



STRUCTURAL-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF BINARY OPPOSITIONS REPRESENTING TRAITS OF ENGLISH FAIRY TALE CHARACTERS

Ganiyeva Dildorakhon Azizovna

Doctor of Philological Sciences (DSc), professor

Fergana state university

dganieva86@gmail.com

+998905854464

Yusupova Omina Mukhammadzoi kizi

Doctor of Philosophy in Philological Sciences (PhD)

Fergana state university

yusupovaomina77@gmail.com

+998939894445

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 07th June 2026

Accepted: 09th June 2026

Online: 11th June 2026

KEYWORDS

binary oppositions, fairy tales, folklore, culture, structural-semantic analysis, antonymic pairs, positive and negative traits

ABSTRACT

This article explores the structural and semantic nature of binary oppositions in English fairy tales. It focuses on how positive and negative traits of characters are linguistically encoded through polar opposites. By employing structural-semantic analysis, the research identifies the fundamental antonymic pairs that shape the moral and aesthetic landscape of the folklore. Furthermore, the article illustrates through examples that fairy tales are one of the most prominent factors in revealing a nation's culture.

Introduction

It's much easier to realize the fundamental distinctions between binary oppositions such as good and evil, justice and injustice, wisdom and foolishness through fairy tales. Binary oppositions are the cognitive foundation of folklore. They help the audience distinguish between "good" and "evil". The child psychologist B.Bettelheim stated, "Nothing can be as enriching and satisfying for a child or an adult as folk tales. One can gain more information from them about a person's inner problems and how to properly solve difficulties in any society than from any other story a child can understand" [1]. Tales have a powerful educational quality that they help children differentiate between the good and evil events happening around them.

It should be noted that in the framework of structural-semantic analysis, fairy tales function as a primary semiotic system that facilitates a clearer understanding of the binary oppositions between positive and negative character traits.

In the context of English fairy tales, the lexeme "**kindness**" serves as a core semantic constituent of the positive pole within the binary opposition system. The adjective "kind", originally meaning "natural" or "with the character of the

species". From a structural perspective, the suffix -ness nominalizes the quality, transforming a temporary act into an inherent ontological trait that contrasts sharply with the malice or envy exhibited by villainous characters. In folklore, this implies that the hero's goodness is an inherent, "natural" quality. In English fairy tales the semantic volume of "kindness" often expands to include "pity towards the weak".

"In throth, agras", said she, "it's myself that's glad to show how I value your kindness in giving me shelter". ("Jack the Cunning Thief")

One of the most important qualities of negative characters is **wickedness** or **cruelty**. In English, the lexeme "**wicked**" which is often found in folk tales, can mean immoral, malicious, bad, or sinful. It can be a synonym for words like "bad, evil, awful and terrible" and is used with various meanings depending on the context. The meaning of the word are as follows: 1) morally very bad: evil; 2) fierce, vicious; b: disposed to or marked by mischief: roguish (does wicked impersonations) [6].

"**Wicked**" is used to convey a sense of evil, harm, or trouble in the below sentences.

"After they were gone says Jack to the wicked housekeeper, "Do these fellows ever make you a present?" ("Jack the Cunning Thief")

"Her brother loved her dearly, but her wicked stepmother hated her." ("The Rose Tree")

Cruelty in English folk tales expresses the mental and emotional states of the characters and means "cruel behaviour or a cruel action" [7]. In the structural framework of English fairy tales, "cruelty" acts as the primary semantic antonym to "kindness". This is a privative opposition where "cruelty" is the marked member representing the violation of natural moral laws. In English fairy tales (e.g., The step-mother in "The Well of The World's End" or the giant in "Jack and the Beanstalk"), "cruelty" is often semantically linked to physical or psychological hunger (greed for power, beauty or wealth).

"William would be powerful and strong as the eagle, but feared and hated for cruelty and violence, until he ended a wicked life by a bad death." ("The Sons of The Conqueror")

"And her stepmother hated her because she was more beautiful than herself, and she was very cruel to her". ("The Well of The World's End")

In the binary opposition system of English fairy tales, "**generous**" serves as a vital component of the "ideal hero" archetype, contrasting directly with "greedy" or "miser". It is derived from the Latin *generosus* (meaning "of noble

birth"). Originally, "generous" was linked to social status (nobility). In fairy tales, this has evolved: a character's "generosity" now signals their moral nobility, regardless of their actual social rank. In English tales like "The History of Jack and the Bean-Stalk", "Jack The Giant-Killer" or "The Three Heads of the Well", generosity is often a structural test.

"Now Jack the Giant-Killer, coming that way, was so taken with the generosity of the prince, that he desired to be his servant". ("Jack The Giant-Killer")

However, in English fairy tales, the lexemes **mean** and **miser** are used to describe stingy people. In the linguistic landscape of English fairy tales, "miser" represents the extreme negative manifestation of the "greed" semantic field. It denotes a character who hoards wealth and refuses the social and moral obligation of sharing. For example, in the tales "The Miser and his wife" and "Jack Hannaford", a stingy husband is also described. The lexeme **mean** is described as "cruel, or unkind, angry and violent; not willing to spend money" [6].

In English fairy tales, **greedy** is explained in the Macmillan dictionary as follows: "wanting to eat or drink more food than you need, wanting more money, things, or power than you need" [6]. The lexeme "greedy" functions as a motivational constant within the negative semantic pole of English fairy tales. Morphologically rooted in the concept of physical hunger, it evolves semantically to represent a spiritual and material voracity.

"What must I do, said I, for the sight of that had made me greedy". ("The Vision of MacConglinney")

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that binary oppositions serve as a fundamental structural-semantic framework in English fairy tales. These antonymic pairs are not just linguistic contrasts but are cultural tools used to transmit values. These linguistic and semantic oppositions not only simplify moral complexities for the audience but also preserve the traditional archetypes of English folklore. Ultimately, the use of binary structures is essential for creating clear characterization and maintaining the didactic nature of the fairy tale genre. Furthermore, in English folklore, the triumph of the positive member of the opposition over the negative one is the primary driving force of the plot.

References:

1. Bettelheim B. The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales. – New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 1976. – P.5.
2. Briggs K. British Folk-Tales and Legends. – London and New York, 2002.

3. Joseph J. English fairy tales. – Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 2005. – 169 p.
4. Joseph J. More Celtic Fairy Tales. Illustrated by John D.Batten: – London: David Nutt, 1894. – 267 p.
5. Joseph J. More English Fairy Tales. Illustrated by John D.Batten. – London: David Nutt, 1894. – P.63.
6. The Macmillan English Dictionary. – Malaysia: Macmillan Publisher Limited, 2007. – P.338.
7. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cruelty>

