



A STUDY ON ANTONYMY IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE

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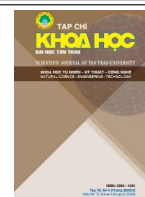
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Abstract

This research presents a comprehensive comparative analysis of antonymy in English and Vietnamese, examining the linguistic and cultural dimensions that shape opposite relationships in both languages. The study employs a systematic approach to investigate how antonyms function within these distinct linguistic systems, focusing on their semantic properties, structural patterns, and contextual applications. Through extensive analysis of data collected from authoritative dictionaries, literary works, and contemporary texts, this research explores various categories of antonyms and their distribution across different semantic fields. The findings reveal both universal patterns and language-specific characteristics in antonymic relationships. While both languages demonstrate conventional binary oppositions, Vietnamese exhibits unique patterns influenced by cultural conceptualization and social contexts, particularly in areas related to social relationships and abstract concepts. The research highlights how cultural perspectives significantly influence the formation and interpretation of antonymic pairs in Vietnamese, creating subtle variations that differ from English counterparts. These distinctions reflect deeper cultural-linguistic relationships that impact communication and translation practices. The study contributes to theoretical understanding of cross-linguistic antonymy and offers practical insights for language teaching, translation studies, and intercultural communication. Furthermore, the findings enhance our comprehension of how cultural frameworks shape linguistic structures, particularly in the expression of opposing concepts across different language systems.



NGHIÊN CỨU VỀ TỪ TRÁI NGHĨA TRONG TIẾNG ANH VÀ TIẾNG VIỆT

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Từ khóa

Từ trái nghĩa, Từ trái nghĩa tiếng Anh, Phân tích ngôn ngữ, Từ trái nghĩa tiếng Việt

Tóm tắt

Nghiên cứu này trình bày một phân tích so sánh toàn diện về từ trái nghĩa trong tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt, xem xét các chiều hướng ngôn ngữ và văn hóa hình thành nên các mối quan hệ đối lập trong cả hai ngôn ngữ. Nghiên cứu sử dụng một phương pháp tiếp cận có hệ thống để điều tra cách thức các từ trái nghĩa hoạt động trong các hệ thống ngôn ngữ riêng biệt này, tập trung vào các đặc tính ngữ nghĩa, mô hình cấu trúc và ứng dụng theo ngữ cảnh của chúng. Thông qua phân tích sâu rộng dữ liệu thu thập được từ các từ điển có thẩm quyền, tác phẩm văn học và văn bản đương đại, nghiên cứu này khám phá nhiều loại từ trái nghĩa và sự phân bố của chúng trên các lĩnh vực ngữ nghĩa khác nhau. Những phát hiện cho thấy cả các mô hình phổ quát và các đặc điểm riêng của ngôn ngữ trong các mối quan hệ trái nghĩa. Trong khi cả hai ngôn ngữ đều thể hiện sự đối lập nhị phân thông thường, tiếng Việt thể hiện các mô hình độc đáo chịu ảnh hưởng của khái niệm hóa văn hóa và bối cảnh xã hội, đặc biệt là trong các lĩnh vực liên quan đến mối quan hệ xã hội và khái niệm trừu tượng. Nghiên cứu nhấn mạnh cách các quan điểm văn hóa ảnh hưởng đáng kể đến sự hình thành và diễn giải các cặp từ trái nghĩa trong tiếng Việt, tạo ra những biến thể tinh tế khác với các cặp từ tương đương trong tiếng Anh. Những sự khác biệt này phản ánh các mối quan hệ ngôn ngữ-văn hóa sâu sắc hơn tác động đến các hoạt động giao tiếp và biên dịch. Nghiên cứu này góp phần vào sự hiểu biết lý thuyết về từ trái nghĩa liên ngôn ngữ và cung cấp những hiểu biết thực tế cho việc giảng dạy ngôn ngữ, nghiên cứu biên dịch và giao tiếp liên văn hóa. Hơn nữa, những phát hiện này giúp chúng ta hiểu rõ hơn về cách các khuôn khổ văn hóa định hình nên cấu trúc ngôn ngữ, đặc biệt là trong việc diễn đạt các khái niệm đối lập giữa các hệ thống ngôn ngữ khác nhau.

1. Introduction

Antonymy, or the study of opposites in language, is a key area of linguistic research that helps us understand how languages convey contrast and meaning. It plays an important role in areas like semantics, pragmatics, and cognitive linguistics, contributing to how we categorize and relate ideas. While antonymy has been widely explored in languages like English, there has been less research comparing it across different languages, particularly in the case of English and Vietnamese, two languages with distinct grammatical structures and cultural influences.

This study aims to fill that gap by comparing antonymy in both English and Vietnamese. It will provide an overview of how antonyms function in each language, analyzing their types, formation, and usage, and then explore how these antonyms differ and align across the two languages. The main research questions guiding this study are as follows:

- 1) What types of antonyms are found in English and Vietnamese?
- 2) What are the main differences in how antonyms are used in English and Vietnamese?

The structure of this article is organized into five sections. Following the introduction, the literature review provides an overview of existing research on antonymy in both English and Vietnamese. The methodology section outlines the approach used for data collection and analysis. Results highlight key findings, and the conclusion and discussion summarize the main points and implications for further research.

2. Literature Review

Research on antonymy has progressed significantly over the years, providing valuable insights into its role in language. Internationally, Lyons (1977) stated, “Antonyms are fundamental to understanding the contrastive nature of language,” emphasizing their structural

importance in linguistics. Cruse (1986) expanded on this, noting, “Antonymy is not a uniform relationship but comprises different types that serve various semantic functions,” which helped lay the groundwork for further classification of antonyms. Murphy (2003) added a cognitive perspective by claiming, “Antonymy is more than a linguistic phenomenon; it reflects mental processes that aid in structuring human thought and communication.” This notion indicated that antonyms are deeply embedded in how people perceive and express contrasting ideas. Paradis et al. (2015) reinforced this with textual analysis, stating, “The context in which antonyms occur shapes their meaning and usage, contributing to their role in meaning-making across discourse.” In the field of computational linguistics, Mohammad et al. (2013) highlighted, “Antonyms play a critical role in natural language processing, helping systems discern oppositional relationships and interpret meanings accurately.”

Vietnamese researchers have also contributed significantly to this field. Hoang Tat Truong (2005), in *Basic English Lexicology*, remarked, “While English and Vietnamese share foundational aspects of antonymy, the Vietnamese language presents unique variations influenced by culture and context.” This insight shows the additional layer of complexity in studying antonyms across different languages. Nguyen Van Hiep (2010) observed, “In Vietnamese, antonyms not only fulfill semantic functions but also adapt to the syntactic structures unique to the language,” indicating a deeper merging of linguistic levels. Nguyen Thi Lan (2015) emphasized educational perspectives, stating, “Teaching antonyms effectively requires integrating cultural context, which can bridge comprehension gaps for students learning English as a second language.” Pham Xuan Thao (2012) highlighted translation challenges, saying, “Antonyms are particularly difficult to translate because they require consideration of

subtle cultural nuances that may not have direct equivalents.”

Despite these valuable contributions, there is still a gap in comprehensive comparative studies between English and Vietnamese antonymy. Current research often focuses on single-language analyses without extensive cross-linguistic comparison. As noted by Murphy (2003), “Cross-linguistic analyses offer a richer understanding of semantic relationships.” This lack of comprehensive studies comparing how antonymy functions across English and Vietnamese presents a significant opportunity for further investigation on how different languages construct oppositional meanings, highlighting both unique and shared linguistic features. Deeper analysis would enhance our theoretical understanding of antonymy and provide practical benefits for translation, language teaching, and effective cross-cultural communication. Moreover, studying antonyms in both English and Vietnamese can provide valuable insights into how language and culture influence the way we think and communicate. By examining the differences and similarities in how antonyms are used in these two languages, we can better understand how culture shapes the way opposites are perceived and expressed. This research can also help us identify cultural biases in language, as well as improve communication between speakers of different languages by fostering a deeper understanding of linguistic and cultural differences.

3. Methods

This study adopts a comparative linguistic approach to investigate antonymy in English and Vietnamese. The research combines theoretical analysis with practical data to explore how antonyms function in both languages, offering a comprehensive perspective on the topic.

In the theoretical part, the study reviews existing research on antonyms, focusing on

important works by linguists like Lyons (1977), Cruse (1986), and Nguyen Van Hiep (2010) to clarify how antonyms are understood in general, especially when comparing English and Vietnamese antonyms.

For the practical part, this study uses a textual analysis approach, which involves analyzing real language data. Texts will be gathered from various sources, such as books, news articles, and academic papers in both English and Vietnamese. These texts will be analyzed to identify antonym pairs, which will then be categorized by their meaning, derivation, and cultural context, etc. The data will be analyzed qualitatively. This approach allows for a detailed look at how antonyms are used in everyday language.

4. Results

4.1. *Types of antonyms in English and Vietnamese*

In English, antonyms are commonly categorized based on their meaning, derivation, or part of speech. This classification system has been widely discussed by various linguists, such as Cruse (2000), who distinguishes between gradable antonyms, complementary antonyms, converse antonyms, and directional antonyms.

4.1.1. *Based on meaning*

a. Gradable antonyms

Gradable antonymy is a relation in which two members of a pair of antonyms are gradable; can be used in a comparative or superlative sense; can be used in questions with how to ask about degrees.

For example: hot-cold

These antonyms can be modified by terms like warm, cool, or chilly to indicate intermediate stages. For instance, you could say, “It’s warm today” or “It’s cool in the morning,” showing that temperature is not always an absolute concept but varies on a scale.

tall-short

Here, you can also use terms like medium-height or average-size to show gradation. In the sentence, “He is a tall man compared to the short man in the room,” these terms indicate differing degrees of height, with room for in-between possibilities.

b. Complementary antonyms

Complementary antonymy is a relation in which two members of a pair are mutually exclusive; cannot be used in a comparative or superlative sense; cannot be used in questions with how to ask about degrees.

For example: alive-dead

If something is alive, it cannot simultaneously be dead, and vice versa. These antonyms are absolute, as shown in the sentence: “The plant is alive, while the other plant is dead.” There are no intermediate states between being alive and being dead.

true-false

These terms have clear opposites. A statement that is true cannot also be false, and any false statement cannot be true. For example, “The answer to the question is true, not false.”

c. Conversive antonyms

Conversive antonymy is a relation in which two members of a pair display symmetry in their meaning. The “if..., then...” formula can be used to test and identify conversive antonyms.

For example: buy-sell

When someone buys something, there is always a counterpart who sells it. These terms express reciprocal actions in economic exchanges, as demonstrated by: “She bought a book, and the vendor sold it to her.”

give-receive

These antonyms also highlight a reciprocal relationship, where giving something implies someone else is receiving it. For instance: “He gave me a gift, and I received it gratefully.”

d. Directional antonyms

Directional antonymy deals with opposites that indicate movement or orientation in opposing directions. These antonyms are commonly used in spatial contexts.

For example: up-down

These antonyms represent opposing vertical directions. In sentences like, “The balloon flew up into the sky, while the kite was pulled down by the wind,” the terms up and down clearly denote opposite directions in space.

left-right

Similarly, the words left and right are used to indicate opposing lateral directions. “Turn left at the intersection and right at the next one” shows how these directional antonyms guide movement.

4.1.2. Based on the derivation

a. Root-word antonyms

These antonyms are formed from the simplest form of the word, without the addition of prefixes or suffixes. The meaning of the words is in its base form.

For example: win-lose

The verb win stands on its own, as does lose. Neither term requires any affixation to form the antonymous relationship. For example: “He managed to win the game, while she had to lose the match.”

b. Derivational antonyms

These antonyms are created by adding prefixes or suffixes to the root words, altering their meanings.

For example: happy-unhappy

By adding the prefix un- to the adjective happy, the meaning is reversed, forming the opposite. A sentence like, “She was happy with her promotion, but her colleague was unhappy about his situation,” showcases this relationship.

4.1.3. By part of speech

a. Antonymous nouns

Nouns can also form antonyms, often based on opposite qualities or conditions. These antonyms often reflect polar concepts such as gender, size, or state.

For example: man-woman

These antonyms represent opposite genders. The distinction is important in discussions of gender or social roles, as in: “The man walked into the room, and the woman followed.”

b. Antonymous verbs

Antonyms formed from verbs express actions that oppose one another. These verbs often highlight opposing actions or events.

For example: accept-reject

The verbs accept and reject describe opposing actions. “He accepted the invitation, but she rejected it,” provides an example of this opposition.

c. Antonymous adjectives

Adjectives describe qualities or attributes of things, and antonyms often describe opposite states or conditions.

For example: big-small

These adjectives denote size. “The big house stood next to the small cottage,” illustrates how these antonyms describe contrasting physical sizes.

d. Antonymous adverbs

Antonyms formed from adverbs describe opposite manners or degrees of action. These are commonly used to indicate contrasting ways of performing actions.

For example: quickly-slowly

These adverbs describe speed. “He ran quickly to catch the bus, but his friend walked slowly,” illustrates the contrast in how actions are performed.

In Vietnamese, antonyms are categorized based on structure and context. According to researchers like Do Huu Chau (1962), Nguyen Van Tu (1968), and Truong Ky Duc (1988), antonyms

can be classified into simple antonyms, complex antonyms, isolation compound antonyms, auxiliary antonyms, and alliterative expression antonyms, where the opposition is highlighted through phonetic patterns.

i. Simple antonyms

Simple antonyms are direct, clear opposites that consist of single words with an inherent and immediate contrast in meaning. These antonyms are easy to identify, as the words themselves directly express opposite meanings without the need for additional context or modifiers.

For example: ngày (day)-đêm (night)

cao (tall)-thấp (short)

The opposition here is unambiguous: “day” is inherently the opposite of “night,” and “tall” is the opposite of “short.”

ii. Complex antonyms

Complex antonyms involve more than one word and are formed from phrases or combinations that together express a contrast in meaning. Unlike simple antonyms, complex antonyms often provide a broader or more nuanced opposition that may involve various degrees of meaning.

For example: tốt (good)-xấu (bad)

đẹp (beautiful)-xấu (ugly)

In these cases, words like rất tốt (very good) vs. không tốt (not good) or tốt hơn (better) vs. xấu hơn (worse) show a more complex interplay where the antonym is embedded in a larger phrase or construction.

Complex antonyms are especially useful in expressing varying degrees of quality, preference, or judgment. They are often used in everyday speech and writing to provide more specific meanings or to compare contrasting ideas.

iii. Isolation compound antonyms

Isolation compound antonyms are formed from a combination of words, where the antonym is conveyed indirectly through context rather than a clear, one-to-one opposition between two words.

This type of antonym relies on the relationship between the words to convey their opposite meanings, often reflecting the changing state of a situation, action, or condition.

For example: được (get, receive)-mất (lose)

Here, the antonymous relationship is not as straightforward as ngày-đêm; rather, the words được and mất reflect a process or result. You can “get” something, but you can also “lose” it, and the opposition here highlights the transformation of possession or state.

iv. Auxiliary antonyms

Auxiliary antonyms are those that are typically formed by adding auxiliary words to a base verb, often indicating opposition in terms of actions or movements. These antonyms express contrast through the use of action words, often paired with another word to modify the direction or nature of the action.

For example: đến (arrive)-đi (leave)
mở (open)-đóng (close)
nói (speak)-im lặng (be silent)

In these cases, the contrast is expressed through verbs that describe actions, where one implies entering or starting, while the other refers to exiting or stopping.

v. Alliterative expression antonyms

Alliterative expression antonyms are formed by words or phrases that follow a phonetic pattern, often emphasizing sound or rhythm rather than just meaning. This type of antonym is used more in poetry or regional expressions, where the rhythm of the words can amplify the contrast.

For example: nở (bloom)-tàn (wilt)
lên (go up)-xuống (go down)

While the opposition between the two words is clear, the focus is often on the sound or phonetic harmony between them. This makes the opposition more memorable or aesthetically pleasing, especially in song lyrics or poetic forms.

In conclusion, both English and Vietnamese feature a wide range of antonyms, but they are categorized and used differently. In English, antonyms are typically grouped by meaning, derivation, or part of speech. Vietnamese, however, focuses on the structure of antonyms, such as simple, complex, and auxiliary opposites. Despite these differences, both languages use antonyms to express contrasting ideas, with each language reflecting its unique linguistic structure and cultural expressions of opposition.

4.2. The main differences in how antonyms are used in English and Vietnamese

4.2.1. Classification of antonyms

In English, antonyms are often categorized based on their semantic relationship, part of speech, or derivational processes. The primary types include:

- Gradable antonyms (e.g., hot-cold) express opposites along a continuum, where the extremes of each word represent opposite ends of a scale.

- Complementary antonyms (e.g., alive-dead) represent binary opposites where one word's existence negates the other.

- Conversive antonyms (e.g., buy-sell) refer to words that are opposites based on perspective or relational functions.

- Directional antonyms (e.g., up-down) express opposite directions or movements. English antonyms are also analyzed based on part of speech, such as adjective antonyms (e.g., happy-sad), verb antonyms (e.g., come-go), and noun antonyms (e.g., winner-loser).

In contrast, Vietnamese categorizes antonyms more by their structure, involving forms like:

- Simple antonyms (e.g., ngày-đêm for day-night) that represent direct opposites without much modification.

- Complex antonyms (e.g., tốt-xấu for good-bad) where one word's meaning is nuanced and

can often be expressed using compound forms or in context.

- Isolation compound antonyms (e.g., *được-mất* for gain-lose) where the antonyms are expressed through different actions or states, making the opposition more context-dependent.

- Auxiliary antonyms (e.g., *đến-đi* for arrive-leave) where verbs with opposite meanings are paired with auxiliary words or modals. Vietnamese antonyms also include alliterative expression antonyms (e.g., such as *nở-tàn* for bloom-wilt) in poetry or rhetoric, where words are paired based on sound.

4.2.2. Structural differences

Antonyms in English are typically derived by adding prefixes or suffixes to base words (e.g., un-, in-), such as happy-unhappy or possible-impossible. This derivational process allows antonyms to be formed relatively easily, making the relationship between the words clear and direct.

The structure of antonyms in Vietnamese is more flexible and often involves multi-word expressions, where a single word cannot always capture the full contrast. For example, *được* (receive)-*mất* (lose) is an isolation compound antonym, where the opposition comes from the action implied by the verb. Additionally, *đến* (arrive)-*đi* (leave) are auxiliary antonyms, which express oppositions in terms of movement or direction. This structural diversity in Vietnamese gives the language a richness in expressing nuanced opposites, particularly in verbs and actions.

4.2.3. Contextual usage

Antonyms in English are often used in clear, direct contexts where the opposing ideas are easily understood. For instance, words like dark and light or full and empty express clear-cut contrasts, and their meanings are generally unambiguous. English relies on precise opposites in describing

situations, especially when it comes to adjectives and adverbs.

In Vietnamese, antonyms can carry more contextual weight, especially when they depend on the structure of the sentence or the relationship between words. For example, *người tốt* (good person)-*người xấu* (bad person) may appear as simple opposites, but the terms also carry broader social and moral implications. Similarly, isolation compound antonyms such as *được* (receive)-*mất* (lose) are often rely on context, reflecting specific situations or changes in status that cannot always be directly translated into English.

c. Semantic differences

Antonyms in English are often used to express logical opposites, such as true-false, or physical opposites, like hot-cold. The opposition is typically conceptual and focuses on a binary distinction. Many antonyms are used to describe specific, often absolute conditions.

Vietnamese antonyms, particularly in complex or auxiliary forms, can be more dynamic and adaptable. For instance, *tốt* (good)-*xấu* (bad) are opposites, but their meaning can change based on the context, often carrying additional cultural or evaluative weight. The broader use of multi-word expressions, especially in literary and poetic contexts, gives Vietnamese antonyms more room for interpretation. Additionally, Vietnamese antonyms related to action (e.g., *đến-đi*) often imply movement, direction, or status shifts, which reflects the language's focus on dynamic relationships.

In conclusion, the primary differences in how antonyms are used in English and Vietnamese revolve around classification, structure, and context. English tends to focus on simple semantic oppositions, often relying on prefixes or clear-cut contrasts. Vietnamese, however, uses a broader array of structural forms, with compound and auxiliary antonyms playing a significant role in

expressing opposition. The contextual nature of Vietnamese antonyms also allows for greater flexibility in meaning, which differs from the more rigid and formalized usage seen in English.

The research has addressed the key questions regarding antonyms in English and Vietnamese, exploring their types, structures, and usage as well as the differences between the two languages, yet there are still other areas that could be further explored.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This comprehensive study has illuminated the intricate nature of antonymy in English and Vietnamese, revealing both fundamental similarities and significant divergences in their expression of opposing meanings. The research demonstrates distinct approaches to antonymic categorization: English employs a meaning-based, derivational, and grammatical classification system, while Vietnamese exhibits a more complex structural taxonomy encompassing simple, complex, isolation compound, auxiliary, and alliterative expressions. A notable distinction emerges in the structural formation of antonyms, with English favoring affixation for creating direct opposites, whereas Vietnamese demonstrates greater linguistic flexibility through context-dependent multi-word expressions. The investigation underscores how cultural and linguistic contexts profoundly influence antonymic relationships. While English antonyms typically maintain consistent, unambiguous meanings, their Vietnamese counterparts often carry nuanced contextual implications that reflect deeper sociocultural values. These findings contribute significantly to our understanding of how different languages encode oppositional meanings, offering valuable insights for linguistic theory and cross-cultural communication. The practical implications of this research extend to language pedagogy, translation studies, and

intercultural communication. Incorporating these insights into language learning curricula can enhance students' vocabulary acquisition and comprehension skills in both languages. Furthermore, the findings provide translators with crucial understanding for maintaining semantic accuracy while preserving cultural nuances. In an increasingly interconnected world, this enhanced awareness of how antonymy functions across languages promotes more effective cross-cultural communication and deeper appreciation of linguistic diversity. This research thus serves as a valuable resource for both theoretical linguistics and practical language applications.

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