



The Phonology Of Antonyms In English: A Syllable Structure Analysis

Majda Sabri Faris

PhD. students at Gujarat University

and

Prof. Dr. Nilotpala Gandhi

Gujarat University

Abstract

An important linguistic conception called antonymy is employed to convey specific lexical-semantic relationships between words. These words exhibit semantic, lexical, morphological, and pragmatic characteristics. Additionally, numerous studies conducted on the level of various nations have emphasized all of these levels concerning antonyms. However, there is one level of analysis that has been completely ignored by researchers and academics, namely the phonological one. Therefore, this study's significance stems from uncovering this factor of analysis and investigating the phonological characteristics of antonyms. The researcher attempts to delve in the phonological features in general and in syllable structures of antonyms in particular to investigate, examine and arrived at a generalization of their occurrences. A case which may be useful to language practitioners, teachers and students. As a result, the current study's goals include identifying antonyms and other related subjects, determining antonyms, as well as investigating the phonological segmental properties of antonyms (more precisely, performing a syllable analysis). It is postulated that antonyms have specific phonological characteristics, besides their specific structure of syllables. Undoubtedly, this initiative will close a gap in the body of literature on the current topic. However, the data that are chosen from websites relevant to this issue are analyzed by using a descriptive analytical technique. Consequently, this study concludes that no specific syllable structure pattern to generalize upon it is found, though there are aspects of similarities among the analyzed data in general. The study will help the students to develop their competence to meet their present and future needs and to make them absorb the significance of antonymy by focusing on this phenomenon from all its aspects.

Keywords: antonymy, antonyms, syllables, syllables structure

Introduction

Simply put, antonyms relate to the opposition and contradiction that permeate every aspect of our life. Nothing can be said to be without conflict. An idea of antonyms gives a language a beautiful aesthetic and stylistic and phonological tone. It makes human languages richer and deeper. As a result, it merits investigation from all angles. Since phonology is a neglected aspect of this topic, it is crucial that the present study address antonyms from this perspective.

The following queries can be used to summarize the study's problem:

1. What are antonyms?
2. If antonyms have any distinctive phonological traits, what are they? Are there any recurring pattern in the antonymous pair's similarities or differences?
3. What advantages do these traits provide for language users in general and students in particular?

The current study hypothesizes that English antonyms have specific phonological characteristics that could be of benefits for language learners. However, the primary objectives are as follows:

1. Shedding light on the phenomenon of antonyms in English.
2. Providing a theoretical background of antonyms.
3. Exploring the phonological characteristics of antonyms to know their syllables structure patterns.

The focus of the current study is only on syllable structure analysis which it comes within studying the phonological segmental structure of antonyms. The scope of this study does not include any additional segmental or suprasegmental features. In order to study syllable structure patterns and determine whether there are any distinctive patterns that characterize antonyms, the researcher divides the words into syllables and then analyzes them into their structures.

Theoretical Foundation

An antonym is a term that, linguistically speaking, has the meaning of opposition to or that something does not coincide with that of another word. For instance, the opposite or antonym of sad is cheerful. Antonymy is used to denote the "pair-wise" relationship between lexical terms that share the characteristics of oppositeness, according to Jones, Murphy, Paradis, and Willners (2000). Additionally, they define antonyms in terms of "maximal similarity and minimal differences," which means that different antonyms may apply to different objects depending on the word features that are most closely associated with contrast in a given environment (ibid.).

It is stated that using antonyms in writing strengthens any creative work and lends it a sense of cohesiveness in addition to providing it an aesthetic appeal. Accordingly, antonymy can be applied in poetry, plays, novels, speeches and peverbs (Gao and Zheng, 2014).

Types of Antonymy

From a semantic perspective antonymy is classified in term of three properties, i.e, "sameness relation, oppositeness relation and inclusiveness". Antonymy is particularly related to oppositeness. Consequently, antonymy, falls into three kinds (Hu, 2001, p.164-168).

Gradable Antonymy, it is the familiar type, where the antonym pairs like (strong×weak) and (long×short) are all examples of this category. However, this form of antonym is primarily adjectives.

Complementary Antonymy like awake×asleep, married×single, pass×fail, and alive×dead are of this type, they are in a complementary distribution in their semantic fields (ibid, 2001).

Converse Antonymy, examples of this type are boy×girl teacher×student, com×go, up×down and north×south. All of these instances have inverse relations. Egan (1968) asserts that "one of them cannot be used without suggesting the other". The pairs of this kind of antonyms are characterized by a big discrepancy between them.

Previous Studies

1. Antonymy and Antonyms: Constructions, Canonicity, and Construals (2000). This book, written by Steven Jones, M. Lynne Murphy, Carita Paradis, and Caroline Willners, examines this occurrence. They concentrate on separating the two approaches to dealing with antonyms. They contend that antonyms may be handled from either a binary or a multi-point of view, with male generally serving as the antonym for female. Big, massive, or vast are some examples of the opposites of little. By providing more justification and examples, they expand upon and enhance their views.

2. An analysis of Antonymy's linguistic use in English texts (2014). Analyzing antonyms in English texts is agreed upon by Chunming Gao and Qianzhen Zheng. The employment of antonymy in various English writings is the main topic of this study. To aid in comprehending antonyms in diverse settings, it approaches antonym from a linguistic perspective. In their conclusion, they emphasize the importance of antonyms in specific English literature. They give several examples of antonyms and claim that there are three different sorts of antonyms: gradable, complementary, and converse.

3. A cross-linguistic analysis of Swedish and English's discourse functions of antonymy (2009). In a study that emphasizes the Swedish speaking contexts to explore the pattern of antonyms and describe their functions and forms in order to know the similarities and discrepancies in them, M. Lynne Murphy, Carita Paradis, Caroline Willners, and Steven Jones (2009) write a research that is pragmatically oriented. They come to the

conclusion that Swedish has all types of antonyms, whether they are coordinated or ancillary (used to convey a field of values inside a component or to provide minor contrast).

As it is evident from the above previous studies, no study focus on studying the phonological characteristics of antonyms.

Data Analysis

The researcher intends to make a phonological analysis, namely syllable structure analysis in addition to syllabic division of the syllables in each selected word with its antonym in order to make a comparison between the selected words and their antonyms to find out the most prominent patterns of syllable structure and whether there are any similarities or differences between each pair of antonyms.

Division of Syllables (Syllabification)

'Syllable division' and 'syllabification' are two words that refer to the same idea and are interchangeable. Syllabification, according to Crystal (2003:447), is "the division of a word into syllables." In this regard, Bulgram (1970:75) makes the assumption that the syllable is a linguistic unit or segment of the section made up of a single vowel nucleus, the boundaries of which are established in accordance with specific phonological rules of syllabification that adhere to the particular phonotactics of a given language. Several academics, including (Bulgram, 1970: 75 and Carr, 1993:198-202), suggest the following syllabification principles:

- 1- A principle of maximal open syllabicity;
- 2- a principle of minimal coda and maximal onset and
- 3- a principle of irregular coda.

The afore-mentioned principles are further expanded by Fallow (1980: 78) who suggests two other principles of syllabification, namely stress and ambisyllabicity. The former principle means that a stressed syllable will attract the maximum number of consonants in both initial and final positions; while the latter principle shows the sharing of an intervocalic consonant by neighbouring syllables, thus a word such as begin is syllabified as (be.gin) or (beg.in) (ibid).

Syllable Structure

A syllable is a basic unit of speech, it is a group of one or more sounds. The central part of a syllable is a vowel sound (V) which may be preceded and/or followed by a consonant (C) or a cluster of consonants (CC or CCC). Phonological theories of syllable are mostly concerned with internal structure of syllables, in this respect, phonologists have adduced every possible configuration for the internal structure of syllables. For instance, the main concern of C VC syllables, is whether the vowel is grouped with the prior consonant (called the onset), with the posterior consonant (called the coda), or with neither (Faris, 2006: 25).

More recently, some phonologists have claimed that the components of the syllable are units of weight called 'moras' (Hyman, 1985 and Hayes, (1989).

Syllables in the English language have internal structure that can be divided into parts. These parts are onset and rhyme; with the rhyme, nucleus and coda are found. It is important to point out that not all syllables have all these parts; the smallest possible syllable contains a nucleus only. Simply, onset means the beginning sound(s) of the syllable which precede the nucleus and coda means the sound(s) at the end of the syllable which follow the nucleus. These are always consonants in English (Roca and Johnson, 2000: 239).

Accordingly, there are four patterns of syllables, they are: (ovo), (cvo), (ovc) and (cvc). In this case, the syllable may be a vowel only, viz. the pattern (ovo), as in (or) this kind of syllable is known as a 'minimum syllable'. The syllable which is not closed by a consonant, viz. the pattern (cvo) as in fee /fi:/ is called an 'open' syllable. Most consonants in English may occur initially in a word or in a syllable except /ŋ/ and /ʒ/. At the other hand, the pattern (ovc) is known as a 'closed' syllable since the syllable is closed by a consonant as in (or) /o:r/. However, in English every vowel can begin a syllable or a word. In English, there are a lot of examples having the pattern (cvc) such as (mat) /mæt/. In general, English is a language having a syllabic structure of the type (c)v(c). This generalization captures the reality that in English both onsets and codas are optional elements unlike the nucleus which is an obligatory item in the syllable (Stageberg, 1981:71; Gimson, 1989:343 and Crystal, 2004:246).

From a phonological viewpoint, consonants always occupy the margins of the syllable structure, but it happens that a consonant occupies the nucleus of the syllable (no vowel is found) as when time devoted for pronouncing the vowel is transferred to the following consonant; and hence producing what it is phonetically called 'syllabic consonant' which is marked with a vertical dash (,) underneath this consonant, as in the case of syllabic consonants such as, /m/, /n/, /l/, [l/ and /r/ in words like, garden /ga:dn/, thicken /thikn/, cattle /kætl/ and history /histri/ (syllabic r is less common in RP), respectively (O'Connor, 1973: 66-73; Knowels, 1987: 102 ; Gimson, 1989: 54; Roach, 2000:78-82).

List of Antonyms (Data)

The data are selected from electronic sites that are interested in the most common antonyms in English: (Learn various antonyms for the most commonly used words of English), as shown in the following table..

Slected Antonyms from the Net.

s	word	syllable division and structure	number of syllables	antonym	syllable division and structure	number of syllables
1	absence	vc.cvcc	2 syllables	present	ccvccc	1 syllables
2	accept	vc.cvcc	2 syllables	refuse	cv.cvc	2 syllables
3	alive	v.cvc	2 syllables	dead	cvc	1 syllables
4	ancient	vc.cvcc	2 syllables	modern	cvccc	1 syllables
5	answer	vc.cvc	2 syllables	question	cvc.cvc	2 syllables
6	admit	vc.cvc	2 syllables	deny	cv.cv	2 syllables
7	attack	v.cvc	2 syllables	defence	cv.cvcc	2 syllables
8	asleep	v.cvc	2 syllables	awake	v.cvc	2 syllables
9	blame	ccvc	1 syllables	praise	ccvc	1 syllables
10	bitter	cvc.v	2 syllables	sweet	ccvc	1 syllables
11	borrow	cv.cv	2 syllables	lend	cvcc	1 syllables
12	broad	ccvc	1 syllables	narrow	cv.cv	2 syllables
13	clever	ccv.cv	2 syllables	stupid	ccv.cvc	2 syllables
14	cruel	ccvc	1 syllables	kind	cvcc	1 syllables
15	dark	cvcc	1 syllables	light	cvc	1 syllables
16	deep	cvc	1 syllables	shallow	cv.cv	2 syllables
17	decrease	cvc.cvc	2 syllables	increase	vc.cvc	2 syllables
18	despair	cv.cvc	2 syllables	hope	cvc	1 syllables
19	dismal	cvc.cvc	2 syllables	cheerful	cvc.cvc	2 syllables
20	expand	vc.cvc	2 syllables	contract	vc.cvc	2 syllables
21	foolish	cv.cvc	2 syllables	wise	cvc	1 syllables
22	first	cvccc	1 syllables	last	cvcc	1 syllables
23	friend	ccvc	1 syllables	enemy	vc.v.v	2 syllables

24	gentle	cvccc	1 syllables	rough	cvc	1 syllables
25	happy	cv.cv	2 syllables	sad	cvc	1 syllables
26	hate	cvc	1 syllables	love	cvc	1 syllables
27	hunger	cvc.cv	2 syllables	thirst	cvccc	1 syllables
28	inferior	vc.cvc.v	3 syllables	superior	cv.cvc.v	3 syllables
29	interior	vc.cvc.v	3 syllables	exterior	cv.cvc.v	3 syllables
30	little	cvcc	1 syllables	large	cvc	1 syllables
31	rapid	cv.cvc	2 syllables	slow	ccv	1 syllables
32	sorrow	cv.cv	2 syllables	joy	cvc	1 syllables
33	strong	cccvc	1 syllables	weak	cvc	1 syllables
34	bad	cvc	1 syllables	good	cvc	1 syllables
35	big	cvc	1 syllables	small	ccvc	1 syllables
36	black	ccvc	1 syllables	white	cvc	1 syllables
37	male	cvc	1 syllables	female	cv.cvc	2 syllables
38	bottom	cv.cvc	2 syllables	top	cvc	1 syllables
39	cold	cvcc	1 syllables	hot	cvc	1 syllables
40	long	cvc	1 syllables	short	cvcc	1 syllables

Results

Quantitatively speaking and as it is obvious from the above table, 42 words of them have one syllable, 34 of them have two syllables and 4 of them have three syllables. The dominant structure of one syllable antonyms is (cvc), with a cluster of consonants at the beginning or at the end after the nucleus vowel, i.e., ccvc as in black and cvcc as in cold.

1	absence	vc.cvcc	2 syllables	present	ccvccc	1 syllables
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If a comparison is made, this pair of antonyms has different syllable number, in addition to that, their structures are different: vc, cvcc, ccvcc. Thus, there is no aspects of similarity between the member of this pair.

2	accept	vc.cvcc	2 syllables	refuse	cv.cvc	2 syllables
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This pair of antonyms has the same syllable number. But, their structures are different: vc, cvcc, cv, ccvc. Accordingly, there is only one aspect of similarity between the member of this pair, although their structures are different.

3	alive	v.cvc	2 syllables	dead	cvc	1 syllables
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This pair of antonyms has different syllable number, however, besides, their structures are different: vc, cvcc, ccvcc. Thus, there is no aspects of similarity between the member of this pair at all.

Conclusions

From the above analyzed data that are taken in details, the researcher is not able to elicit a specific syllable structure pattern between the member of each pair to make generalization upon it. Nor she can elicit a general syllable structure pattern that is predominantly found in the whole data. Although the one syllable structure with (an onset consonant at the beginning, a vowel in the centre, and a coda consonant at the end) is prevailing, the cvc pattern is not prevailing in all one syllable words. For example, there are other patterns: ccvc, as in broad and cruel; cvcc is also present in short and slow; cccvc is found in strong; cvcc as in friend and the longer ccvcc one syllable pattern is found in the word present.

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