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## The Role of Synonyms and Antonyms in Speaking and Writing

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### Abstract

The current study is a serious attempt to carry out a comprehensive survey of the research subject heading The Role of Synonyms and Antonyms in Speaking and Writing which is certainly of great importance as the case with the other semantic themes. This research paper discusses a vital area in the English study of semantics.

Synonyms are completely different words in spelling; but they are all alike (or nearly alike) in meaning, whereas an antonym is a word that indicates a meaning as opposed to the meaning of a given word. So the two words are named antonyms to each other.

It is anticipated that the present study will be useful for the learners of English in their study, especially, when they communicate or write.

**Keywords:** synonym, antonym, opposite, alike, types of synonyms, overuse

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## دور المترادفات والمتضادات في التحدث والكتابة

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### المستخلص

الدراسة الحالية هي محاولة جادة لإنجاز مسح شامل لموضوع دور المرادفات والأضداد في الحديث والكتابة، هذا الموضوع بالتأكيد ذو أهمية عظيمة كما هو الحال مع مواضيع الدلالة الأخرى. يناقش البحث مجال حيوي في دراسة علم الدلالة الانكليزي.

المرادفات هي كلمات متباينة كلياً املائياً لكنها متشابهة (أو تقريباً متشابهة) في المعنى بينما يعرف الضد على أنه كلمة تشير الى معنى مخالف المعنى الكلمة المعطاة، لذا فإن الكلمتين تسمى أضداد الواحدة عكس الاخرى.

من المتوقع للدراسة الحالية أن تكون مفيدة لمتعلمي اللغة الانكليزية في دراستهم وبالخصوص عند التفاهم والتواصل مع الاخرين أو عند الكتابة.

### 1. Introduction

A synonym is a word or phrase that resembles (completely or partially) another word or phrase in meaning; for example, “smart girl” is similar to “intelligent girl” because smart and intelligent are synonyms. By the way, these two vocabulary words express exact similarity which is called absolute synonymy though, in other cases, some synonyms have partial meaning, whereas others are remote in expressing the meaning for given words. Let's talk about the verb look which means “an act of just looking” and its synonym stare which means “to look for a long time with eyes wide open”. These are not totally similar in meaning. In other words, they are partial synonyms.

English is considered a big reservoir of synonyms that have the same meaning without or with little difference. A word and its synonyms are alike and sometimes almost alike in expressing similar meaning.

The choice of the most proper synonym is a big challenge for the writers and mostly for the learners of English at different stages who try to convey their ideas accurately. Selecting the precise synonyms in your writing offers it pretty good flavour.

An antonym, however, is a word expressing the opposite meaning of another word. The study of antonyms will definitely strengthen your sense of the language and help you elect the most suitable words in your writing. Learners can expand their vocabulary words effectively by obtaining many more antonyms words and synonyms.

The grammarians mainly focus on the categories of antonyms and call upon learners to master the subject of antonyms through its types since they are considered as essential pillars in studying it.

The Introduction of this paper implies the following subsections: problem, aims to be attained, hypothesis, procedure, value of the study and limitation of the study.

### **1.1 Problem**

Semantics is defined as the scientific study of meaning. The semantic component includes various topics among which synonyms and antonyms usually occupy crucial areas in the field of linguistics.

The learners of English, especially, those at elementary stages often face a crushing trouble in finding a synonym for a given word. Moreover, they feel perplexed and bewildered in choosing the most appropriate synonym for a certain word.

As for antonyms, most learners of English and even some writers have not passed through the categories of antonyms. So, this drawback makes them adopt improper choices of antonyms in certain contexts.

### **1.2 Aims to Be Attained**

The present research paper aims to introduce the subjects of synonyms and antonyms usage to the learners of English and to show their significance in due respect. Any wrong choice of them is certainly the cause of damaging the wanted meaning which is, as a result, affected negatively in speaking and writing.

### **1.3 Hypothesis**

The following hypotheses are suggested in this study:

1. Learners of English, especially, those at beginning stages use synonyms and antonyms randomly without close connection to the real meaning they want to express.
2. The learners mostly overuse the same word in their writing due to the lack in words stock.

3. The context of situation can affect the choice of synonyms for certain words. Sometimes it is hard for the learners to realise the importance of context in deciding the choice of a word than the other.
4. What is related to meaning forms big problems for the learners of English since this field of language study is very complicated and demanding the efforts.

#### **1.4 Procedure**

The procedures pursued in this study will be the following:

1. Collecting all about synonyms and antonyms from various sources, such as: books on semantics, papers and from sites over the internet.
2. Learning the correct use of synonyms requires the possession of suitable understanding to its categories that are listed, as follows: absolute synonyms, partial synonyms and remote synonyms. This process is done within the limits of their meaning.
3. Understanding the subject of antonyms is better realised by knowing its types. The researcher will deal fully with the categories of antonyms as they are suggested by many specialists in the field of semantics. The categories of antonyms are: auto-antonyms, converse or relational antonyms and graded antonyms.
4. Giving directives to keep away from the repeated use of the same word over and over again because, in case of overusing the same words, the reader might lose joy in what he reads.
5. Inserting important conclusions at the end of this paper. The section of conclusion represents the core of the current study.

#### **1.5 Importance of the study**

This research can be inspiring for those who are fond of the semantic aspects of the language. This study can broaden the horizons of any of learners, teachers and researchers.

The researcher uses his own style in presenting his work. So the value of this article lies in the simplified way of posing the current material. This work differs from other research papers in that it is exhibited in a simple comprehensible way.

#### **1.6 Limitation of the Study**

This research paper is confined to the study of English synonyms and antonyms with mentioning the three types of synonyms which include: absolute, partial and remote

synonyms. The categories of antonyms are also put under study. An advice to avoid repeating the same word again and again is offered now and then. Anything which is not related to the subject is totally excluded.

The researcher, anyhow, cannot study all the synonyms and antonyms of the English language because it is impossible to refer to them all. Sufficient examples, however, are given in the research.

## **2. Synonymy under study**

### **2.1 The Term Synonymy Defined**

The Specialists in the field of semantics as a main component in the study of language tackle the term synonymy and Harris (1973:1) is one of them who gives his comment by saying “Synonymy is held to be the sameness of meaning of different expressions.” Or “Two words are synonymous if they can be used interchangeably in all sentence context”, this is according to Jackson (1988:65). Kleider (1988: 10) shares his thought by claiming: “Synonymous words that have the same sense in a given context are synonymous.” They are two or more words with very closely related meanings. They can often, but not always, be replaced for each other in sentences. All above definitions share the same concept of similarity between a given word and its synonyms, the only difference among these definitions is the use of different wording.

The researcher admits that all the foregoing definitions are eloquently worded ones despite using various styles which refer to the similarity of meaning between a certain word and its synonyms. The definitions, in other words, have in common the concept of similarity in meaning between a word and its synonyms. Let’s go over some examples of synonyms as pairs:

rich – wealthy ; big – large ; complex – complicated ; strong – powerful ; fast – quick ; woman – female ; happy – cheerful ; pretty – beautiful ; constantly – always ; cease – stop ; chilly – cool ; confess – admit ; condemn – denounce

### **2.2 Advantages of Synonyms**

Synonyms can enhance word choice, or selecting the best single word or expression for what you are trying to communicate.

The first advantage of synonyms is achieved when trying to choose the exact word as a substitute for a certain word. Some languages may have only word for expressing a certain meaning. English, however, uses a variety of words to convey a single meaning, each with its unique subtle distinction. This variety of words is partly ascribed to the existence of loan words that are taken from other languages. For examples there are some distinctions between the word good and its synonyms. Fine as a synonym for good usually has a lesser degree in meaning of good, whereas excellent has a greater degree of good. Choosing the precise word is of real importance to writing well. Therefore, the semantic differences between good, fine and excellent can influence communication. When saying the meal was fine, it conveys a slightly different meaning than saying the meal was excellent in spite of being synonyms. In short, a big stock of synonyms helps you elect the best word for what you want to communicate. This difference is significant for those who want to write accurately and to make persuasive writings for the readers; in this case, choosing the exact synonyms will connect you with special kind of readers.

Secondly, the other main advantage of synonyms is also to avoid using the same word over and over again because it is always recommended to use the same word as sparingly as possible. Repeating a specific word can constitute a problem, especially, when focusing on a single topic. And most of your sentences or clauses must include words related to the topic. The term elegant variation is used to refer to the alternating synonyms so as to reach a variety in a piece of writing.

The frequent use of the same word your writing would become repetitive, in this case, your reader might lose interest in what he reads. You have to tint your sentences with synonyms for a single word. If you use the word dog in writing a topic, you can use synonyms, such as hound or conine and if you are dealing with a particular of a dog, you could use words like puppy or mutt. You could even utilize the slang counterparts like doggo, pupper, pooch or furball. In this case, your sentences are supplied with several substitutes of dog. In using alternating synonyms for each new sentence or clause, your writing becomes more enjoyable and vital. In so doing, the reader's attention is attracted and reading your work becomes more interesting.

### **2.3 Categories of Synonyms**

Learning the correct usage of synonyms requires the possession of suitable understanding to its categories that are listed below. The categories of synonyms depend on how similar their meanings are:

### **1. Absolute Synonyms**

There are words that have exactly the same meaning; in that there is no difference in meaning between a given word and its synonym, in this case, you can use absolute synonyms interchangeably: one synonym can take the place of another fully with retaining exactly the same message. Examples:

identical - indistinguishable

drink - beverage

insect - bug

### **2. Partial synonyms**

Partial synonyms are words that have almost the same meaning or the same thing and the differences are slight and little. What separates such synonyms can only be the degree or amount of meaning, such as: the distinction between good and excellent. One word, however, can be a specific type of a more general word; for examples, puppy is still a dog which is used here with little distinction. In regard to the partial synonyms, the meaning is affected merely slightly but the main message remains the same. Examples on partial synonyms:

car - vehicle

run - sprint

big - gignatic

### **3. Remote Synonyms**

Remote synonyms are the words which have different meanings though their meaning are still linked. Such synonyms cannot be used interchangeably. The message changes and becomes different in case of replacing a word with a remote synonym. However, they are almost related; sometimes a remote synonym could be a better or more accurate word choice than the original like:

smart - witty

river - oreek

hairy- furry

### **3. Preliminary Remarks on Antonymy**

Among various linguistic fields, semantics, particularly, semantic relations, lexical relations that involves topics like synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy etc. is placed in a major position in the study of language. Antonymy which is the oppositeness of meaning is tackled as having the most significant rank among semantic relations. Some specialists in this field assure that human creatures have tendency to think in opposites. And this why a large quantity of antonyms exists in the vocabulary words of human languages.

As one of the semantic relations, antonymy is taken to be useful since antonymous pairs are used in a great of frequency in proverbs and idioms in order to leave big effects on hearers and readers. Antonymy is an indispensable characteristic in common speech and literary writing when using oxymoron, paradox and irony. Besides, antonymy plays an important part in the process of teaching and learning, for example, when defining short as not tall and trivial not significant. Antonymy takes the second place (only next to synonymy) as far as frequency among the various semantic relations is concerned.

#### **3.1 The Term Antonymy Defined**

The word antonymy is first invented by C.J. Smith in contrast to the synonymy. Great efforts have been made to define antonym but these definitions tend to show what is illustrated rather than described. In reality to give examples on antonyms like big/ small, famous/ unknown, close/ open etc. will be more effective and useful than trying to find definitions because finding a definition which includes every example is surely hard and problematic.

Lyons (81:1977) exhibits his definition by claiming, “antonyms are the words opposite in meaning”. For example, sell and buy is a pair of antonyms and the relation between them as antonym.

Hu Zhuanglin (2001:164), the eminent Chinese Linguist says, “antonym is the name for oppositeness relation”. Leech (1981:17) declares that antonym is the opposite meaning relation between words and word of opposite meaning is antonym.



### **3.2 Types of Antonyms**

An antonym is a word which refers to the opposite meaning of another word. An opposite can be opposed in meaning to a given word or something contrary to anything. The material of antonyms cannot be dominated to the full unless its types are totally assimilated. Having a good insight into the categories of antonyms could help you choose the exact opposite for a particular given word. Hence, one may come across other namings for each type mentioned in here. Antonyms can exist in four categories.

#### **1. Graded Antonyms**

This refers to one of a pair of words with opposite meanings where the two meanings get on continuing spectrum. So hot and cold are two meanings that belong to the opposite ends of the spectrum. Therefore, they are regarded as gradable antonyms in their relation in the spectrum. More examples on this type are, as follows:

heavy - light

skinny - fat

light - dark

old - young

early - late

empty - full

dull - interesting

#### **2. Complementary Antonyms**

This type is sometimes called binary or contradictory antonyms which are referred to as ones one of a pair of words with contradictory meanings. In this case, the two meanings do not belong to a continuous spectrum. So there is no continuing spectrum between mortal and immortal although they are opposites to each other. They are, therefore related as complementary antonyms or they are logically opposites.

Examples:

odd - even

entrance - exit

inhale - exhale

occupied-vacant

Such opposites are logically-considered so and this relation can be reached by use of logic.

### **3. Relational Antonyms**

There are groups of word pairs which have a relationship from opposite points of view. A word and its antonym show a strong relationship. Relational antonyms would not be found without the others. Indeed, there is no lexical oppositeness of teacher though teacher and pupil are opposite words within the limit of the relationship between them.

Examples:

wife - husband

doctor - patient

predator - prey

teach - learn

servant - master

come - go

parent - child

### **4. Auto-antonyms**

Such antonyms refer to words that have the opposite meaning according to context and under separate definitions. Such an antonyms includes two different meanings and one for that given word. Conronym and Jansus word are sometimes used to refer to the Auto-antonyms. Examples showing this type:

enjoin / to prohibit and to issue injection

fast / moving quickly or fixed firmly in place

cleave / to split or to adhere sanction punishment, prohibition or permission

stay / to remain in a specific place, to postpone or to guide direction or movement

### **3.3 The Use of Antonyms in Literature Works**

The use of antonyms is clear and effective in various literature works of outstanding English writers. This use exists obviously in poetry, drama, novel and in the speeches of presidents and important figures.

In writing English texts, cohesion is usually achieved through the smart use of antonyms. Writers are certainly interested in and good at using antonyms in their literature works because by employing antonyms their texts become artistically charming and strongly convincing. Using antonyms in proper places of a text produces a powerful sense of comparison.

### **3.3.1 Antonyms in poetry**

Antonyms are widely encountered in poetry. The following poetry lines are quoted from *Ulysses* written by the English poet Alfred Tennyson: “Though much is taken, much abides; and though / We are not now that strength which is in the old days / Moved earth and heaven; that which we are / One equal-temper of heroic hearts / Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will / To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”

These are encouraging lines and every desperate man can obtain strength from them. What makes these lines kept in mind for long and powerful is the use of antonyms in this good way.

### **3.3.2 Antonyms in Drama**

Antonyms emerge clearly in writing dramas. William Shakespeare in his drama *Romeo and Juliet* contains obviously the use of antonyms in more than one place, the excerpts from this play is, as follows: “My only love sprung from my only hate. Too early seen unknown, and known too late. Prodigious birth of love it is to me, that I must love a loathed.” The four antonym pairs used in this quotation are to show the well known figures of speech in English, oxymoron and paradox. Reading the opposite words at first in the above excerpt may make the readers think that these are illogical, ridiculous and raving, but when we go deep into the plot of the play we discover that this use of antonym pairs exists to depict the contradictory mentality of Juliet at that moment.

### **3.3.3 Antonyms in Novels**

Most novelists are very skillful at using antonyms in their novels. The following quotation is taken from *A Tale of Two Cities* written by Charles Dickens. “It was the best

times, it was the worst times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us.”

In this excerpt, six pairs of antonyms are available to depict complex, gloomy and risky atmosphere before the French revolution. This great novelist and the like have a good mastery of using antonyms, definitely, in most of his writings.

### **3.3.4 Use of Antonymy in Speeches**

When antonyms are employed in speeches, a clear-cut position and an obvious point of view are made. In this way, the language has a more powerful effect and helps being convincing. Many people use antonyms to justify their stand and move the public opinion. This is certainly done by the American presidents.

Abraham Lincoln once in his speech at Gettysburg said “the brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, for above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.”

The use of antonyms in this address shows the persuasive power of the speaker and the people are more likely to be persuaded to a greater extent. The same could be said about Martin Luther King as an eminent figure who once said “On hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of a poverty in the midst of vast ocean of material prosperity.”

### **Conclusion**

This paper focuses on investigating an important subject which, though it is tackled by many scholars and researches, is posed in a new technique and simple style so that the learners of English can receive it earnestly to bridge the gap of their weakness with respect to this semantic area. That is why the topic is chosen.

This section is set to be the final part of the study which implies detected findings and concluded remarks reached during writing the research and, especially, by the end of it. The researcher’s judgements on the very subject of the research represent the results arrived at lately.

1. A synonym is a word that is similar (or almost similar) to another word. Sometimes synonyms have exact meaning to given words and, in other cases, they convey partial meaning. An antonym, on the other hand, is used to mean the opposite of a given word. Synonyms and antonyms should carefully be chosen within the limits of the same part of speech.
2. The language components adopted by updated grammarians are given the order: semantics first occurs followed by phonology and grammar finally. This order is considered the most logical one in the study of language. As for Synonyms and antonyms, these subjects are essential part of the semantic studies. For this reason, they are studied and taught within the semantic component.
3. Learners of English can upgrade their words by learning a lot more synonyms and antonyms to use them when required in speaking and writing. These two subjects are regarded as main sources and important factors of word increase in English.
4. Derivation as a crucial word formation process of increasing the vocabulary words plays an important role in English since a great deal of synonyms and antonyms are created through this process. Examples on derived synonyms:

pretty - beautiful

respectable - honourable

pretty - lovely

and examples on derived antonyms:

regular - irregular

correct - incorrect

noble - ignoble

happy - unhappy

The suffixes (-ful), (-able), (-ly) and others are used to create synonymous words, whereas the prefixes (ir-), (in-), (ig-) (un-) and others are used to derive the opposite meaning of words. It should carefully be noted that the word respectable and its synonym honourable are obtained by adding the suffix (-able) to the root nouns respect and honour which are synonyms to each other as well.

5. Arabic, the researcher's native language, has similar counterparts to these English subjects. The Arabic counterparts are available under the titles "المترادفات" the Arabic name for synonyms and "الامضداد" versus antonyms. These semantic English phenomena are found in Arabic having the same linguistic distribution and behaviour.
6. The topics of synonyms and antonyms are essential elements in speaking and writing. They are both used to clarify the meaning of other words in sentences. Choosing the exact synonym is required in order to retain the original message of the text. Writers of English should also be keen in electing the accurate opposites in order to convey the exact message to the receivers.
7. An Antonym is a word which has the opposite meaning of another word. The English opposites are either independent words or derived words involving certain prefixes or suffixes that carry the opposite meaning of a given word. Examples of independent antonyms:

<u>famous</u>	unknown
<u>rich</u>	<u>poor</u>
<u>strong</u>	<u>weak</u>
<u>stupid</u>	<u>smart</u>
beautiful	<u>ugly</u>

Examples of antonyms with prefixes or a suffixes:

proper	improper
believe	disbelieve
noble	ignoble
careful	careless

8. The semantic study of antonyms in English literature works helps the readers comprehend and get interested in what the authors intend to convey much more easily, moreover, the ability in using the language is enhanced noticeably and the speaker's performance is heightened to a greater extent.
9. The use of antonyms is a frequent method in literature works, poetry, drama, novel and speeches made by heads of states or by important figures. This method is adopted to

reach a high degree of artistic beauty of the work, besides, such works make the readers convinced in what they read.

10. Some specialists in the field of language philosophy argue that synonyms carry completely or partially different meanings since they are formed totally with different spelling. So, according to this point of view, it hard to find hundred percent synonyms. However, words with different letters have always slight or big differences in meaning. Those philosophers, therefor, deny the existence of exact synonyms in meaning.
11. Throughout the process of investigation, it has been discovered that, in most cases, synonyms and antonyms have a lesser degree of meaning or that of greater degree. Finding precise synonyms or antonyms is sometimes rare; but a little bit difference will not affect the message badly. The message with an imprecise synonym remains unchanged and expressive.
12. Good writers are usually those who avoid the frequent use of the same word in their writings. Using a variety of words with similar meaning is a positive sign of good writing. Repeating the same word over and over again makes the reader lose interest in what he reads and that certainly creates boredom for him. Those who are keen on selecting the most proper synonyms and antonyms are considered distinguished in their writings.
13. The best way to memorize new words can easily be realised by way of looking for their similar utterances in meaning or the opposites of certain words.
14. Once you have a good stock of synonyms and antonyms, this will offer you a good chance of electing the most exact synonym or antonym of another word. In this case, your choices become more precise and better for a particular given word in certain contexts.
15. Experience in teaching English for long shows that most learners of English face a big problem in finding the most exact synonym for another word. They also fail to find the wanted antonym as an opposed word in meaning of a certain given word when looking up such words in a dictionary.

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