A CRITIQUE OF THE VIEW OF ANTONYMY AS A RELATION BETWEEN WORD FORMS

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Abstract. This paper discusses a critique of the view of antonymy as a relation between word forms and suggestions that co-occurrence alone can explain how two words come to be associated. These conclusions defined after investigating the co-occurrence patterns of many pairs of antonyms.

Keywords: Near antonyms, co-occurrence, criticism, substitution, syntactic frases, semantic.

Annotation. Эта статья обсуждает критика зрения антонимии как отношение между формами слова и предложениями, которые в одиночку могут объяснить, как будут связаны два слова. Эти выводы определяются после расследования узоров соуречения многих пар антонимов.

Ключевые слова: около антонимов, соэлемент, критика, замена, синдактические шарики, семантические.
Murphy and Andrew are two linguists who are somewhat skeptical of the claim that there is no role for conceptual meaning in antonymy because antonymy is only a relationship between word forms. In their 1992 research report, they offer some apt criticisms of the WordNet model and describe their own studies which suggest that conceptual meaning plays a role in antonymy just as it does in synonymy.

Murphy and Andrew start by discussing Charles and Miller’s suggestion that co-occurrence alone can explain how two words come to be associated. They begin by pointing out, "There are a number of other words that co-occur but are not even near-antonyms: 
dentist/teeth, food/eat, sick/tired, and a variety of idioms and phrasal expressions". How do word learners know that some kinds of co-occurring words are antonyms, but others are not? [1]

Their second criticism is even more to the point. They say: An explanation is needed for why antonyms co-occur. If it is because they are associated in semantic memory, then we have formed a completely circular explanation in which co-occurrence is caused by the relation, and the relation is caused by co-occurrence.

This also occurred to me the first time I read Charles and Miller (1989). It seems that the only way out of this circularity is to take the meanings of the words into account. After all, when people speak, they choose words to express their ideas; if people are choosing to use antonyms together in the same sentence, it is because they intend to convey a contrast in meaning and they are choosing words which effectively convey that contrast. As Murphy and Andrew put it, "If antonymy is just a kind of
lexical association, then the semantic component would be superfluous, whereas in fact it seems to be the crucial element".

Murphy and Andrew's final criticism is that an increasing amount of the research done on word meanings suggests that "[Semantic relations should be definable in terms of conceptual relations," but in the WordNet model, antonymy is a lexical association that is not based on conceptual relations.

We believe that word meanings are mentally represented as concepts and that semantic relations, including antonymy, can be "computed" by a language user as necessary. To test whether this in fact is true of antonymy, they conducted a few simple experiments making use of research on conceptual combination which shows that the meaning of an adjective depends to some extent on the noun it is modifying. As an example, they point out that the meaning of fresh is somewhat different in the phrase’s fresh shirt, fresh idea and fresh fish. If, as Gross, Fischer and Miller claim, antonymy is a relationship between word forms and not concepts, Murphy and Andrew say that fresh should have a single antonym, and this antonym should be the same regardless of the context in which fresh occurs. If, on the other hand, antonymy is a relation between concepts, then an adjective would be expected to have different antonyms in different contexts because the same adjective evokes different concepts (each with its own antonym) in different as the WordNet model.

In their discussion, Murphy and Andrew say that although some synonyms and antonyms may be "pre-stored" in the mental lexicon as a result of associations that arise from frequent co-occurrence, the relations of synonymy and antonymy are basically conceptual in nature and so they can also be figured out when necessary.

Synonyms can be computed via conceptual similarity—they do not have to be pre-stored. Antonyms for a given word can likewise be produced by searching the space of semantically related words...they can be generated by choosing words with similar meanings and searching for one that differs only in one dimension.
The significance of Murphy and Andrew's study for my research is that it offers good reasons to reject the claim of Miller and his colleagues that antonymy is simply an association between particular word forms, and it encourages us to look for a semantically based explanation for the question of why speakers choose to use two particular words together so often.


They find that, although Charles and Miller found that substitutability per se does not apply to most antonyms (that is, in most ordinary contexts, antonyms cannot be substituted for one another), the correct generalization actually involves a combination of co-occurrence and substitution. Through their study of antonyms in two corpora, they find that "all lexically antonymous adjectives that have a relatively high frequency of occurrence for either member of the antonym pair has a greater-than-chance occurrence rate," a finding which supports the co-occurrence hypothesis, but at the same time, they find that "these cooccurrences are constrained syntactically so that they occur in parallel and often essentially identical phrases" (Justeson and Katz 1992).

Although Justeson and Katz conclude that antonymy involves a link between two specific words, just as Miller and his colleagues claimed, they also say that a semantic component is necessary to antonymy:

We conclude that antonyms are those semantically opposed words that are conjoined and often opposed to one another at relatively high rates in sentences by substitution for one another in otherwise essentially identical (or parallel) phrases (italics mine). (Justeson and Katz 1992.

Justeson and Katz reached these conclusions after investigating the cooccurrence patterns of many pairs of antonyms, first in the Brown corpus (useful because it was tagged) and then in a larger, untagged corpus of 25,000,000 words. The larger corpus
was used to check patterns seen in the smaller corpus but which were not statistically significant because some of the adjectives did not occur very frequently.

They began by looking at the occurrences of the antonyms studied by Deese. Of the 35 pairs they looked at, 30 pairs occurred together in the Brown corpus in the same sentence at least once.[3]

In other words, speakers have strong intuitions about antonym pairs that they frequently encounter, but when they are asked to judge whether two less frequently occurring words are antonyms or not, they do not have such strong intuitions. I can give the example of *sick/well*. These two words show a clear contrast in meaning, but *sick* also contrasts with *healthy* and *well* also contrasts with *ill*, so semantic criteria alone are not enough to determine an antonym. If a speaker has enough exposure to *sick* occurring in the same sentence with *well*, she will quickly identify them as antonyms, but if not, she may not be able to make a judgment about them. If I am right in this regard, then it seems that co-occurrence goes a long way toward explaining why antonymy seems to be a "gradient phenomenon", but unfortunately, no one seems to have yet tested this hypothesis by checking the co-occurrence rates of pairs such as *sick/well* to see if they are really significantly lower than the co-occurrence rates for more easily recognized antonym pairs.

The studies of co-occurrence phenomena discussed so far have focused on adjectives, but in her study, Fellbaum widens the scope to other categories of words. She points out that although antonymy is widespread in the adjectival lexicon, it is also found among nouns, verbs, and adverbs, and that many times, a single concept is expressed by words of different syntactic classes, e.g., *death, die, dead, deadly* and the contrasting *life, live, alive*. She accepts the WordNet model's premise that associations between antonyms organize the adjectival lexicon, but she asks: Does the associative effect of antonymy transcend the borders of syntactic categories? If so, then there is nothing special about antonymous adjectives, other than that antonymy
is more pervasive among adjectives; rather, there is something special about antonymous concepts, no matter in what form these concepts are lexicalized.

In other words, I can suggest, co-occurrence may not be limited to adjectives and antonymy may in fact reflect an association between antonymous concepts rather than an association between words forms.

To summarize, like Charles and Miller, I believe that co-occurrence in the same sentence leads language learners to associate antonyms in semantic memory. However, they believe that co-occurrence alone is not enough to explain the association; in particular, they pay attention to the syntactic frames in which the antonyms often occur, speculating that these frames draw attention to the antonyms and thus aid the association. Finally, semantics must also be involved to some extent because speakers can distinguish antonyms from other kinds of contrasting words which also co-occur frequently. However, as always, there are some unanswered questions.

List of used literature:

