

A Better Understanding of the Antonyms

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Abstract— This paper proposes new different ways to give opposite meanings of words, changing only one letter of a word can make antonyms, for example: hire and fire. The letter (h) is just changed into (f), and the two words are completely opposite of each other. There should be notice that adding prefixes doesn't always work, like flammable and inflammable pretty much mean the same thing rather than antonyms. Antonyms in English language have played a significant role in the advancement of the users positions. Another important role of them is to control and learn a good amount of English vocabulary. As the English language is the language that possesses the largest vocabulary in the world. The main purpose of this study is to apply the creative thinking process for opposite words instructions. Showing the differences among the opposite words in relation to their meanings is also important, when a word has more than one antonym.

Key Words— antonyms, graded, relational, complimentary, hire, fire, unhappy, sad.

1 INTRODUCTION

In English language, one notorious problem of distributional similarity models is that they tend to not only retrieve words that are strongly alike to each other (such as synonyms), but also words that differ in their meaning (i.e. antonyms). It has often been argued that this behavior is due to the distributional similarity of synonyms and antonyms: despite conveying different meanings, antonyms also seem to occur in very similar contexts (Mohammad et al., 2013).

The English vocabulary is characterized by its richness, immensity, and complexity. Too many to count precisely, the total number of English words is very likely to be over 2 million, with more than 54,000 word families (Schmitt, 2000). Having this large number of words in English language is due to that Stahl (2005) stated, "English is promiscuous in the way that it adds words and takes words from sources such as other languages, slang, and compounding" (p. 97). Learning antonyms can be regarded as the most cognitively demanding task human beings may encounter as a result of having the biggest number of vocabulary in English. Nagy (2005) explained that "the expansion and elaboration of antonyms is something that extends across a lifetime" (p.2).

Many critics argue that one of the most emphasized problems encountered in learning language is that knowing what words are similar or opposites which can help people to understand the same when it comes to ideas. Due to the fact that ideas cannot be created without words; and words without ideas too. Often words will have more than one antonym but as with synonyms it depends on the context. For instance, the word warm could have the antonym cool or chilly. In order to choose the correct antonym, you have to look at all the meanings and how the word is used. Cool can mean stylish as well as chilly so the word cool may not be the best choice.

However, I do not want to immediately conclude examples of opposite words. Firstly I want to define the concept of antonym.

2 ANTONYMS

The word "antonym" comes from the Greek and can be broken down into "anti" meaning opposite and "onym" meaning name. So an antonym is a word that has the opposite meaning of another word. Since language is complex, and there can be many words that have similar meanings, sometimes an antonym is not exactly the opposite in meaning. Antonyms are words that mean the opposite of other words. The antonym of short is tall, for example. English lets its speakers find and make their own antonyms just by adding a prefix. The ability to make up one's own words and have them be real words is something truly lovable about English (Murphy and Andrew, 1993: 17).

3 TYPES OF ANTONYMS

There are three main categories of antonyms: graded antonyms, relational antonyms, and complementary antonyms.

3.1 Graded antonyms are word pairs that have variations between the two opposites. These antonyms deal with levels

of comparison and they can be two words on a scale. Many are relative terms, which can be interpreted differently by different people. Examples are:

young and old, hard and soft, happy and sad, wise and foolish, fat and skinny, warm and cool, early and late, fast and slow, dark and light (Jones, 2002: 34-7).

3.2 Relational antonyms are pairs that have a relationship. Each word wouldn't exist without the other. There can't be a parent without a child or it's either all or nothing. Relational antonyms are kind of like complementary antonyms, except that both must exist for them to be antonyms of each other. Check out these examples:

above and below, doctor and patient, husband and wife, servant and master, borrow and lend, give and receive, predator and prey, buy and sell (ibid).

3.3 Complimentary antonyms are word pairs that have no degree of meaning. In other words, When looking at complementary antonyms, there is no middle ground.

Examples of these are:

boy and girl, off and on, night and day, entrance and exit, exterior and interior, male and female, daughter and son, true and false, dead and alive, push and pull, and pass and fail (Jones, 2002: 34-7).

4 MAKING AN ANTONYM

In English, there are different ways to make antonyms:

4.1 Sometimes a word can change into an antonym very simply by adding a prefix, like "un, non, in, or, il, mis, dis, ab, dys, mal, im, ir, and etc." all these prefixes can affix to words to create antonyms.

Here are some examples:

Normal becomes abnormal, agree becomes disagree, function becomes malfunction, complete becomes incomplete, official becomes unofficial, understanding becomes misunderstand-

ing, functional becomes dysfunctional, mature becomes immature, fiction becomes nonfiction, regular becomes irregular, legible becomes illegible (Manser, 2004: 12-393).

4.2 Another very common way to change words into antonyms is to give words which are quite different letters.

For example:

Tall and short, good and bad (ibid)

4.3 Getting opposite words by changing only one letter.

For example:

Hire and fire, thin and thick (Manser, 2004: 12-393).

Adding prefixes doesn't always work, like flammable and inflammable pretty much mean the same thing--they're synonyms--but usually prefix juggling works like water on fire (Cruse, 1986).

In English, it is possible to have two opposite words for one word. Happy can have unhappy and sad, for example. So, unhappy and sad are two opposite words for happy. But, if we compare them to each we realize that the two antonyms are different, and they have similarities too. To distinguish them from each, it is better to know what are exactly their meanings. According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, the word sad is defined as (1) "feeling unhappy", (2) "making you unhappy", (3) "not satisfactory", (4) "lonely" and (5) "boring". whereas unhappy is either "not happy" or "worried". In the word focus of sad, unhappy is the first word and described as "sad because of the situation you are in". Sad is also considered to be the opposite of happy. When typing in unhappy, the word focus is the same as in sad. Therefore, and for the other given traits, sad and unhappy are candidates for near-synonyms. The label "mood" for the dimension shared by happy and sad. However, we can speak of unhappy and sad feelings, but only sad, not unhappy, actually occurred significantly often with the nouns face and smile. Thus in this semantic area, the contrast between happy and sad is probably stronger than between happy and unhappy. In addition to that, sad is morphologically simple while unhappy is derived from happy (Lehrer and Lehrer, 1982: 483-501).

Regarding these two words "hire and fire", they are opposite of each other, as their meanings are explained in Oxford dictionary. Hire means employing somebody to do a particular job (Hornby, 2000: 614). Fire means forcing somebody to leave their job (ibid, 477). Similarly, English language just like Arabic language can make antonyms by changing only one letter. The second example "thin and thick" can be also considered for the same thing, because the two letters "ck" in the word "thick" can stand for only one sound which is /k/ sound.

5 CONCLUSION

It is of vital importance to distinguish between synonyms and antonyms.

Antonyms are words that have opposite meanings. As we introduced a simple approach to deal with antonyms, they can help readers and learners understand the meanings of words by showing opposites. When using antonyms always keep in mind the context of the word and then choose the best word that means the opposite. As with synonyms, showing variations in meaning through the use of the correct antonyms will add spark and interest to your writing (Murphy, 2003: 23-38).

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