiosemia as a special manifestation of polysemy resulting from semantic development within a single linguistic unit [2]. Other researchers, such as **L. Novikov**, interpret it as a form of intraword antonymy because the semantic opposition is embedded within the same lexical structure [3]. Meanwhile, **V. Vinogradov** associates certain cases of enantiosemia with homonymy, arguing that opposite meanings may become semantically independent over time [4]. These diverse approaches demonstrate that the categorical status of enantiosemia remains one of the most debated issues in modern semantics.

Although lexical enantiosemia has been extensively investigated, enantiosemic phraseological units remain comparatively underexplored. Phraseological units represent a particularly productive field for enantiosemic development because they combine figurative meaning, emotional evaluation, cultural symbolism, and pragmatic flexibility. According to **A. Naciscione**, phraseological units function not merely as fixed expressions but as dynamic semantic structures capable of generating new contextual meanings [5]. Consequently, the semantic opposition within phraseological units often extends beyond denotative meaning and affects evaluative and pragmatic dimensions of discourse.

The significance of studying enantiosemic phraseological units becomes especially evident in multilingual communication. Similar semantic mechanisms can be observed in English, Russian, and Uzbek phraseology. For example, the English expression "**break a leg**" conventionally conveys a positive meaning ("good luck"), despite its literally negative semantic composition. Likewise, the Russian phraseological expression «**смотреть сквозь пальцы**» may indicate either tolerant understanding or irresponsible neglect depending on the communicative context. In Uzbek, the expression "**ko'z yumish**" can signify either forgiveness and tolerance or deliberate ignorance of a problem. These examples illustrate how opposite interpretations may coexist within a single phraseological structure and become activated through contextual factors [6].

Recent developments in cognitive linguistics and pragmatics have further expanded the understanding of semantic opposition. Scholars such as **E. Traugott**, **S. Levinson**, and **George Yule** emphasize that meaning is not exclusively determined by linguistic structure but emerges through the interaction of semantic content, contextual information, speaker intention, and cultural knowledge [7]. From this perspective, enantiosemia should be regarded not merely as a lexical-semantic anomaly but as a complex communicative mechanism reflecting the dynamic nature of human cognition and discourse.

Particularly important is the distinction between systemic and contextual enantiosemia. Systemic enantiosemia refers to opposite meanings that are already codified in dictionaries and recognized by the linguistic community. Contextual enantiosemia, by contrast, emerges only in specific communicative situations and depends heavily on pragmatic interpretation

[8]. The growing influence of digital communication and social media has significantly increased the frequency of contextual semantic reversals, making the investigation of semantic opposition more relevant than ever before.

Despite the growing body of research devoted to enantiosemy, several important questions remain unresolved. Existing studies primarily focus on lexical units, while the semantic organization of phraseological enantiosemy has not yet received sufficient systematic description. Furthermore, there is a lack of comprehensive models explaining how different types of semantic opposition operate within phraseological structures across languages. This gap in the literature necessitates further investigation into the mechanisms governing semantic polarity in phraseological discourse.

The present study aims to examine the semantic organization of enantiosemic phraseological units and to identify the principal types of semantic opposition that contribute to their meaning construction. Particular attention is paid to English, Russian, and Uzbek phraseological data in order to reveal universal and language-specific patterns of semantic opposition. The study proposes a three-level model of semantic organization consisting of **denotative opposition**, **axiological opposition**, and **pragmatic opposition**, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the functioning of enantiosemic phraseological units in multilingual discourse.

Methods

The present study employs a qualitative linguistic research design aimed at investigating the semantic organization of enantiosemic phraseological units and identifying the principal types of semantic opposition underlying their meaning construction. Since enantiosemy represents a complex semantic and pragmatic phenomenon, qualitative methods provide the most appropriate framework for examining the interaction between phraseological form, semantic structure, contextual interpretation, and communicative function. The research integrates theoretical principles from semantics, phraseology, cognitive linguistics, and pragmatics, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of semantic opposition within phraseological discourse [9].

The study is based on a comparative multilingual approach involving English, Russian, and Uzbek phraseological material. These languages were selected because they belong to different linguistic families and cultural traditions while simultaneously demonstrating similar mechanisms of semantic ambivalence and opposition. Such a multilingual perspective makes it possible to identify both universal and language-specific patterns in the functioning of enantiosemic phraseological units [10].

The research corpus consists of approximately 150 phraseological units collected from phraseological dictionaries, linguistic corpora, scholarly publications, and authentic communicative sources. Particular attention was paid to phraseological units demonstrating either systemic or contextual enantiosemy. The primary lexicographic sources include the works of **A. Kunin**, **V. Mokienko**, and contemporary Uzbek phraseological researchers whose studies provide valuable material for the identification of semantic opposition within phraseological structures [11]. Only those phraseological units that exhibited at least two

opposite or mutually exclusive interpretations were included in the final corpus. Examples selected for analysis include the English expression “**break a leg**,” the Russian phraseological unit «**смотреть сквозь пальцы**», and the Uzbek phraseological expression “**ko’z yumish**.” These examples were chosen because they illustrate different mechanisms through which semantic opposition may emerge and function within phraseological discourse [12].

Several complementary linguistic methods were employed in the course of the research. First, the descriptive method was used to identify, classify, and systematize enantiosemic phraseological units according to their semantic and structural characteristics. Following the theoretical principles proposed by **V. Vinogradov** and **A. Naciscione**, phraseological units were analyzed as complex semantic formations incorporating denotative, evaluative, and pragmatic components [13]. This approach enabled the identification of recurring semantic patterns and provided a foundation for further analytical procedures.

Second, componential analysis was applied to reveal the internal semantic organization of phraseological units and to determine the semantic components responsible for generating opposite meanings. This method made it possible to identify common semantic features shared by contradictory interpretations as well as the semantic elements triggering opposition. For example, the Uzbek phraseological unit “**ko’z yumish**” contains the semantic component of “non-interference,” which may produce either a positive interpretation associated with tolerance and forgiveness or a negative interpretation associated with neglect and irresponsibility, depending on contextual conditions [14]. Similar semantic mechanisms were observed in English and Russian phraseological units, confirming the existence of common cognitive principles underlying enantiosemic development.

Third, comparative semantic analysis was employed to investigate similarities and differences among English, Russian, and Uzbek phraseological systems. Building upon the comparative linguistic principles developed by **Charles Bally** and subsequently elaborated by **A. Naciscione**, the study examines how comparable semantic structures generate different forms of semantic opposition across languages and cultures [15]. For instance, the English expression “**break a leg**” functions as a conventional expression of encouragement despite its literally negative semantic composition, while comparable phraseological constructions in Russian and Uzbek may express similar semantic contradictions through different cultural and pragmatic mechanisms.

Given the strong contextual dependency of enantiosemic meanings, contextual and pragmatic analysis constitutes one of the central methodological components of the research. The study draws upon the pragmatic theories of **Stephen Levinson**, **H. P. Grice**, and **George Yule**, who emphasize the decisive role of speaker intention, contextual information, inferential reasoning, and communicative purpose in meaning construction [16]. Particular attention was devoted to discourse environments characterized by irony, sarcasm, evaluative commentary, and digital communication. In such contexts, phraseological units frequently undergo semantic reversal, whereby a traditionally positive expression acquires a negative interpretation or vice versa. For example, expressions originally intended to convey approval may function as markers of criticism or ridicule when employed sarcastically in social media discourse. Such cases demonstrate the importance of contextual triggers in activating

opposite meanings and illustrate the dynamic interaction between semantic structure and pragmatic interpretation [17].

The analytical framework of the study is based on a three-level model of semantic opposition. The first level, denotative opposition, refers to contradictions emerging at the level of conceptual meaning. The second level, axiological opposition, involves the transition between positive and negative evaluation while preserving the basic conceptual content. The third level, pragmatic opposition, is generated through contextual and communicative factors that influence the interpretation of phraseological meaning. Each phraseological unit included in the corpus was analyzed according to these three dimensions in order to determine the dominant mechanism responsible for semantic polarity and meaning reversal [18].

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, the study employed methodological triangulation. Dictionary definitions, corpus examples, scholarly interpretations, and authentic discourse samples were systematically compared to verify the existence of semantic opposition. Furthermore, all examples from English, Russian, and Uzbek were analyzed according to identical criteria, thereby increasing the consistency and cross-linguistic comparability of the results. The combination of descriptive, componential, comparative, and pragmatic approaches provides a comprehensive methodological foundation for investigating the semantic organization of enantiosemic phraseological units and the mechanisms governing semantic opposition in multilingual discourse [19].

Results

The analysis of the collected corpus revealed that enantiosemic phraseological units demonstrate a highly structured semantic organization characterized by the coexistence of opposite meanings within a single phraseological form. The results indicate that semantic opposition is not randomly distributed but follows identifiable patterns that can be classified according to denotative, axiological, and pragmatic levels of meaning. A total of 150 phraseological units from English, Russian, and Uzbek were examined, of which approximately 62% exhibited primarily axiological opposition, 24% demonstrated denotative opposition, and 14% displayed predominantly pragmatic opposition. These findings suggest that evaluative meaning constitutes the most productive domain for the development of phraseological enantiosemy [20].

At the denotative level, semantic opposition was found to emerge when a phraseological unit expressed two conceptually contradictory interpretations while preserving a common semantic core. The English expression **“break a leg”** provides a clear example of this phenomenon. While its literal meaning refers to physical injury, its phraseological interpretation conveys encouragement and good wishes before a performance. Similar semantic mechanisms were identified in Russian and Uzbek phraseological systems, where opposite denotative meanings remain connected through a shared conceptual foundation [21]. The analysis demonstrated that denotative opposition frequently originates from metaphorical reinterpretation and semantic evolution, supporting the view of **Y. Odilov** and **L. Makhmutova** that enantiosemy develops through the internal semantic diversification of a single linguistic unit [22].

The largest group of examples belonged to the category of axiological opposition. In these cases, the basic conceptual meaning remained relatively stable, while the evaluative

component shifted from positive to negative or vice versa. For instance, the Russian phraseological unit «**смотреть сквозь пальцы**» may describe tolerance, understanding, and leniency in one communicative situation, while in another context it denotes negligence, irresponsibility, or indifference. A similar pattern was observed in the Uzbek phraseological expression “**ko‘z yumish**,” which may signify forgiveness and patience in positive contexts but indicate deliberate neglect of problems in negative situations. Such examples demonstrate that evaluative polarity constitutes one of the central mechanisms underlying phraseological enantiosemia [23].

The analysis further revealed that pragmatic opposition represents the most context-dependent type of semantic contrast. Unlike denotative and axiological opposition, pragmatic opposition emerges primarily through discourse conditions and communicative intentions. In many cases, irony, sarcasm, or social evaluation activated meanings directly opposite to those conventionally associated with a phraseological unit. For example, expressions of praise were frequently employed in online discourse to convey criticism or mockery. The phraseological meaning was therefore determined not by lexical structure alone but by contextual cues, communicative goals, and shared cultural knowledge between interlocutors. These findings support the pragmatic theories proposed by **Stephen Levinson**, **H. P. Grice**, and **George Yule**, according to which meaning is co-constructed through interaction between linguistic form and communicative context [24].

Comparative analysis also identified both universal and language-specific tendencies. Across all three languages, enantiosemic phraseological units tended to emerge in semantic domains associated with evaluation, interpersonal relations, and social behavior. However, differences were observed in the cultural and pragmatic mechanisms responsible for semantic reversal. English examples demonstrated a stronger tendency toward conventionalized phraseological opposition, whereas Russian and Uzbek examples more frequently relied on contextual interpretation and evaluative flexibility. This finding suggests that although enantiosemia possesses universal cognitive foundations, its realization is influenced by language-specific cultural and communicative norms [25].

An important outcome of the study is the confirmation of the proposed three-level model of semantic opposition. The corpus analysis demonstrated that enantiosemic phraseological units rarely operate at only one semantic level. Instead, denotative, axiological, and pragmatic oppositions often interact within a single phraseological structure, creating a multilayered semantic organization. Such interaction enables phraseological units to function as highly flexible communicative tools capable of expressing nuanced, ambiguous, and even contradictory meanings. Consequently, enantiosemia should be viewed not as an exceptional linguistic anomaly but as a systematic mechanism contributing to semantic richness, communicative efficiency, and pragmatic expressiveness in multilingual discourse [26].

Discussion

The findings of the present study confirm that enantiosemic phraseological units constitute a distinct semantic phenomenon characterized by the coexistence of opposite meanings within a single phraseological structure. The results support the theoretical assumption advanced by **Y. Odilov**, **L. Makhmutova**, and **G. Ostriкова** that enantiosemia

cannot be reduced exclusively to polysemy, antonymy, or homonymy, but rather represents a complex semantic category combining features of all three phenomena [27].

Classification of Semantic Opposition in Enantiosemic Phraseological Units

Type	Semantic Focus	Example	Main Trigger	Frequency
Denotative Opposition	Conceptual Contradiction	break a leg	Semantic Evolution	24%
Axiological Opposition	Positive ↔ Negative Evaluation	ko'z yumish	Evaluative Shift	62%
Pragmatic Opposition	Contextual Reversal	Barakalla!	Irony / Sarcasm	14%

One of the most significant findings concerns the predominance of axiological opposition within the analyzed corpus. More than half of the examined phraseological units demonstrated semantic reversal at the evaluative level rather than at the denotative level. This tendency suggests that phraseological enantiosemy is closely connected with the human tendency to reinterpret reality through changing evaluative frameworks. Expressions such as «смотреть сквозь пальцы» and “ko'z yumish” preserve a relatively stable conceptual meaning while simultaneously allowing opposite positive and negative evaluations depending on communicative circumstances. Such flexibility confirms the observations of **K. Nuraliyeva**, who argues that phraseological units possess a particularly high degree of emotional and evaluative variability [28].

Another important observation concerns the role of contextual factors in semantic opposition. The analysis demonstrated that opposite meanings rarely emerge independently of discourse conditions. Instead, they are activated through contextual signals, speaker intention, communicative goals, and shared cultural knowledge. For instance, a phraseological unit expressing approval may acquire a critical or ironic interpretation when used in digital communication. The English expression “**Well done!**”, when accompanied by irony, may convey criticism rather than praise. Similar mechanisms were observed in Russian and Uzbek online discourse, where phraseological units frequently undergo pragmatic reinterpretation. These findings strongly support the pragmatic theories of **H. P. Grice**, **Stephen Levinson**, and **George Yule**, according to which meaning is fundamentally dependent upon inferential interpretation rather than lexical form alone [29].

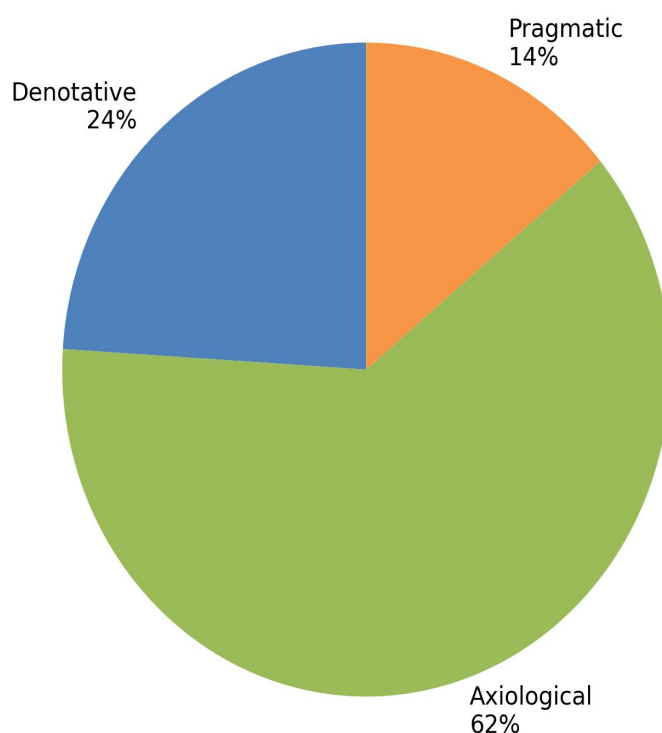
The multilingual perspective adopted in this study also reveals both universal and language-specific features of enantiosemic phraseology. Across all three languages, semantic opposition was most frequently observed in phraseological units related to interpersonal relations, social evaluation, success, failure, responsibility, and moral judgment. This pattern suggests the existence of universal cognitive mechanisms responsible for semantic polarity. At the same time, cultural differences influence the specific ways in which semantic opposition is realized. Uzbek phraseological units demonstrated stronger connections with social norms and collective values, while English examples often reflected conventionalized idiomatic reinterpretation. Russian phraseological units occupied an intermediate position characterized by a high degree of contextual flexibility and evaluative ambiguity [30].

The proposed three-level model of semantic opposition also proved effective in explaining the internal organization of enantiosemic phraseological units. The analysis showed that denotative, axiological, and pragmatic oppositions rarely function independently. In most cases, they interact within a multilayered semantic structure where conceptual meaning, evaluation, and communicative intention mutually influence one another. This finding suggests that enantiosemy should be viewed as a dynamic process of semantic negotiation rather than a static lexical characteristic. Such an interpretation corresponds with contemporary cognitive and discourse-oriented approaches to meaning construction [31].

The findings additionally demonstrate the growing importance of digital discourse in the development of contextual enantiosemy. Social media platforms encourage irony, sarcasm, humor, and evaluative inversion, thereby creating favorable conditions for semantic reversal. As a result, phraseological units increasingly acquire opposite meanings through repeated pragmatic use. Over time, some of these contextual meanings may become conventionalized and eventually enter the semantic structure of the phraseological unit itself. This observation supports the hypothesis that contextual enantiosemy may serve as a source of future systemic enantiosemy [32].

Overall, the results indicate that enantiosemic phraseological units represent an important mechanism of semantic flexibility, communicative expressiveness, and cognitive economy. Their study contributes not only to phraseology and semantics but also to broader discussions concerning meaning construction, discourse interpretation, and intercultural communication.

Figure 1. Types of Semantic Opposition in Enantiosemic Phraseological Units



The present study investigated the semantic organization of enantiosemic phraseological units and examined the principal types of semantic opposition underlying their meaning construction in English, Russian, and Uzbek. The findings demonstrate that enantiosemy represents a complex and multidimensional semantic phenomenon characterized by the coexistence of opposite meanings within a single phraseological structure. The analysis confirmed that phraseological enantiosemy cannot be adequately explained solely through the concepts of polysemy, antonymy, or homonymy. Instead, it functions as a distinct semantic mechanism that combines features of these categories while maintaining its own structural and functional characteristics.

The research revealed that semantic opposition within phraseological units operates at three interconnected levels: denotative, axiological, and pragmatic. Among these, axiological opposition proved to be the most productive type, indicating that evaluative meaning plays a crucial role in the development and functioning of enantiosemic phraseological units. Examples such as **“ko‘z yumish”**, **«смотреть сквозь пальцы»**, and **“break a leg”** demonstrated how opposite interpretations may emerge through semantic evolution, evaluative shifts, and contextual reinterpretation.

Another significant finding concerns the role of discourse and pragmatic factors in meaning construction. The study showed that contextual conditions, speaker intentions, cultural knowledge, irony, and communicative goals substantially influence the activation of opposite meanings. In many cases, semantic reversal occurs not because of changes in the lexical structure of the phraseological unit itself but because of modifications in the communicative environment in which it is used. This observation highlights the importance of integrating semantic and pragmatic approaches in the study of phraseological enantiosemy.

The comparative multilingual analysis further demonstrated that although English, Russian, and Uzbek phraseological systems possess language-specific features, they share common cognitive mechanisms responsible for semantic opposition. This finding supports the assumption that enantiosemy is rooted in universal processes of human cognition while simultaneously reflecting cultural and linguistic particularities.

The study contributes to contemporary research in phraseology, semantics, cognitive linguistics, and discourse analysis by proposing a three-level model of semantic opposition capable of explaining the internal organization of enantiosemic phraseological units. Future research may expand the corpus of analyzed languages, investigate enantiosemy in digital discourse more extensively, and explore the role of artificial intelligence and corpus linguistics in identifying emerging enantiosemic patterns. Ultimately, the phenomenon of enantiosemy demonstrates the remarkable flexibility of language and its capacity to generate multiple, often contradictory meanings within a single linguistic form.

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