

RESURSA EDUCATIONALA DESCHISA

ANTONYMY IN SPECIFIC ENGLISH TEXTS

AUTOR : LIA CODRUTA

UNITATEA DE INVATAMANT : SCOALA GIMNAZIALA SLATIOARA

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ANTONYMY IN SPECIFIC ENGLISH TEXTS

Antonymy helps achieve textual cohesion. It reveals the opposition and the unity of objects in languages. Employing antonyms in English texts correctly reveals the oppositeness of objects and produces a strong sense of comparison.

Therefore, writers are fond of and good at employing antonyms in their literature works, because it makes the works artistically charming and powerfully convincing.

A. Antonymy Used in Poetry

Antonyms are widely used in poetry. English poet Alfred Tennyson had the famous lines in his *Ulysses* “Though much is taken, much abides; and though/ We are not now that strength which in the old days/ Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;/ One equal-temper of heroic hearts,/ Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will/ To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.” How encouraging it is! Even a man in despair can get the power from the lines. And what makes the lines memorable and powerful is the use of antonyms.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo has the poem, “O loving hate,/ O anything, or nothing first created!/ O heavy lightness, serious vanity,/ Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms,/ Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,/ Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!”

B. Antonymy Used in Dramas

Antonymy is also widely used in dramas. It can be seen obviously from the works of William Shakespeare. In *Romeo and Juliet* “My only love sprung from my only hate. Too early seen unknown, and known too late. Prodigious birth of love it is to me, that I must love a loathed” In the quotation, four antonym pairs are there and they constitute the well known figures of speech in English, oxymoron and paradox. When we read the words at first, we may think them very ridiculous, illogical and raving. However, when we explore the plot of the dramas, we can find that the drama uses these antonym pairs and corresponding figures of speech to depict the

contradictory mind of Juliet on the occasion. Juliet says this in Act 1 Scene 5 when she finds out who Romeo is. She's expressing a bunch of information and emotion all at once here—she's fallen in love with Romeo, but she's upset that he is a member of the rival family. She saw him first (too early) and fell for him before she found out who he was (too late). Love now seems very strange to her, that she can love someone she's supposed to hate.

Antonyms for the most of time are used to make irony and oxymoron. In *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, Caesar states, "I thank you for your pains and courtesy." Different listeners interpret it differently. Caesar meant one thing; to the audience, who knows that Caesar will soon be killed, the statement means something entirely different. Oxymoron is formed whenever two words that are contrary in normal usage are combined together. (Watson, 2006, p.29) The master of the oxymoron was William Shakespeare. In the Act 5 Scene 1 of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Theseus remarks about the choices for the entertainment in the evening: "A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus/ And his love Thisby; very tragical mirth./ Merry and tragical? tedious and brief?/ That is hot ice and wondrous strange snow. How shall we find the concord of this discord? "

C. Antonymy Used in Novels

In the process of writing novels, numerous novelists are very good at employing antonyms. The following is excerpted from *A Tale of Two Cities* written by Charles Dickens. "It was the best times, it was the worst times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of the foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us." It uses six pairs of antonyms to depict the complicated and dangerous atmosphere before the French revolution. These six antonym pairs are parallel and overwhelming.

In Maxwell Anderson's *Lost in the Stars*, you will read "That you are all lost here, black and white, rich and poor, the fools and the wise!"

In O. Henry's *The Duel*, you will read "I despise its very vastness and power. It has the poorest millionaires, the littlest great men, the haughtiest beggars, the plainest beauties, the lowest skyscrapers, the dolefullest pleasures of any town I ever saw."

In T. Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* you will read "there was an audible stillness, in which

the common voice sounded strange.” Every famous novelist without exception has a good master of antonyms.

D. Antonymy Used in Speeches

When antonymy is used in a speech, a clear-cut stand and a clear point of view are easily made. The language has stronger rhythm and helps being persuasive. As a result, many people employ antonymy in their speeches to state their opinions, justify their positions and influence the public opinion. This can be best seen from the speeches of American presidents.

Abraham Lincoln once in his Address at Gettysburg had “The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, for above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. ”. The effect achieved by the use of these antonyms is rather striking.

With the beautiful language forms with the use of antonymy the persuasive power of the speakers are strengthened greatly and the audience are more likely to be convinced to a greater extent. Examples are many, not only in presidential speeches, like Barack Obama, Abraham Lincoln. Martin Luther King had “one hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of a poverty in the midst of vast ocean of material prosperity.” (Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 2014)

E. Antonymy Used in Proverbs

Proverb is a form of language with the presentation of each figure of speech, which is a fixed short verse naturally coming from the usual use of some composition of the language. Proverbs are simple; meanwhile, they entertain a thought deeply. When antonyms are used in proverbs, the rhetorical effect of phonological harmony, formal beauty and conciseness are achieved.

Several examples are given as follows. “*More haste, less speed.*” “*Easy come, easy go.*” “*Art is long, life is short.*” “*An idle youth, a needy age.*” “*Small sorrows speak; great sorrows are silent.*” Very famous people are more skilful of using antonymy in proverbs. George Herbert has “Love makes all hard hearts gentle”. And George Eliot has “It is surely better to pardon too much than to condemn too much”. All these examples listed above are neat in the construction of the sentences. No matter visually or phonologically, a kind of beauty of harmony can be sensed, which helps convey profound messages from their writing.

Antonymy plays rather important roles in specific English texts, especially in poetry, novels, dramas, speeches and proverbs. Antonymy helps the English textual cohesion. Employing antonyms in texts correctly reveals the oppositeness of the things and produces the strong sense of comparison. Therefore, writers are fond of and are good at employing the antonyms in their literature works, and it contributes to achieve characterization, scene description, statement of opinions, discussion.

The linguistic study of antonymy in English texts helps readers understand and appreciate authors' intention much more easily.

Teachers who emphasize the study of antonymy in class will find their students have a higher reading ability. However, the study of antonymy should not stop at linguistic level. Probing into the rhetorical function of antonymy may help us improve the ability of using language and heighten the effect of language output.