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METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR OPPOSITIONAL ANALYSIS IN PHRASEOLOGY

This article formalizes oppositional analysis as a methodological framework for phraseology, modelling the interaction between structural configurations and semantic contrasts in phraseological units. While traditional phraseological studies focus on etymology, cognitive metaphor, and cross-linguistic equivalence, internal structural contrasts and paradigmatic oppositions remain underexplored. Adapting classical structural semantics and N. Trubetzkoy's oppositional principles, this study establishes that phraseological units derive their system-internal values through feature-level contrasts across intralinguistic (internal constituent/syntactic) and interlinguistic (paradigmatic) dimensions.

The research demonstrates that valid phraseological oppositions require a shared conceptual archisememe, at least one differential semantic or pragmatic feature, and paradigmatic equivalence. The framework adapts structural oppositions into four primary categories: privative oppositions, governed by multidimensional markedness across evaluative, stylistic, aspectual, and agentive parameters; gradual oppositions, forming multi-tiered scalar chains; equipollent oppositions, reflecting symmetrical, rival cognitive models; binary oppositions, utilizing structural symmetry to assert total conceptual coverage.

The paper also investigates how internal oxymorons and syntactic parallelism create conceptual dissonance that triggers non-compositional figurative processing. It highlights that phraseological oppositions are contextually fluid, as discourse mechanisms like grammatical negation and pragmatic reframing induce semantic neutralization. Finally, the study operationalizes a four-stage analytical protocol – comprising identification, feature decomposition, classification, and corpus verification – providing a standardized empirical tool for descriptive, comparative, and computational phraseology.

Key words: methodology, phraseology, phraseological unit, oppositional analysis, structural semantics, markedness, paradigmatic relations.

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МЕТОДОЛОГІЧНІ ЗАСАДИ ОПОЗИЦІЙНОГО АНАЛІЗУ У ФРАЗЕОЛОГІЇ

Дослідження формалізує опозиційний аналіз у статусі методологічної платформи фразеологічних розвідок, що дає змогу реконструювати механізми взаємодії структурних моделей і семантичних опозицій у межах фразеологічного складу мови. Попри значний доробок традиційної фразеології в царині етимології, когнітив-

ної метафоризації та міжмовної відповідності, механізми формування внутрішніх структурних контрастів і парадигматичних опозицій досі залишаються системно не осмисленими. Спираючись на теоретичні положення структурної семантики та теорію опозицій Н. Трубецького, дослідження доводить, що фразеологічні одиниці здобувають свої внутрішньосистемні значення через диференційні ознакові контрасти на інтралінгвальному (внутрішньокomпонентному / синтаксичному) й інтерлінгвальному (парадигматичному) рівнях.

Доведено, що критеріями верифікації фразеологічної опозиції виступають наявність інваріантної концептуальної архісеми, релевантної диференційної (семантичної або прагматичної) ознаки й парадигматичної взаємозамінності одиниць. У межах розробленої моделі класичні опозиції диференційовано за чотирма категоріями: привативні (базуються на багатоаспектній маркованості за оцінними, стилістичними, граматико-аспектними та агентивними параметрами); градуальні (формують багаторівневі скалярні ланцюги); еквіполентні (відображають симетричні, конкуруючі когнітивні моделі); бінарні (спираються на симетричні контрасти для експлікації абсолютної концептуальної повноти).

З'ясовано, що внутрішні оксиморони та синтаксичний паралелізм створюють концептуальний дисонанс, який запускає некомпозиційне фігуративне прочитання. Наголошено на контекстуальній гнучкості фразеологічних опозицій, оскільки граматичне заперечення та прагматичне переосмислення спричиняють семантичну нейтралізацію. Обґрунтовано чотириетапну аналітичну процедуру (ідентифікація, компонентна декомпозиція, класифікація, корпусна верифікація), яка може слугувати стандартизованим інструментом для описової, з'ясованої та комп'ютерної фразеології.

Ключові слова: методологія, фразеологія, фразеологічна одиниця, опозиційний аналіз, структурна семантика, маркованість, парадигматичні відношення.

Formulation of the problem. Phraseology is treated as an independent linguistic domain concerned with fixed or semi-fixed multi-word expressions that function as single semantic units and frequently resist literal compositional reading (Alisoy, 2025: 72–73; Qizi, 2025: 141; Tursunova, 2025: 59). Historically, the study of phraseology centered on etymology (Semeniuk, Potapenko, 2023), cognitive metaphor (Lakoff, Johnson, 2003; Gibbs, 1994), structural stability (Wray, 2002), and cross-linguistic equivalence (Яшук, 2014: 83). However, the precise structural and semantic mechanisms that govern internal contrast within phraseological configurations and the paradigmatic relations established between opposing phraseological units remain an underexplored facet of structural semantics.

Oppositional analysis, pioneered by N. Trubetzkoy in phonology and expanded by R. Jakobson, L. Hjelmslev, and J. Lyons into grammar and lexicology, posits that linguistic elements derive their system-internal values through contrast with other elements within a paradigm. In lexical semantics, oppositions manifest in antonymy, synonymy, hyponymy, and complementary distribution (Cruse, 1986; Єфремова, 2001: 47). In phraseology applying oppositional methods presents theoretical challenges due to the complex interaction between the literal constituents of an idiom and its figurative sense (Cacciari, Tabossi, 2014; Glucksberg, 2001), syntactic fixedness vs. lexical variability (Nunberg et al., 1994; Moon, 1998), idiomatic markedness, evaluative polarity, and pragmatic stance (Fernando, 1996).

This research aims to formalize oppositional analysis as a methodological framework for phraseology by modelling the interaction between structural configurations and semantic contrasts in phraseologi-

cal units. The specific **research objectives** are as follows: 1) to examine classical theories of markedness and opposition to assess their theoretical adaptability and boundaries within phraseology; 2) to adapt oppositional criteria to the investigation of phraseological units; 3) to analyze the interplay between formal syntactic configurations and semantic oppositions in the construction of phraseological meaning; 4) to empirically validate the methodological framework for oppositional analysis in phraseology.

Presenting the main research material. Oppositional analysis originates in Ferdinand de Saussure's insight that language is a system of pure values where signs are defined negative-relationally – by what they are not. Representatives of the Prague Linguistic Circle operationalized this concept. They demonstrated that linguistic units are organized into paradigms through feature contrasts, and established the universality of binary markedness, distinguishing marked terms (possessing a defining feature) from unmarked terms (lacking or neutral toward it). Structural semantics transposed these principles to the lexicon decomposing lexical meaning into minimal semantic components and demonstrating that lexical oppositions extend beyond binary antonymy to include complementaries, converses, and directional opposites.

When adapting structural oppositional theory to phraseology, linguists encounter complex structural lexical items. A phraseological unit is not an atomic signifier; it is a complex, composite signifier characterized by syntactic compositionality at the surface level and semantic unity at the deep level (Pulman, 1993). Phraseological stability is defined by fixed structural templates, making the application of oppositional principles twofold.

To establish a phraseological opposition between two separate phraseological units or within the inter-

nal constituents of a single multi-word unit, three structural conditions should be satisfied: common basis of comparison, differential feature and paradigmatic equivalence.

As far as the common base is concerned, the opposing units must share an underlying conceptual archisememe or syntactic framework (Cruse, 1986). Without a shared semantic base, opposition dissolves into mere divergence. The phraseological units should also differ by at least one explicit semantic, structural, or pragmatic component, such as positive vs. negative evaluation, or active vs. passive agency. In addition, phraseological units must occupy comparable functional distributions within the linguistic system, allowing them to substitute or contrast with one another in equivalent syntactic slots.

Within phraseology, these relational contrasts operate across intralinguistic and interlinguistic oppositions. In intralinguistic (internal) oppositions, contrasts are embedded directly within the internal syntax and constituent lexicon of a single phraseological unit. These manifest through coordinate constructions, parallel clauses, or internal oxymorons, such as the spatial-temporal span in *from rags to riches*, *thick and thin*, or the polar choices in *sink or swim*. In interlinguistic (systemic/paradigmatic) oppositions relations are indicated between distinct, independent phraseological units that function as structural or semantic antonyms across the lexicon (Fernando, 1996), such as the active/passive divergence between *to take to heart* and *to turn a blind eye*, *to spill the beans* and *to keep one's lips sealed*, or the procedural conflict between *to break ground* and *to hit a brick wall*.

Adapting N. Trubetzkoy's (Trubetzkoy, 1969) classical taxonomy of linguistic oppositions to phraseology yields four primary structural-semantic categories: privative, gradual, equipollent, and binary/complementary oppositions.

A privative opposition occurs when one member of a phraseological pair possesses a specific semantic or structural feature (designated as the marked member) while the other member lacks this feature or remains neutral, functioning as the unmarked member. In phraseological systems, markedness operates across evaluative, stylistic, aspectual, and agentive dimensions.

Evaluative privative oppositions are illustrated by the following example. The neutral expression *to keep an eye on* functions as the unmarked member lacking heightened intensity. In contrast, *to keep a hawk's eye on* or *to watch like a hawk* carries the differential feature of intense vigilance, making them marked members of the paradigm. Similarly, *to pay attention* serves as the unmarked baseline, whereas *to hang on*

someone's every word is marked by extreme, subordinate attentiveness.

The mechanics of stylistic privative oppositions can be observed in the following case. Standard verbal expressions or euphemisms like *to die* or *to pass away* serve as stylistically unmarked options distributed across formal and neutral registers. Conversely, the idiomatic units *to kick the bucket*, *to bite the dust*, and *to push up daisies* are marked by the presence of informal, irreverent, or morbid humor (Moon, 1998).

The contrastive nature of aspectual privative oppositions may be evidenced in the following example. The state-descriptive idiom *to know the ropes* represents an unmarked condition regarding action initiation. The variant expression *to learn the ropes* introduces the specific differential feature of inceptive action, making it aspectually marked. The same with *to be in the loop*, which expresses a static state, whereas *to bring someone into the loop* or *to get in the loop* is marked for causative or inceptive aspect.

The following operational pattern exemplifies agency privative oppositions. The active construction *to hold one's tongue* or *to pull oneself together* features intentional agentive control. By contrast, *to have one's tongue tied* or *to fall apart at the seams* carries the differential feature of passive subjugation or loss of voluntary agency.

Privative relations demonstrate how phraseological systems generate semantic nuance by introducing specialized conceptual constraints to a shared semantic nucleus. The unmarked phraseological unit typically displays a broader contextual distribution, whereas the marked counterpart is restricted to specific stylistic, pragmatic, or cognitive environments (Fernando, 1996).

Gradual oppositions consist of units that express varying degrees of a shared continuous property (Cruse, 1986). Phraseological units form continuous scalar chains across dimensions such as intensity, temporal duration, emotional state, and financial status. For example, a scalar phraseological opposition measuring the concept of intellectual capacity and mental stability progresses continuously across five distinct idiomatic points: starting at the severe negative pole with *off one's rocker* or *out of one's tree*, moving to the mild negative defect expressed by *a sandwich short of a picnic* or *not the sharpest tool in the shed*, advancing to the neutral baseline of *of sound mind*, progressing to high competence with *on the ball*, and reaching the positive extreme of acute intelligence represented by *sharp as a tack*.

Similarly, the continuum of financial solvency exhibits a multi-tiered gradual opposition structured across six distinct scalar degrees. At the lower pole lies

extreme financial deficit, instantiated by expressions such as *flat broke*, *down and out*, and *without a penny to one's name*. This transitions into moderate financial deficit (*in the red*, *in a tight spot*) and marginal deficit (*living paycheck to paycheck*, *keeping one's head above water*), where physical survival remains possible despite constant pressure. The continuum reaches an equilibrium baseline with neutral expressions of balance (*making ends meet*, *breaking even*), before ascending to comfortable solvency (*well-off*, *in the black*) and ultimately reaching extreme affluence, denoted by idiomatic units like *rolling in money*, *made of money*, and *living high on the hog*.

In equipollent oppositions, the relationship between opposing units is entirely symmetrical; neither member can be reduced to the simple presence or absence of a single feature, nor do they lie on a continuous linear scale (Trubetzkoy, 1969). Instead, both members are positively characterized by distinct, non-overlapping semantic features of equal systemic status.

This structural-semantic contrast is clearly illustrated in phraseological units denoting problem-solving strategies. Thus, the phraseological unit *to take the bull by the horns* embodies a proactive approach marked by positive semes of directness, physical confrontation, and courage, while expressions *to beat around the bush* and *to bury one's head in the sand* occupy the opposing pole, defined by features of indirectness, intentional evasion, and hesitation.

In the domain of problem-solving strategies, phraseological units establish an equipollent opposition between proactive engagement and deliberate avoidance. The idiom *to take the bull by the horns* encodes positive semantic features of directness, confrontational agency, and proactive courage. Conversely, its antonymic counterparts *to beat around the bush* and *to bury one's head in the sand* occupy the opposing pole, defined by explicit features of indirectness, intentional evasion, and hesitation.

The domain of resource management, for example, exhibits an equipollent opposition between overexertion and measured restraint. *To burn the candle at both ends* represents an overwork, depletion, and systemic exhaustion. This contrasts sharply with expressions such as *to husband one's resources* or *to pace oneself*, which encode the positive semantic features of deliberate conservation, temporal patience, and sustainable effort.

Neither phraseological unit in these pairs acts as a marked or reduced variant of the other; rather, they represent equivalent, rival cognitive models of human behavior within the phraseological system (Lakoff, Johnson, 2003).

Binary oppositions represent absolute semantic polarization with no intermediate middle ground (Trubetzkoy, 1969). In phraseological units, binary contrasts frequently structure internal coordinate constructions via coordinate conjunctions (*and*, *or*, *nor*) or paired prepositional frameworks (*from... to...*, *through... and...*) as in the following examples.

In the spatial domain, spatial binaries employ fixed paired forms to establish geographic, directional, or scalar totality. Phraseological units such as *from top to bottom*, *far and wide*, *over hill and dale*, *heaven and earth*, and the expanded multinomial *left, right, and center* utilize polar spatial points to encode comprehensive spatial coverage.

Similarly, temporal binaries structure the perception of time through recurring, rhythmic, or boundaries-marking coordinate pairs. Idiomatic units like *day in, day out* and *now and then* quantify cyclical frequency, while *sooner or later* frames temporal inevitability. Phraseological units such as *from cradle to grave* and *from dusk till dawn* establish temporal completeness by explicitly defining the terminal boundaries of a duration.

Internal binary phraseological units rely on structural symmetry to reinforce absolute semantic coverage. By linking diametrically opposed conceptual poles within a single formulaic unit, the phraseology asserts total coverage or universal applicability. For example, the idiom *from A to Z* or *lock, stock, and barrel* signifies absolute completeness precisely because its structural limits span the initial and final boundaries of an ordered domain.

Oppositional analysis of phraseological units involves investigating how semantic contrasts generate holistic idiomatic meanings (Cacciari, Tabossi, 1993; Nunberg et al., 1994). By embedding oxymoronic elements or structural asymmetries, idioms produce a conceptual dissonance that serves as the catalyst for figurative interpretation.

Phraseological units frequently internalize semantically contradictory lexical components to symbolize complex or inherently unstable phenomena: *an open secret* – merges the objective lexical sense of a secret (something intentionally hidden) with the epistemic accessibility of being open (something universally known); *to make haste slowly* – pairs the rapid velocity implied by making haste with the deliberate, cautious manner of acting slowly; *a deafening silence* – juxtaposes the total acoustic absence of silence with the extreme auditory intensity of being deafening.

The internal opposition within these units creates a semantic paradox that forces the interpreter to abandon literal compositional processing and shift to a higher-order metaphorical domain (Glucksberg, 2001). The

interaction between the opposing positive and negative features of the constituents of the idioms yields an emergent, non-compositional idiomatic meaning that cannot be reduced to either constituent in isolation.

Structural contrasts are often reinforced through formal syntactic parallelism, where two clauses or prepositional phrases mirror each other syntactically while contrasting semantically: *easy come, easy go* – the structure relies on two parallel clauses (the first clause combines the adverb *easy* with the verb *come*, conveying the semantic domain of acquisition; this is mirrored by the second clause combining the adverb *easy* with the verb *go*, conveying the semantic domain of loss); *out of sight, out of mind* – two prepositional phrases mirror one another (the first pairs the preposition *out of* with the noun *sight*, operating in the domain of visual perception; the second pairs the preposition *out of* with the noun *mind*, operating in the domain of cognitive attention); *in for a penny, in for a pound* – mirrors the prepositional frame *in for a (noun)*, contrasting the minor commitment of a *penny* with the total commitment of a *pound*.

Oppositional boundaries between phraseological units are not immutable static configurations; they are susceptible to contextual manipulation, pragmatic softening, and semantic neutralization (Moon, 1998). Neutralization occurs when a specific discourse context eliminates the functional opposition between two paradigmatically opposed phraseological units.

Pragmatic equalization may be found in the paradigmatic opposition between *to add fuel to the fire* (which carries the feature of exacerbating a conflict) and *to pour oil on troubled waters* (which carries the feature of pacifying a conflict). In discourse analysis, the interaction between opposing idiomatic units frequently results in functional equivalence under specific pragmatic conditions. For example, in political analysis of ineffective diplomacy, an attempt to *pour oil on troubled waters* (intended to mitigate conflict) may be pragmatically re-framed as functionally identical to *adding fuel to the fire* (exacerbating conflict) when the intervention yields unintended escalation.

Grammatical negation applied to idiomatic units alters oppositional dynamics by transforming polar opposites into scalar intermediates rather than simple inversions. Thus, grammatically negating the highly marked positive idiom *to be on cloud nine*, which conveys extreme joy, into *not to be on cloud nine* does not automatically shift its meaning to the polar negative state of extreme misery (*in the depths of despair*). Instead, negating the expression neutralizes the marked feature of extreme intensity, shifting the overall phraseological meaning toward a neutral center of mild dissatisfaction or uninspired neutrality.

To establish a methodological framework for oppositional analysis in phraseology a four-stage analytical procedure may be proposed. The stage of identification and extraction involves isolating target phraseological units from corpora or lexicographical databases to establish their constituent boundaries and syntactic templates. The stage of feature matrix decomposition deconstructs the unit's meaning into atomic semantic components, delineating the shared archiseme from key differential semes. In the stage of oppositional classification, the extracted units should be mapped against a four-fold structural taxonomy (privative, gradual, equipollent, and binary). Finally, the stage of contextual and pragmatic verification tests the stability of these structural oppositions in natural language corpora (e.g. BNC), evaluating instances of contextual neutralization, syntactic modification, and pragmatic shift.

This procedure may be exemplified by the binary complementary opposition of phraseological units *to keep one's head: to lose one's head*. For identification stage the syntactic forms are identified as sharing the identical verbal pattern consisting of a verb followed by a possessive pronoun and the target noun *head*. At decomposition stage the shared archiseme is isolated as the concept of maintaining emotional control under stress. Phraseological unit *to keep one's head* is assigned the differential seme of retaining rational composure, whereas phraseological unit *to lose one's head* is assigned the differential seme of losing rational composure. At the stage of classification the pair is categorized as a binary complementary opposition evaluated along the parameter of rational control. Phraseological unit *to lose one's head* is designated as the marked member carrying the feature of cognitive disruption.

Corpus verification (stage 4) across contemporary texts demonstrates discourse peculiarities of the given opposition.

Conclusions. The formalization of oppositional analysis within phraseology addresses a critical methodological gap in semantics, establishing that phraseological units derive their system-internal values through systematic, feature-level contrasts. Oppositional mechanisms operate both intralinguistically and interlinguistically. Markedness governs evaluative stance, register, aspectual nuance, and pragmatic force. Phraseological oppositions are not static dictionary entries; they interact dynamically with discourse constraints. The standardized methodological framework for oppositional analysis in phraseology lies in integrating identification, feature matrix decomposition, classification, and corpus verification.

Future research should extend this methodological framework by integrating computational distributional semantics to measure the semantic distances and oppositional vectors of phraseological units across large-scale textual corpora.

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