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INTENTIONAL FUNCTIONS OF OPPOSITIONAL REDUCTION AND INTENSIFIED OPPOSITIONAL CONTRAST IN MODERN ENGLISH

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the use of grammatical oppositions of the English verb in the process of communication, where the paradigmatic relations of contrast between the elements of oppositions can be either neutralized or actualized under the influence of speakers' intentions. The range of these intentions in the sphere of grammatical categories of primary and prospective time, aspect, voice and mood is revealed and described by the authors. It gives the opportunity to see the phenomena in question in the new light and to explain their regular character.

Keywords: paradigm, opposition, neutralization, transposition, grammatical antonymy

One of the most topical problems of modern linguistic investigations is the problem of the contextual use of grammatical oppositions in the process of communication. In this case we deal with the syntagmatic aspect of morphology or *syntagmatic paradigmatics*.

We offer this oxymoronic term to underline the importance of taking into account paradigmatic relations existing in the system of the language for the analysis of speech. It is especially necessary when we deal with the phenomenon of *oppositional reduction* based

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on the neutralization of paradigmatic oppositional contrast in speech and the phenomenon of *grammatical antonymy* based on the intensification of this contrast in the context.

Our working hypothesis is that both phenomena *are affected by speaker's intentions*. In other words, they perform some *intentional functions*. The latter can be defined as semantic functions of grammatical forms in their reference to the semantics of the whole utterance. They show what a speaker means and what he wants to express [1]. The aim of this article is to reveal these functions in reference to grammatical categories of the English verb and thus to show the regular character of both phenomena in question.

It is commonly known that *oppositional reduction* (substitution) is treated in linguistics as the use of one member of the opposition in the position of the other, counter-member. This use can be either stylistically unmarked and regulated by rules (exceptions to rules) (*neutralization*) or stylistically marked if the form stands in sharp contradiction with its regular grammatical meaning being used in contextual conditions uncommon for it (*transposition*) [2].

It's quite clear that intentional functions of speakers using transposition are more distinct than in the case of neutralization. But the latter is also affected by them though not so explicitly. So we shall analyse intentional functions of oppositional reduction in general.

Examination of scientific works, authentic textbooks and works of fiction shows that the following intentional functions of reduction of *primary time* oppositions (present simple – past simple forms) can be distinguished:

1) vivid representation of the past (historic present) when the form of the present tense is used in the context of the past, thus replacing the form of the past tense. The speaker may want to involve the listener in the past situation, to give his suppositions about the course of events (to reconstruct the situation), to make the listener remember some details. For ex.:

“Let us continue the reconstruction. The murderer comes to the cabin, gives her the money and then –” “And then,” said Poirot, she counts it ... The murderer struck (A. Christie);

2) generalized representation of the event (the form of the past tense replaces the form of the present tense). In this case the form of the past tense stands in contrast with the meaning of some adverbial phrase referring the event to the present moment. As a result the time limits are broadened and the past event is represented as belonging to a more general time situation which is stretched out to the present moment inclusive [3]. For ex.:

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But it was only today that I went there (H. Dunmore);

3) demonstration of politeness (the form of the past tense replaces the form of the present tense). Such use of the past tense is especially typical of service workers' speech. For ex.:

(1) Did you want anything else?

(2) How did you want it? (M. Ockenden).

Intentional functions of reduction of *prospective time* oppositions (future – non-future forms) can be summarized as follows:

1) expression of the intention, plan, consequence of the present cause, preference, intensified definiteness (non-future forms replace future ones). For ex.:

(1) “This time I’m not stopping until you are out of here” (F. Bergon) (intention).

(2) “I’m catching the 11.35 boat” (M. Ockenden) (plan).

(3) Joe Romano is going to pay for killing my mother, Tracy swore to herself (S. Sheldon) (consequence of the present cause);

2) description of one's habitual actions, expression of volition (future forms replace non-future ones). For ex.:

(3) Once a year he would go into hospital for a month-long check-up (C. Raine) (habitual action).

(1) ‘Someone is supplying him with drugs,’ Dr Tichner said, but he won't tell me who (S. Sheldon) (volition).

If the subject of the volition is expressed by an inanimate noun we can also distinguish the function of personification. For ex.:

Your car will not start (L. J. Archer).

Reduction of *aspective* oppositions can perform the following functions:

1) representation of the action as a mere fact (not a process) or as an instantaneous event (non-continuous forms replace continuous ones). For ex.:

(1) You work harder than I do, and you deserve a good supper (R.D. Fuller) (fact).

(2) Look out, here comes the doctor (R. Kee) (instantaneous event);

2) expression of the limited duration, repetition of temporary happenings, volition, close connection with the moment of speech, unreal optical and acoustic impressions; vivid representation of duration; demonstration of intensified politeness (continuous forms replace non-continuous ones). For ex.:

(1) Her phone was constantly ringing whenever we were together (C. Weber) (repetition of temporary happenings).

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(2) What were you wanting? (R. Rendell)
(demonstration of intensified politeness).

(3) I'm hearing the echoes again (B. Wood) (unreal acoustic impressions).

The following intentional functions of reduction of *voice* oppositions can be distinguished:

1) omission of the real subject of the action (active forms replace passive ones). For ex.:

Before she could fit it in the lock the door opened (E. Chisnall);

2) laying special emphasis on the function of something (the object is important, but not the place) or on the non-voluntary character of the action. For ex.:

(1) The house is lived in by a Miss Pebmarsh (A. Christie) (function).

(2) I seem to feel that what you've been saying from the beginning is that a human doesn't live, but is lived (W. Saroyan) (non-voluntary character of the action).

Grammatical antonymy is a phenomena opposite to oppositional reduction. It can be characterized as an intensified oppositional contrast. It means that differential features of elements of the opposition become more distinct in speech than they are in the system of the language. In this case both members of the opposition are used in one and the same sentence and the difference between them is purposefully emphasized by the speaker (the phenomenon of grammatical antonymy is described in details in the dissertation by N.B. Boyeva [4]).

The intentional function of grammatical antonymy in the sphere of *primary time* oppositions can be the following:

1) expression of the intensified isolation of the present situation from that in the past. The form of the past tense shows that the situation which took place in the past doesn't take place at the moment of speech. For. ex.:

(1) The police found his (Colonel Abraham's body) only ten minutes ago. I am – I was Colonel Abraham's personal aide (R. Ludlum) (= I am not his aide anymore).

(2) 'I love him, and I have his child.'
'Loved him, you mean' (S.M. Riley) (= You don't love him now);

2) expression of the lack of the isolation of the situation in the past from the present one. For ex.:

'Everything was easier then, we were young.'

'You still are' (D. Steel)

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The following interpretation, proving the lack of isolation in question, is possible here:

‘We were young, we aren’t any longer.’

‘You are mistaken. You are still young’;

3) indication of the wrong time reference. For ex.:

(1) But still Cindy had – has – her frailties (S. Kellerman).

(2) ‘I couldn’t – I can’t – get a plane out of Saba’ (R. Ludlum).

Grammatical antonymy in the sphere of *prospective time* helps to oppose the assumption to a real fact. For ex.:

‘The Antichrist will solidify his power with a show of strength!’ (hypothetical situation).

‘He already has’ (T. Lahaye) (real situation).

Intentional function of grammatical antonymy in the sphere of *aspective* oppositions is to express the isolation of the situation in the past from that which precedes it. For ex.:

Mr. Holm, as he was now called, or Senator Holm, as he had been called before his ascendance to the ultimate rung of the ladder, was a man of simple taste (P. Ustinov).

Intensified contrast in the sphere of *voice* oppositions enables the speaker to realize the following intentions:

1) to oppose the situations in which one and the same person is either a master of the situation or a person dependent on somebody’s actions. For ex.:

‘There’s no one else here?’

‘Only a retreated gardener who controls a pack of mastiff attack dogs and he himself is easily controlled’ (R. Ludlum);

2) to show the possibility or impossibility of fulfilling an action on one’s own initiative. For ex.:

Room number one is that you speak in my courtroom only when you are first spoken to (S. Grisham).

Unlike oppositional reduction grammatical antonymy penetrates the sphere of *mood* oppositions fulfilling the following functions:

1) expression of the contrast of imaginary and real actions. The forms of the subjunctive mood in this case express contrary-to-fact situations [5]. For ex.:

‘So he climbed the steps.’

‘Had he climbed the steps up to the tower and walked round he would have slipped closer to the steps’ (C. Robb) (= he didn’t climb);

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2) expression of the contrast of some assumption to a real fact. The forms of the subjunctive mood express the meaning 'contrary to assumption', 'contrary to expectation' [6]. For ex.:

'If everyone thought as you, there would be chaos!'

'There is chaos in any case, my dear Plagot' (P. Ustinov).

It's necessary to mention that speakers use different means of intensification of the oppositional contrast alongside with the use of forms in contact with each other, which additionally helps to reveal their intentions. These means include:

1) logical stress. For ex.:

'We know me well enough for that.'

'We knew you before you got nerves (D. Hamett);

2) graphical means (italics, punctuation). For ex.:

'You will like Peshawar', said Mr Hassan. 'It's a nice little town.'

'It was, yes, but not now' (P. Theroux);

3) the use of one member of the opposition in a parcellated construction

'He's a good surgeon.'

'Was' (D. Francis);

4) conjunctions, negative particles and different adverbs. For ex.:

(1) I'm your friend. Or I was (C. Robb).

(2) They were simply to observe, and not under any circumstances, to be observed (R. Ludlum).

Summing up the results of our research we would like to say that the mechanism of oppositional reduction and intensified oppositional contrast is based on paradigmatic oppositional relations undergoing some changes in the process of speech under the influence of speakers' intentions. The latter are understood as the purposeful choice of grammatical forms by speakers' for gaining definite aims. The range of these intentions is rather wide and their investigations helps to penetrate deeper into the essence of grammatical categories and their communicative potential. It also gives the opportunity to represent oppositional reduction and grammatical antonymy not as casual but regular phenomena, determined by the human factor.

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