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PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF ITALIAN PROVERBS WITH ANTONYMIC CORRELATION

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Abstract

This article explores the pragmatic features of Italian proverbs characterized by antonymic correlation. The study examines how lexical oppositions function within proverbial expressions to convey contrast, evaluation, emphasis, generalization, warning, and moral attitudes. Particular attention is given to the communicative role of antonymic pairs and their contribution to the expressive and didactic potential of Italian proverbs. The analysis demonstrates that antonymic correlation functions not only as a structural-semantic device but also as an important pragmatic mechanism for expressing social experience, cultural values, behavioral norms, and evaluative meanings. The findings highlight the close relationship between antonymy, pragmatic meaning, and Italian linguistic culture.

Keywords: Italian proverbs, antonymic correlation, antonymy, pragmatics, pragmatic analysis, paremiology, proverbial discourse, evaluation, linguistic culture.

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ITALYANCHA ANTONOMIK KORRELYATSIYALI MAQOLLARNING PRAGMATIK TAHLILI

Annotatsiya

Mazkur maqolada antonimik korrelyatsiyaga ega italyan maqollarning pragmatik xususiyatlari tadqiq etiladi. Unda leksik zidlikning maqollarda qarama-qarshilik, baholash, ta'kidlash, umumlashtirish, ogohlantirish va axloqiy munosabatlarni ifodalashdagi vazifalari tahlil qilinib, antonimik juftliklarning kommunikativ roli hamda ularning italyan maqollarning ekspressiv va didaktik imkoniyatlarini shakllantirishdagi o'rniga alohida e'tibor qaratiladi. Tahlil natijalari antonimik korrelyatsiya nafaqat strukturaviy-semantik vosita, balki ijtimoiy tajriba, madaniy qadriyatlar, xulq-atvor me'yorlari va baholovchi ma'nolarni ifodalovchi muhim pragmatik mexanizm ekanligini ko'rsatadi. Tadqiqot antonimiya, pragmatik ma'no va italyan lingvomadaniyati o'rtasidagi uzviy aloqani ochib beradi.

Kalit so'zlar: italyancha maqollar, antonimik korrelyatsiya, antonimiya, pragmatika, pragmatik tahlil, paremiologiya, maqol nutqi, baholash, lingvomadaniyat.

ПРАГМАТИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ ИТАЛЬЯНСКИХ ПОСЛОВИЦ С АНТОНИМИЧЕСКОЙ КОРРЕЛЯЦИЕЙ

Аннотация

В статье исследуются прагматические особенности итальянских пословиц, характеризующихся антонимической корреляцией. Рассматриваются функции лексического противопоставления в передаче контраста, оценки, усиления, обобщения, предупреждения и нравственных установок. Особое внимание уделяется коммуникативной роли антонимических пар и их

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значению в формировании экспрессивного и дидактического потенциала итальянских пословиц. Результаты анализа показывают, что антонимическая корреляция выступает не только как структурно-семантическое средство, но и как важный прагматический механизм выражения социального опыта, культурных ценностей, норм поведения и оценочных значений. Исследование раскрывает взаимосвязь антонимии, прагматического значения и итальянской лингвокультуры.

Ключевые слова: итальянские пословицы, антонимическая корреляция, антонимия, прагматика, прагматический анализ, паремиология, пословичный дискурс, оценочность, лингвокультура.

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs represent one of the most concise and culturally significant forms of linguistic expression, reflecting the collective experience, values, beliefs, and behavioural norms of a speech community. In Italian, proverbial expressions occupy an important place in everyday communication and frequently convey complex meanings through simple and memorable linguistic structures. Their communicative effectiveness is closely connected with the use of various semantic and stylistic devices, among which antonymy has a particularly important role. The opposition of lexical meanings enables a proverb to present an idea through contrast, making its message more expressive, memorable, and accessible to the recipient. Therefore, the study of antonymic relations in Italian proverbs provides valuable insight into both their semantic organization and communicative potential.

Antonymic correlation in proverbial discourse is not limited to the formal juxtaposition of words with opposite meanings. In many cases, antonymic pairs create a semantic tension through which speakers express evaluation, emphasize a particular idea, establish a contrast between alternative behaviours, or formulate

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a general observation about human life. Such oppositions as bene–male (good–bad), grande–piccolo (big–small), ricco–povero (rich–poor), prima–dopo (before–after), and vita–morte (life–death) can function as meaningful components of proverbial structures. From a pragmatic perspective, their significance lies in the communicative intention underlying the opposition: a proverb may advise, warn, criticize, encourage, generalize experience, or transmit a culturally established judgement. Consequently, antonymic correlation should be considered not only as a lexical-semantic phenomenon but also as a pragmatic resource that contributes to the interpretation and communicative force of proverbial expressions.

LIRERATURE REVIEW / METHODS

The theoretical study of antonymy is closely connected with the broader investigation of lexical-semantic relations. D. A. Cruse, in *Lexical Semantics*, treats oppositeness as one of the major types of lexical relations and emphasizes that different forms of opposition require interpretation according to their semantic organization and contextual behaviour [1]. This perspective is particularly relevant to proverbial language, where antonymic pairs frequently operate beyond their basic dictionary meanings. In Italian paremiology, the proverb has been investigated as a distinctive linguistic and cultural unit rather than merely a fixed expression. V. Lambertini's *Che cos'è un proverbio* examines the linguistic nature of the proverb within paremiology and paremiography and stresses the importance of studying proverbs through both linguistic resources and contemporary communicative data [2]. Italian paremiographic scholarship also includes the extensive collections of C. Lapucci, whose *Dizionario dei proverbi italiani* documents approximately 25,000 Italian proverbs and provides information concerning their meanings, attestations, origins, and variants [3]. The *Enciclopedia dell'Italiano* likewise identifies major works in Italian proverb studies, including the paremiological research of T. Franceschi, O. Lurati, L.

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Serianni, and others [4]. These studies provide an important lexical and cultural basis for examining antonymic structures in Italian proverbial discourse. Research in Uzbek linguistics also demonstrates that antonymy in proverbs cannot be adequately understood through semantic opposition alone. R. Shukurov's *Antonyms in Uzbek* represents an important contribution to the systematic study of antonymic relations in Uzbek [5]. Research on Uzbek proverbs has further shown that antonymic relations may strengthen the expressive and semantic potential of proverbial expressions. Ubaydova and Ubaydova, for example, distinguish lexical antonymy from contextual antonymy and demonstrate how contextual opposition can emerge from the communicative situation of Uzbek folk proverbs [6]. Similarly, Uzoqova emphasizes the role of antonymic lexemes in expressing value-related meanings in Uzbek proverbs and notes their contribution to the emotional and expressive force of proverbial language [7]. More recent linguocultural research has also demonstrated that oppositional pairs in Uzbek proverbs may encode moral, social, and culturally specific meanings rather than simply representing formal semantic contrasts [8]. These approaches are significant for the present research because they support an interpretation of antonymic correlation as a phenomenon involving semantic, stylistic, pragmatic, and linguocultural dimensions.

Building on these theoretical and empirical approaches, the present study investigates the pragmatic functions of antonymic correlation in Italian proverbs. The research uses a qualitative descriptive method and is based on a selected corpus of Italian proverbial expressions containing lexical or contextual oppositions. The material is analyzed through four interconnected procedures: semantic analysis, which identifies the opposing lexical components; structural analysis, which determines how antonymic elements are organized within the proverb; pragmatic analysis, which establishes their communicative functions; and linguocultural interpretation, which examines the values and social experience encoded in the opposition. Particular attention is given to functions

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such as contrast, evaluation, emphasis, generalization, warning, advice, and moral instruction. The analysis therefore moves from the identification of antonymic pairs to the interpretation of their role in communication. While existing studies provide substantial descriptions of Italian proverbs and antonymy in general, the pragmatic interaction between antonymic correlation and proverbial meaning remains a productive area for further investigation. The present study addresses this aspect by examining how antonymic opposition contributes to the communicative force and cultural interpretation of Italian proverbial expressions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of Italian proverbs with antonymic correlation was organized according to four principal analytical dimensions: (1) structural-semantic function, (2) pragmatic function, (3) communicative effect, and (4) linguocultural significance. On the basis of these dimensions, the identified proverbial expressions were examined according to the type of antonymic relation and the communicative purpose realized through that relation. The analysis demonstrates that antonymic correlation is not an isolated lexical phenomenon but a multifunctional mechanism that contributes simultaneously to the semantic organization, expressiveness, evaluation, and pragmatic interpretation of proverbial discourse.

The first major result concerns the structural-semantic function of antonymic correlation. Antonymic pairs create a binary semantic framework within which the central message of a proverb becomes more explicit and recognizable. Oppositions such as bene–male (good–bad), ricco–povero (rich–poor), grande–piccolo (big–small), and vita–morte (life–death) establish two conceptual poles and allow the proverb to organize a complex observation through a compact linguistic structure. This structural economy is particularly characteristic of proverbial discourse, where brevity and memorability are essential features. The opposition consequently performs an interpretive function: by identifying the

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relationship between the two poles, the recipient can more readily reconstruct the generalized meaning intended by the proverb.

Analytical dimension	Main function of antonymic correlation	Pragmatic effect
Structural-semantic	Establishing lexical and conceptual opposition	Creates semantic contrast and facilitates interpretation
Evaluative	Expressing positive or negative judgement	Communicates approval, criticism, or disapproval
Didactic	Formulating advice, instruction, or moral principles	Encourages reflection and behavioural regulation
Warning	Contrasting desirable and undesirable consequences	Signals potential risks or undesirable outcomes
Generalizing	Representing experience through opposing concepts	Converts individual experience into a generalized statement
Expressive	Intensifying the emotional and rhetorical force	Makes the proverb memorable and persuasive
Linguocultural	Encoding culturally significant values and norms	Transmits collective experience and cultural knowledge

The second result relates to the evaluative function of antonymic correlation. The analysis shows that opposite lexical components frequently serve to encode socially and culturally recognizable evaluations. Rather than expressing an assessment through an explicit statement, the proverb may construct an opposition in which one pole is implicitly associated with desirable behaviour and the other with an undesirable state or action. For instance, *Meglio tardi che mai* (Better late than never) employs opposition between *tardi* (late) and *mai* (never) to produce a positive evaluation of an action that occurs later than expected. The pragmatic effect is therefore not limited to temporal contrast: the expression functions as encouragement and reassurance. This demonstrates that

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the pragmatic interpretation of antonymic structures may extend beyond their literal semantic opposition.

The third result concerns the didactic and advisory function of antonymic structures. Proverbs traditionally communicate collective experience in a form that can be applied to recurrent situations. Antonymic correlation strengthens this function by presenting alternative states or behavioural possibilities as two contrasting poles. Through such constructions, the speaker can provide advice without using a direct imperative. The proverbial statement may formally appear descriptive, while pragmatically functioning as an instruction, recommendation, or encouragement. This indirectness is an important feature of proverbial communication because the authority of the message is associated not with the individual speaker but with the collective experience represented by the proverb. Antonymic correlation therefore contributes to the transformation of linguistic opposition into behavioural guidance.

The fourth result is associated with the warning function of antonymy. In a number of proverbial structures, opposing concepts are used to highlight the consequences of particular choices or actions. The contrast between positive and negative outcomes creates a pragmatic warning and encourages the recipient to recognize a potential danger or undesirable consequence. The rhetorical effectiveness of such proverbs derives partly from the simplicity of the opposition: two contrasting possibilities can represent an entire chain of social or personal experience. Consequently, antonymic correlation provides a concise means of regulating behaviour while maintaining the indirect and generalized character of proverbial discourse.

The fifth result concerns the generalizing function of antonymic correlation. The opposition of two semantic poles enables an individual experience to be transformed into a broader observation about human life. Concepts associated with wealth and poverty, success and failure, youth and old age, or life and death can function as representative extremes rather than references to a single concrete

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situation. In this way, the proverb moves from a particular event to a generalized principle. The antonymic structure is therefore closely connected with the gnomic character of proverbial language: it presents knowledge as a stable observation that can be applied across different situations. This finding supports the view that proverbial meaning is constructed through the interaction of semantic structure and culturally shared experience [2,3].

The sixth result concerns the expressive and persuasive effect of antonymic correlation. Placing semantically opposed elements within a short and rhythmically organized expression increases its rhetorical prominence. The contrast attracts attention and facilitates memorization, while the compact structure gives the statement a categorical and authoritative character. As a result, antonymic proverbs can be particularly effective in spoken interaction, where a speaker may employ a proverb to reinforce an argument, conclude a discussion, criticize behaviour, or emphasize a particular observation. The expressive function therefore supports the pragmatic functions identified above rather than operating independently of them.

The analysis demonstrates the linguocultural significance of antonymic correlation. The lexical oppositions found in Italian proverbs frequently relate to culturally meaningful domains such as work, money, family, interpersonal relations, time, morality, and human behaviour. These oppositions do not merely organize linguistic material; they reflect culturally established ways of categorizing experience. The pragmatic interpretation of a proverb consequently depends partly on shared cultural knowledge. This observation is compatible with previous research on Italian paremiology, which treats proverbs as linguistic units closely connected with collective experience and cultural representation [2–4]. Research on Uzbek proverbs similarly demonstrates that antonymic relations may express culturally significant evaluations and contextual meanings [5–6]. The results can therefore be summarized through the following functional model:

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Antonymic opposition → semantic contrast → pragmatic interpretation → communicative function → cultural meaning.

Within this model, antonymic correlation constitutes the initial structural mechanism, while pragmatic interpretation determines how the opposition functions in communication. The same type of lexical opposition may consequently realize different functions depending on the proverb and communicative context. A single antonymic construction may simultaneously express contrast, evaluation, advice, and a culturally established moral judgement. This multifunctionality is one of the principal findings of the study and indicates that antonymy in Italian proverbial discourse should be analyzed at the intersection of lexical semantics, pragmatics, and linguocultural studies.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that antonymic correlation is a significant pragmatic mechanism in Italian proverbs. Antonymic pairs do more than create lexical contrast: they express evaluation, advice, warning, generalization, and moral judgement. Their pragmatic effect depends on the interaction between lexical opposition, communicative context, and shared cultural knowledge. The findings show that antonymic structures make proverbial expressions concise, expressive, memorable, and communicatively effective. They also provide a compact way of transmitting social experience, behavioural norms, and culturally established values. Thus, the pragmatic analysis of antonymic correlation offers a deeper understanding of how Italian proverbs function not only as linguistic expressions but also as carriers of collective cultural experience.

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