

## **Some Considerations about Discursive Antonymy**

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**Abstract:** The contextual-discursive and syntactic-combinatorial side of the canonical and non-canonical antonyms contribute to the shaping of an antonymically configured discourse, as well as to the relief of an antonymic communicative-discursive impact. We consider that, in a functional-contextual plan, one can delimit the hyperonym concept discursive (functional) antonymy, along with the hyponymic concepts: stylistic antonymy, phraseological antonymy, paremiologic antonymy, aphoristic antonymy, terminological antonymy, scientific antonymy, etc. At the same time, contextual or occasional antonymy is part of discursive antonymy because its context or statement is specific to both canonical and non-canonical, occasional, contextual antonyms. In the present study, the focus is on stylistic antonyms, trying to identify in the present discourse a linguistic paradigm of opposing terms.

**Keywords:** functional antonymy, irony, euphemism, paradox

### **1. Introduction. Antonymy as a functional-discursive phenomenon**

In the present study, the focus is on the antonymic pairs (canonical and non-canonical) and especially on their behaviour in the present discursive space. We believe that, if antonyms can be spotted at lexical level quite easily, antonymy, as a universal phenomenon, has a much broader sphere of coverage, including antonyms of all kinds, from homolex and heterolex canonical antonyms to non-canonical and occasional (quasi-antonymy).

All discursive forms based on antonymic or contrasting cohesion can be reunited under the name "discursive antonymy" (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1984, Berbinski 2011). A synonymous terminological synonym of this operational concept is functional antonymy. In our opinion, this conceptual hyperonym phrase includes the

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hyponymic concepts: stylistic antonymy, phraseological antonymy, paremiologic antonymy, aphoristic antonymy, terminological antonymy, scientific antonymy, etc.

The delimitation of antonymy as a discursive phenomenon is also made by considering modelling and activating factors such as semantic ambivalence, binarism, duality. We will not insist on some philosophical aspects of these operational terms. We will only say that, by accessing the ambivalent, dual character of the linguistic sign, special stylistic and expressive effects are created in a speech.

## **2. Canonical and non-canonical antonymic pairs in the advertising discourse**

Antonymic pairs appeal to short sentences encountered in day-to-day or in journalistic and advertising discourses, including the television segment. A suggestive expression is found in the advertising for the pharmaceutical product "Furazolidon", an antibiotic, antidiuretic drug:

(1) "Potrivit în momente nepotrivite". [Suitable at times unsuitable]

We note that the "suitable-unsuitable" homolex opposite terms are selected in an inspired manner by the emitter, so that the advertising message achieves its objective, namely, to suggest the usefulness, quality and prompt reaction of this medicinal product. At the same time, an important note of hilarity is created around it. The message is created in a very concise, precise and persuasive style. In fact, one of the functions of the advertising language is that of persuasiveness, the ability of the linguistic statement, which, of course, accompanied by pragmatic, paratextual and visual elements and, inevitably, psychological or socio-economic ones, has the purpose of convincing a customer to buy a particular product.

Promotional language benefits from the expressiveness of the use of the counterpart in other areas as well. For example, in the Kaufland commercial chain, in the frozen food district, we find a freezer with the following message:

(2) "Produse congelate pentru minți dezghețate". [Frozen products for defrosted minds]

The recipient of the advertising message is assured by the fact that frozen foods need to use this material, but especially because only a "defrosted mind" (*i.e.* "clever mind") – a Romanian metaphor for smart people, due to the figurative meaning (*i.e.* "clever", "ager", "lively", "smart") of the word "dezghețat" [thawed, defrosted] will opt for the use of these bags and will, thus, be distinguished from "unintelligent" people.

Looking to provide another example, the next reply from an interview broadcast in primetime by ProTV channel news when an interlocutor, speaking of her sphere of activity, said:

- (3) "Este chiar mai mult decât un hobby, este pasiune". [It's even more than a hobby, it's passion.] (meaning "the activity carried out").

It is obvious that the logical-semantic relation between the two words (*hobby-passion*) is that of synonymy, but in the given situational context (3), the synonymous relationship is either eluded or diverted to another type of linguistic relation leading to a contrast relationship through contextual-opposite sense. These types of contrasts are evident in a certain situational-referential context. Finally, by using these contrasts, the desired effect is sought by the transmitter, defined in Wilson-Sperber's theory of relevance. As a result, these statements become at least relevant to the situation for which they were created. However, it is worth saying that it is not sure that the emitters of these messages are fully aware of the fact that they issue statements of an antonymic-contrasting fact; but one fact is certain, namely that at the psycho-communicative level, there is a tendency of the human mind to create antonymic, dichotomous or antagonistic statements.

Advertisements often contain litote-expressions as a way of expressing an unfavourable, unpleasant, troublesome reality. For example, in the advertising clip of the Penny chain, which proposed the campaign "100 Years of Romania", on the occasion of the celebration of the centennial of the Romanian State, the protagonist says, referring to Romania, that:

- (4) "... *n-o fi ea perfectă*, dar e România noastră, cu bune și cu rele, dar mai ales cu bune...". [*it may not be perfect*, but it is our Romania, with its ups and downs, but especially with ups] (our emphasis)

The litote "*n-o fi perfectă*" [it may not be perfect] is a way to substitute an "unperfect" reality with a more elaborate image. In the same statement, the antonymic phrase "*cu bune și cu rele*" [with its ups and downs], appears, which is to emphasize the same idea, the tutelary message of the video: "*Optimism de România*" [Romanian optimism].

These discursive models also prove that the contrast and contradictory relationships contribute to the creation of textual cohesion, to the creation of a textual-discursive sense based on (quasi) antonyms.

### **3. Discursive forms based on antonymic or contrasting context: enantiosemy, euphemism, litote, chiasm, irony, allusion, metaphor, paradox, etc.**

Depending on certain verbal, paraverbal or nonverbal parameters such as irony, sarcasm, repetition, intonation, vocal prolongation, mimic, emotional status of locators, punctuation marks, quotes, use of italics, capitalization in written communication, etc., the ability of lexemes or phrases to focus on both positive and negative meanings at the same time. In literature, linguistic ambivalence has conceptually equivalent enantiosemy. About enantiosemy as a discursive

phenomenon we discussed in our study (Gheltofan 2017), where we determined it to be specific to a mono-lexemic, monophrasemic or monoparemic structure in which the intersemic differentiation is of an opposing, antonymic, ambivalent nature in certain given contexts and we observe some stability of the enantiosemic meanings in the verbal act. Therefore, we just recall that there are many terms and numerous phrases with enantiosemic potential, and that enantiosemic meaning can also be achieved in a diachronic plan. For example, there are expressions in the Romanian language of the Communist era – elements of an ideological discourse, which currently suffers from a semantic polarization and which, being negatively charged, should be avoided in the current communication: *epoca măreață* [the great age], *epoca de aur* [the golden age], *pe cele mai înalte piscuri* [the highest peaks], etc.

*Epoca de aur* [the golden age] is the official name referring to the Communist period in Romania, where the leader of the country was Nicolae Ceausescu. From the desire to create the myth of the President's personality, this metaphorical formula was also chosen, which was considered to be the most appropriate to describe the benefits of Communism and the period of economic, social and technological development through which the country passed. Nowadays, this phrase can only work when referring to a certain cultural, historical period, otherwise the negative connotation acquired historically and ideologically influences its use.

Metaphorical phrases such as "pe cele mai înalte piscuri ale științei" [the highest peaks of science], "pe cele mai înalte piscuri ale cunoașterii" [on the highest peaks of knowledge] are also avoided, as they awaken the same feeling of the Romanian emitter in a long, unfriendly and ill-fated historical period. However, in the specialized language, for example, in the sphere of geography, one cannot avoid expressions like "pe cele mai înalte piscuri muntoase" [on the highest mountain peaks], "pe cele mai înalte piscuri montane" [on the highest Alpine peaks], where the denotative side of this expression is accessed. Finally, there is much dynamism and unpredictability in the discourse space, so there are various discursive forms, and the emitter is free to choose the linguistic-discursive instruments at his own liking.

Along with enantiosemy, oxymoron, antithesis, paradox, euphemism, litote, chiasm, parallelism, repetition, zeugma, irony, allusion, metaphor, etc. (see also above) can also rely on dialectic-semantic oppositions, constituting both tropes and elements of the current, everyday speech as they long exceed the boundaries of stylistics and rhetoric.

These communicative-stylistic forms are relevant in communication.

By using them, the range of discursive instruments is considerably widened and there is a great impact on the discursive level. In fact, they can be described or understood as: linguistic procedure, stylistic process, but also discursive mark, discursive operator, socio-communicative label or convention, socio-discursive instrument, etc. For example, euphemistic expressions are some of the most telling examples of the close link between a verbalized form and the extra-linguistic components, which we have mentioned above (*cf.* Gheltofan 2014). For example, a recent example that has drawn the attention of the Romanian public:

(5) "Chiparosule!" [You, cypress!]

The Minister of Finance (from Romania), Eugen Teodorovici, addressed Liberal Senator Florin Cîțu using this formula during the budget debate for the year 2019 within the budget-finance commissions of the Romanian Parliament. We recognize in this case an ironic euphemism, to which the transmitter calls for the imposition of a dispute between the two. We mention that, in Romanian slang, the word "chiparos" [cypress<sup>1</sup>] means "handsome". Perhaps this slang semantisation is related to the beauty and tenacity of this type of tree. Although this semantism is of a positive nature, the access to irony through intonation and mimic of the emitter results in the opposite effect, a negative effect. Using it as a conflicting tool in political discourse, his transmitter does not have the patience to have his message interpreted and unveils the meaning of his use, continuing with the remark: "După ce că ești urât, mai ești și prost. Ai auzit?" [It is not enough that you are ugly, you are also stupid. Did you hear me?] (<https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/politic>). Later, the emitter disengages from the contrasting semantics attributed to the word "cypress", saying that his remark was harmless: "Am spus ceva urât? Am zis frumosule, chiparosule. Vedeți ce înseamnă chiparos." [Did I say anything nasty? I said 'handsome, cypress'. Look it up.] (idem).

Such examples are numerous in the media and political discourse of recent times. Euphemism (ironic or sarcastic) is a stereotypical tool of media and political language and not only. Euphemism is, in general, part of the range of basic discursive expressions/ modalities that help create the "politically correct" discourse ("positive growth", "negative growth", "road event" for "accident", "senior" for "old person", etc.). One cannot, however, notice the contrasting but ironic note of expressions such as "positive growth", "negative growth". There is a semantic inadvertence, a semanticism of the opposite type between the meaning of the word "growth" and that of the word "negative", as well as a semi-duplication, a truism at the expression "positive growth". In fact, the main function of euphemism is to attenuate or mask reality, either because of social, economic, political or other constraints, or to be in accordance with certain requirements or norms of aesthetic-moral conduct. Euphemism appears in the form of a simple word or phrase, a verbalized form that substitutes an unpleasant, disturbing reality that is used by an emitter to evade a possible communication conflict or to avoid producing a psycho-communication discomfort to the receiver. In the previous example (5), the euphemism, but also the ironic intention, violates the essential feature of this mode of expression, which transforms this euphemism into dysphemism or pseudo-euphemism. In general, there is increasing adherence to such logical-linguistic mechanisms.

Lately, special attention has been paid to the discursive forms of irony. Irony is a linguistic, literary and discourse phenomenon that has long been studied, both in the international and in the Romanian space. As with other complex phenomena, this

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<sup>1</sup> An ornamental, resinous tree, often encountered in the Mediterranean area.

time also, the specialists are confronted with the difficulty of presenting a unanimous definition of irony. We shall not focus on these difficulties, for one can consult the specialists' studies. For what we want to show here, it is important that irony is perceived as a communication phenomenon, as a discursive act, as a verbal means. The researcher Liliana Hoinărescu (2016), studying the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romanian parliamentary speech in terms of ironic use, notes that irony is "a rhetorical, persuasive and critical instrument" with which politicians try to get various reactions of their co-participants to the parliamentary dialogue. We note that, if the percussive effect expected is obtained, in this case (6) as in the previous one (5), it also goes to the devotion of intentions and the decoding of the ironic statement by the emitter himself.

At the same time, Hoinărescu points out that the social and emotional aspect of the ironic message is important, because the ironic content can be either a policy of politeness or impoliteness. In the policy of politeness, *self-irony* also falls, while *irony-joke*, *irony-sarcasm*, *irony-bantering* fall into impoliteness policy.

We appeal to an example-fragment extracted from the study mentioned:

- (6) „T. Maiorescu: O mică observare însă, d-lor: în aceste studii clasice, dacă se vor auzi mai departe în țară, este de temut că lumea, îndrăznesc a zice toată lumea, când va vedea că numiți asini pe Ionescu, pe Kogălniceanu, pe Lahovari, are să se întrebe: cine sunt leii din compararea d-voastre? Nu cumva d-nii Lățescu, Dimancea și Epurescu? (mare ilaritate). Dar atunci mi-e teamă că toată lumea la noi în țară o să zică: mai bine asin cu Ionescu, cu Kogălniceanu, cu Lahovari, decât leu cu Lățescu, cu Dimancea și cu Epurescu (ilaritate). Și trecând la celălalt pasagiu al d-voastră, dacă pentru „chiverniseală” este lupta, dacă vreunul din noi, din opoziție, vrem să ajungem la guvern numai fiindcă vrem să ajungem la „chiverniseală”, nu cumva cei ajunși deja acolo sunt chivernisiți?...Vedeți ce însemnează, când 3 fragmente de lideri nu fac un singur lider întreg? Vedeți ce însemnează a întrebuița arme cu două tăișuri? Și e lucru curios: în asemenea arme tăișul al doilea, care se întoarce, arde mai tare decât celălalt; aspiranții la chiverniseală în opoziție presupun ajunșii la chiverniseală în majoritate!”

[T. Maiorescu: A little observation, though, gentlemen: in these classical studies, if heard in the country, it is feared that the world, I dare say everyone, when you see that you call mules Ionescu, Kogălniceanu, or Lahovari, they will ask: who are the lions of your comparison? Aren't they Mr. Lățescu, Dimancea and Epurescu? (great hilarity). But then, I'm afraid everyone in our country will say: it is better be a mule with Ionescu, Kogălniceanu and Lahovari than lions with Lățescu, Dimancea and Epurescu (hilarity).

And, going to your other passage, if there is a fight for "riches", if any of us, in the opposition, want to get to the government just because we want to get to the "riches", are not the ones already arriving there rich? ...

Do you see what it means when three pieces of leaders do not make a single leader? Do you see what it means to use two-edged weapons? And it is curious: in such weapons the second edge, which returns, burns harder than the other aspirants to riches in opposition suppose the already rich ones that are in the majority!] (*apud* Hoinărescu 2016, 138).

from which we select the following rows:

- (7) "mai bine asin cu Ionescu, cu Kogălniceanu, cu Lahovari, decât leu cu Lătescu, cu Dimancea și cu Epurescu (ilaritate)" [better be mules with Ionescu, Kogălniceanu, or Lahovari, than lions with Mr. Lătescu, Dimancea and Epurescu (hilarity).] (idem).

Example (7) is an ironic metaphor based on a paremiologic formula of the *better A than B* type (see Gheltofán 2015). This is an occasional antonymic paremy where we encounter two animal metaphors in contact: "mule" vs. "lion", which, through their figurative semantics, access contrast relations, which send to obviously contrasting associations. The contrast is accentuated by the "sensation" of "contrasting" alliteration (l vs. L) between "lion" and "Lătescu" ("Lat" [large] + suffix *-escu*) and, especially, by joining the "lion" metaphor and the animal-anthroponym "Epurescu" ("Epure" (i.e. "rabbit") + suffix *-escu*). Practically, in example (6), there are 3 levels of contrast: through the monolexic antonymic metaphor ("mule" vs. "lion"); by the alliteration with a contrasting effect (the positively connected object "lion" in contrast with the negatively connoted anthroponym "Lătescu"); through a positively conceived "lion" object in contrast to the "Epurescu" negative connotated anthroponym. Positive semes in contact with negative ones are particularly obvious. All these linguistic artefacts, to which the elite politician calls, maintain the ironic discourse, forming an ironic climate. In the end, not only persistent, ironic, but also comic content is achieved. Finally, the example (6) also demonstrates that irony as a discursive phenomenon lies at the border between linguistic expression, stylistic expression and rhetorical-communicative expression. It is a complex phenomenon.

- (8) „aspiranții la chiverniseală în opoziție presupun ajușii la chiverniseală în majoritate!” [aspirants to riches in opposition suppose the already rich ones that are in the majority] (Hoinărescu 2016, 138).

Exemplul (8) also represents an ironic statement, formulated by the transmitter example using the opposite semantism. This antonymic configuration, "A presupposes B", is one of the functional categories of discursive antonyms, which we call "coordinating antonymic context" (Gheltofán 2013, following in the footsteps of Murphy et al. 2009). And here (8), they compete with two antonymic constructions in achieving the opposite semantism: "aspirants to riches" vs. "the rich ones" (occasional antonymy) and "opposition" vs. "majority" (antonymy which we accept as canonical in political discourse). It is obvious that the irony in these examples (7), (8) is much more elaborate than the irony of the previous euphemism (5).

Irony becomes operative from complex speech forms to simple conversation between two locutors. For example, even in the face of a semantic contrast, we meet in the colloquial style ironic expressions like: "Este frumoasă ca limba rusă sau ca limba germană" [It's beautiful like Russian or German language], "Ei, bravos!" [Well, bravos!], "Minunat!" [Wonderful!], "Bună treabă!" [Good work!], etc.

Chiasm is a syntactic figure, a form of repetition, metaphorically called "syntactic mirror", because it is constituted by the "cross-repetition" of two grammatical functions, of the AB-BA (*cf.* DSL: 104). As a syntactic structure based on repetition, chiasm is the actual support of proverbs and sayings, aphorisms, word games, callipers, etc. Chiasm can also be built using the antonymic structure. For example, underlining the "monotony effect" that occurs through excessive use of chiasm in the journalistic field, researcher Rodica Zafiu (2001: 24) notices an electrifying force of the play "Opposition Power and Power Opposition".

Zeugma also is an expression that puts "on the same syntactic level the semantic contrasting elements", associating the concrete with the abstract, so the effect is parodic: "și-a pierdut optimismul și un portofel de piele" [he lost his optimism and a leather wallet], "și-a luat rămas bun și pălăria" [he bid adieu and the hat] (*idem*) or in phraseology we find the ironic, laughable pragmatemes: "adio și un praz verde" [goodbye and a green leek], "adio și n-am cuvinte" [goodbye and I have no words].

Structurally antagonistic, paradox also is created by the overlapping of opposing universes, through wilful mixing of meanings, by dramatic opposition. Fl. Smarandache, a mathematician, is a Romanian-American scholar with special achievements in spatial, physical geometry, and so on. He is considered to be the creator of the literary trend called *paradoxism*, which is obviously based on the stylistically-discursive formula of the paradox, to which are added antithetic and oxymoronic expressions, the opposite metaphors, but also parody, ambiguity, etc. Smarandache (1998) usually paradoxical rhymes based on: *paraphrasing of the clichés* (here we meet the pun based on the antonymic substitution in known pronouncements, sayings, proverbs): "Omul potrivit/ La locul nepotrivit" [The right man/In the wrong place] = Infractor [The offender]; *double negation*, which means affirmation: "Război/ Împotriva războiului" [War/ Against War] = Pace [Peace]; *denial of clichés* (which produces antitheses): "Primește/ ce ți se dă" [Receive/ what is given to you], becomes: "Primește/ Ce nu ți se dă" [Receive/ What is not given to you] = Neconformist [The nonconformist]; "Lasă-mă să te las" [Let me leave you], becomes "Lasă-mă să nu te las" [Let me not leave you] = Răzbunător [The avenger]; *antonymisation* (noun, adjective, etc.): "Dulce ca/ mierea" [Sweet as/ honey], becomes "Dulce ca/ Fierea" [Sweet as/ Bile] = Bitter; double paradox: "Melodie anarhică/ Sau anarhie melodică" [Anarchic Melody/ Or Melody Anarchy] = Jazz.

#### 4. Conclusion

The multifaceted profile of discursive antonyms requires detailed analysis. We recognize one of the main roles of contrast (opposition) or antonymy, namely to concentrate suggestively on a message, to compress a reality, often suggesting especially in the current language, to shock the reader.

There is a visible semantic potential of words and phrases to engage in semantic contrast and semantic contradictions, or to be ambivalent.

The few stylistic-communicational tools briefly presented may be benchmarks for measuring vivacity and dynamics of the lexicon, the current dynamics of language, and even the dynamics of interpersonal communication. They become, in the end, stereotypical discursive mechanics, demonstrating once again that the antonymic paradigm (canonical and non-canonical) can be the foundation of discourse, statement, expressive verbal means.

We are talking about euphemistic, enantiosemic, paradoxical, oxymoronic contextualization, etc. – an important feature of the current language. And they form the actual discursive props. Sometimes, these contextualisations are hardly noticeable due to their circumscription in the communication of any kind. A wider, experiential and linguistic context is needed. At the same time, speakers of a language very well understand how to use all the attributes of ambivalent, euphemistic, enantiosemic, ironic, sarcastic use, etc.

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