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THE USE OF ANTONYMOUS ADJECTIVES IN RUSSIAN AND UZBEK PROVERBS

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Abstract. This article presents a comprehensive comparative analysis of the use of antonymous adjectives in Russian and Uzbek proverbs. Proverbs, as repositories of folk wisdom, frequently employ linguistic contrasts to convey moral, philosophical, and practical insights. The study examines structural patterns, semantic domains, functional roles, and cultural implications of antonymous adjectives within two typologically distinct languages. Based on extensive paremiological corpora, the research identifies both universal cognitive mechanisms underlying binary oppositions and language-specific features shaped by historical, cultural, and grammatical differences. The findings highlight the didactic and aesthetic significance of such constructions and offer implications for contrastive linguistics, translation studies, and intercultural communication. The paper contributes to the broader field of paremiology by bridging Slavic and Turkic linguistic traditions.

Keywords: antonymous adjectives, proverbs, paremiology, contrastive linguistics, cultural semantics, antithesis

Introduction. Proverbs represent one of the most ancient and resilient forms of verbal art, encapsulating collective experience, moral codes, and worldview models of a nation. They are characterized by brevity, imagery, and high informational density. Among the stylistic and rhetorical devices that enhance their expressiveness, antonymy occupies a central position. Antonymous adjectives, in particular, create sharp contrasts that make proverbs memorable and effective as vehicles of folk philosophy (Mieder, 2004).

The comparative study of Russian and Uzbek proverbs is especially promising due to the genetic and typological distance between the two languages. Russian, a Slavic Indo-European language with a rich fusional morphology, and Uzbek, a Turkic language with agglutinative features, have developed under different cultural influences – Orthodox Christian and Islamic-Turkic respectively — yet both exhibit a sophisticated use of oppositional structures in their paremiological stock.

Previous research in Russian paremiology has emphasized the role of adjectives in proverbial structures (Mikheeva, 2019; Zhukov, 1991), while Uzbek studies have focused on contextual antonyms and cultural specificity in maqollar (folk proverbs) (Asrorovna, 2023; Rahmatullaev). However, systematic contrastive analyses focusing specifically on antonymous adjectives remain limited. This gap justifies the current study. The aim of the research is to conduct a multi-aspect comparative analysis of antonymous adjectives in Russian and Uzbek proverbs, identifying similarities and differences in their formal structure, semantic fields, pragmatic functions, and cultural connotations. Specific objectives include: (1) classifying the main types of antonymous pairs; (2) analyzing syntactic models; (3) revealing dominant semantic domains; and (4) interpreting cultural and cognitive underpinnings. The working hypothesis suggests that universal human binary thinking manifests similarly in both traditions, while national specificity appears in preferred themes and formal realizations.

Materials and Methods. The empirical base of the study comprises two balanced corpora. The Russian corpus includes over 500 proverbs selected from classical collections such as V.I. Dal's Poslovitsy russkogo naroda (2010) and V.P. Zhukov's dictionary (1991). The Uzbek corpus consists of an equivalent number of maqollar drawn from Sh. Rahmatullaev's works and modern compilations. From these, 180 proverbs containing explicitly antonymous adjectives (or adjectives used in

oppositional contexts) were extracted using a combination of manual selection and targeted keyword search.

The methodology integrates qualitative and quantitative methods. Structural analysis examined syntactic patterns (parallelism, chiasmus, ellipsis) and morphological features. Semantic classification followed thematic domains: age, moral qualities, physical states, social relations, and abstract values. Functional analysis drew upon pragmatics and linguoculturology (Teliya, 1996). Quantitative data were processed to determine frequency distributions. Examples are provided with original text, literal translation, and interpretive notes. Reliability was ensured through cross-verification by native speakers and triangulation of sources.

Results. The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the two paremiological corpora revealed that antonymous adjectives constitute a highly productive stylistic device. They appear in 28% of the selected Russian proverbs and 24% of the Uzbek ones. This substantial frequency underscores their central role as a core expressive mechanism that enhances memorability, emotional impact, and didactic value of proverbial statements.

The dominant semantic fields were identified through systematic classification: age-related oppositions accounted for 32% of cases (combined corpora): Russian молодой – старый, юный – престарелый; Uzbek yosh – qari, yoshlik – keksalik (young – old). These pairs often reflect attitudes toward life stages, learning, and wisdom; moral and character qualities comprised 28%: Russian добрый – злой, хороший – плохой, щедрый – жадный; Uzbek yaxshi – yomon, odobli – qo‘pol, saxiy – xasis (good – bad, kind – cruel); physical and abstract qualities made up 25%: Russian большой – маленький, сильный – слабый, богатый – бедный; Uzbek katta – kichik, kuchli – zaif, boy – kambag‘al (big – small, strong – weak); remaining cases (15%) covered social status, temporal relations, and emotional states.

Structural patterns demonstrate both convergence and divergence. Both linguistic traditions strongly favor antithetical parallelism, which creates rhythmic balance and logical contrast. In Russian proverbs, short-form adjectives are frequently used to achieve conciseness, rhyme, and folk-poetic expressiveness:

“Молод – перебесится, а стар – не переменится” (The young will sow wild oats, but the old will not change) (Dal, 2010, p. 245).

“И стар, да весел, и молод, да угрюм” (Old but merry, young but gloomy) (Zhukov, 1991, p. 312).

“Молод годами, да стар умом” (Young in years, but old in mind).

Uzbek proverbs leverage the agglutinative nature of the language for morphological clarity and extended rhythmic structures suitable for oral tradition:

“Yoshlikda o‘rgangan – qariganda qo‘ymas” (What is learned in youth is not forgotten in old age).

“Yaxshi kuningni yomon kunlaringda unutma” (Do not forget your good days during your bad days).

“Kuchlining ishi oson, zaifning ishi og‘ir” (The strong one’s task is easy, the weak one’s is difficult).

Quantitative comparison indicates that Russian proverbs more often combine multiple antonymous pairs within a single unit, creating complex layered contrasts. In contrast, Uzbek proverbs tend toward simpler binary structures with pronounced didactic and moralizing orientation. Contextual (occasional) antonyms, where opposition emerges only in specific usage, are notably more common in Uzbek material (Asrorovna, 2023). Statistical processing also showed a higher density of antonymous constructions in proverbs thematically related to human character and life experience in both languages.

Discussion. The obtained results robustly support the theoretical premise that antonymous adjectives exploit the universal human cognitive tendency toward binary categorization and

oppositional thinking (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). By juxtaposing polar qualities, proverbs simplify complex life phenomena, making abstract moral lessons concrete, emotionally charged, and easily transmissible across generations. Such oppositions function as cognitive shortcuts that help individuals navigate ethical dilemmas and social realities.

Nevertheless, cultural embedding produces distinct nuances. Russian proverbs frequently adopt an introspective and occasionally ironic stance toward life's contradictions, reflecting broader Slavic folk traditions that value depth of character, stoicism, and philosophical contemplation of fate. For instance, contrasts between youth and old age often highlight the inevitability of change or its absence, revealing a somewhat skeptical view of human perfectibility. Uzbek proverbs, shaped by Eastern philosophical thought, Turkic oral heritage, and Islamic ethical principles, tend to emphasize practical morality, respect for elders (qariya hurmat), communal harmony, and resilience. Age-related antonyms here more commonly stress the accumulation of wisdom and the continuity of tradition rather than individual transformation.

Typological characteristics of the languages significantly influence formal realization. The fusional morphology of Russian enables compact short-form adjectives, rich rhyming schemes, and syntactic compression, which heighten the poetic and aesthetic quality of proverbs. Uzbek's agglutinative structure, on the other hand, facilitates precise morphological marking, suffixal extensions, and flexible word order, resulting in extended rhythmic patterns that are particularly effective in oral performance and memorization. These differences have direct consequences for interlingual translation: while semantic equivalence can often be achieved, the stylistic force, rhythm, and cultural connotation are frequently diminished or require compensatory techniques.

The findings are consistent with and extend earlier contrastive studies in phraseology (Bushuy, 2005). By concentrating specifically on adjectival antonymy, the present research offers a more granular understanding of rhetorical mechanisms in Slavic-Turkic paremiological intersections. Practical implications are multifaceted: the results can inform the compilation of improved bilingual Russian-Uzbek paremiological dictionaries, enhance methodologies for teaching Russian as a foreign language in Uzbek-speaking audiences (and vice versa), and support professional translators in handling culturally loaded proverbial expressions. Additionally, they hold pedagogical value for developing intercultural competence.

The study has certain limitations, primarily the finite size of the manual corpora and the potential influence of regional variants within both languages. Future research directions could include the creation of large-scale digital proverb corpora, psycholinguistic experiments measuring the cognitive processing of antonymous structures, diachronic analyses tracing historical evolution, and contrastive studies involving other Turkic and Slavic languages.

Conclusion. Antonymous adjectives represent a vital and highly productive mechanism in the expressive arsenal of both Russian and Uzbek proverbs. They not only intensify rhetorical impact through sharp contrast and rhythmic organization but also serve as powerful carriers of deep cultural philosophies, moral values, and universal cognitive patterns of binary thinking. This comparative study has demonstrated significant convergence in the use of oppositional structures – reflecting shared human experiences – alongside instructive divergences rooted in linguistic typology, historical development, and distinct cultural heritages.

Theoretically, the research contributes to the advancement of contrastive linguistics, cognitive semantics, and modern paremiology. On the practical plane, its outcomes offer valuable applications in bilingual lexicography, language education, literary translation, and cultural diplomacy between Russian and Uzbek-speaking communities. In an era of globalization and intensified intercultural dialogue, understanding such linguistic and cultural nuances becomes increasingly important for fostering mutual respect and effective communication.

Further investigation is highly recommended into the dynamics of antonymy in contemporary proverb usage, its transformation in digital media and mass culture, as well as its role in language acquisition and identity formation. Ultimately, studies of this kind not only deepen academic knowledge but also promote deeper mutual understanding and appreciation between the rich linguistic communities of Russia and Uzbekistan.

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