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STATIC AND DYNAMIC SEMANTIC PROPERTIES OF THE OXYMORON IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract. The paper offers a contrastive analysis of the semantic structure of oxymoronic units in English and Uzbek, distinguishing between their static and dynamic layers. The author proposes a division of oxymorons into usual (lexicalised) and occasional (author-specific) types and substantiates the typological difference between the structural models available in the two languages. The analysis shows that the contradictory semantics of the oxymoron is not stored in the language system but arises in the process of contextual actualisation.

Key words: oxymoron, semantic contradiction, static semantics, dynamic semantics, usual and occasional oxymoron, contrastive linguistics, English, Uzbek.

Introduction. The oxymoron is a stylistic figure produced by the combination of two semantically opposed units within a single syntactic whole. What makes it attractive as an object of research is that the oxymoron creates a logically impossible combination which is nevertheless successfully understood in speech. The listener, then, does not eliminate the contradiction; on the contrary, the contradiction is accepted as a meaning-generating device. It is therefore insufficient to describe the oxymoron at the lexical level alone: it must be studied in the relationship between two layers of semantics — the stable meaning fixed in the language system (the static layer) and the contextual meaning realised in speech (the dynamic layer).

The tradition of distinguishing static and dynamic semantics took shape in Russian linguistics in the works of M.N. Kozhina and I.V. Arnold and, in its conceptual interpretation, in A.P. Babushkin's notions of the "static concept" and the "dynamic concept". In the present paper this distinction is applied to the oxymoron and tested contrastively on English and Uzbek material.

Material and method. The analysis is based on oxymoronic combinations collected from English and Uzbek literary texts. The samples come from two sources: a selection of literary texts, and the classic examples cited in dictionaries and handbooks of stylistics. The examples of the second group were marked separately, since they constitute metalinguistic rather than speech material and cannot serve as a basis for conclusions about frequency of use. The study employs descriptive, comparative-contrastive and componential analysis. It should be stressed that the non-quantitative observations presented below are drawn from a limited sample and cannot support statistical generalisation: they are put forward as hypotheses and require verification on a balanced corpus.

The static layer is understood here as the structure of an oxymoronic unit outside context: the categorial nature of its components, the type of syntactic link between them, and the denotative content

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of their lexical meanings. At this level the oxymoron displays no “unnaturalness” whatsoever: it fully conforms to an ordinary attributive or predicative pattern. In English the most productive model is the adjective + noun combination: bittersweet victory, deafening silence, sweet sorrow, cruel kindness, open secret. The second most frequent pattern is adverb + adjective: seriously funny, awfully good. The participle + noun model also occurs: living death, living dead. In Uzbek the principal model is likewise adjective + noun: shirin azob (‘sweet torment’), qora nur (‘black light’), jim faryod (‘silent scream’), sokin g‘avg‘o (‘quiet tumult’), dahshatli go‘zallik (‘terrifying beauty’), quvonchli g‘am (‘joyful sorrow’). The agglutinative structure of Uzbek, however, provides an additional possibility absent in English: the converb + verb pattern (kulib yig‘lamoq ‘to weep laughing’, jim faryod qilmoq ‘to scream silently’) and the adjective + adjective pattern (noaniq aniq ‘indefinitely definite’). In these patterns the contradiction is predicative-processual rather than attributive in character: it is not a property but the action itself that carries the internal opposition.

Table 1

Model	English	Uzbek
Adjective + noun	bittersweet victory, sweet sorrow	shirin azob, qora nur
Adverb + adjective	seriously funny, awfully good	not productive
Participle + noun	living death, living dead	rarely attested
Adjective + adjective	rarely attested	noaniq aniq
Converb + verb	no equivalent pattern	kulib yig‘lamoq, jim faryod qilmoq

It is at this point that the first typological difference emerges: in English the oxymoron lives chiefly in the form of a compressed attributive combination, whereas in Uzbek it is freely formed not only in the attributive pattern but also in the predicative converb pattern. This difference is not accidental — it follows directly from the morphological type of the two languages.

In the existing literature, examples of the oxymoron are frequently listed side by side. In our view this is methodologically unsound, since they fall into two semantically distinct groups. **Usual (lexicalised) oxymorons** are combinations entrenched in the language system as ready-made units: open secret, virtual reality, original copy, jumbo shrimp, passive aggression. In these units the contradiction has died out: a speaker who hears virtual reality experiences no semantic clash whatsoever — it is a term, not a stylistic figure. Such units are the diachronic outcome of the oxymoron, not its synchronic manifestation. **Occasional (author-specific) oxymorons** are combinations created in a text for that particular place, with the contradiction still alive. It is precisely these that can serve as the object of stylistic analysis, because in them the process of meaning generation can be observed. The practical consequence of this distinction is that usual oxymorons cannot ground conclusions about the cognitive mechanism of the

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oxymoron — they have long since turned into ordinary lexical units. In a contrastive study, mixing the two groups either artificially inflates the difference between the two languages or, conversely, conceals it.

The dynamic layer is the actualisation of the oxymoron in text. For a contradictory combination to be understood, the listener modifies the semantic scope of at least one of its components. This process can be described in three stages.

First, the logical incompatibility is registered: the two members of the combination cannot both be true at once. Second, one of the components is read figuratively, or its semantic scope is narrowed. Third, the resulting new meaning belongs not to a part of the combination but to the whole.

In deafening silence, for instance, the adjective deafening shifts from denoting acoustic force to denoting psychological pressure, while silence retains its meaning of absence of sound. The contradiction does not disappear; it is distributed across two different levels — the physical and the psychological. The same distribution is observed in the Uzbek *jim faryod* ('silent scream'): *jim* ('silent') refers to the outer state, *faryod* ('scream') to the inner one.

The decisive role of context is particularly evident in the following observation: in a sports text bittersweet victory conveys the fatigue and sense of loss that accompany success, whereas in a military text it denotes a result achieved at the cost of casualties. The static structure of the combination remains unchanged — what changes is the way the contradiction is resolved. This confirms that the meaning of the oxymoron is formed not in the language system but in the text. From the standpoint of cognitive linguistics, the three-stage process described above is interpreted as a partial overlap of two conceptual domains. The central claim made by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson about metaphor applies to the oxymoron as well: the opposition is not eliminated but distributed across two different domains of experience, whereby the logical incompatibility is removed.

This interpretation yields an important methodological consequence. The comprehension of an oxymoron takes place not in the linguistic unit itself but in the reader's experience. Hence, when comparing oxymorons in two languages, one must take into account not only the linguistic form but also the background knowledge required to resolve that form. It is this aspect that distinguishes the present study from a purely structural comparison. At the same time, this cognitive interpretation has primarily explanatory power; testing it empirically calls for a separate psycholinguistic methodology, and within the present paper it is adopted as a working model.

A comparison of occasional oxymorons in English and Uzbek reveals the following preliminary differences. **The structural difference:** English tends towards attributive compression, whereas Uzbek also makes active use of the predicative converb pattern. This difference stems from morphological type and constitutes the point of greatest difficulty in translation. **The functional difference:** in the material examined, English oxymorons are more often associated with irony and intellectual play, while Uzbek ones tend to express inner psychological conflict. This observation is intriguing, but it cannot be presented as a strict regularity: it may derive not from the potential of the two languages but from the genre composition of the selected corpus of texts. The difference is therefore retained with the status of a hypothesis and must be verified on a genre-balanced corpus.

Third, there is a difference in the degree of lexicalisation: English has a markedly larger number of lexicalised oxymorons, which have passed into the terminological layer (virtual reality, passive aggression). In Uzbek such a transition is observed less frequently — the oxymoron remains largely confined to literary discourse.

Of the three differences above, only the first — the structural one — follows directly from the language system and can therefore be accepted as a reliable typological conclusion. The other two depend on the text sample; confirming them requires a corpus balanced for genre and period, together with quantitative measurement. Stating this limitation explicitly is not a weakness of the study but a precise formulation of the task for its next stage.

Conclusion. The semantic nature of the oxymoron is revealed more clearly when the static and dynamic layers are analysed separately. In the static layer the oxymoron is nothing more than an ordinary syntactic pattern; the contradiction arises in the dynamic layer, through a context-driven shift in the semantic scope of one of the components. In contrastive research, a strict distinction between usual and occasional oxymorons is a methodological prerequisite; otherwise typological conclusions become unreliable. The principal structural difference between English and Uzbek — the existence in Uzbek of the predicative converb oxymoron pattern — is explained by the morphological type of the two languages and opens a promising avenue for further research.

Directions for future work include the quantitative measurement of the frequency of oxymoron patterns; the identification of the distribution of occasional oxymorons across genres; and a separate study of the translation equivalents of Uzbek converb-pattern oxymorons. Since these directions lie at the intersection of contrastive linguistics and translation studies, their potential for practical results is high.

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