

**PRESUPPOSITIONS ARISING THROUGH ANTONYMIC
RELATIONS: EVIDENCE FROM JENNIFER EGAN'S "THE CANDY HOUSE"
AND ULUG'BEK HAMDAM'S "MUVOZANAT"**

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Introduction

Alongside the classical lexical (change-of-state) trigger, a related but distinct source of presupposition can be identified in texts that organize a character's self-perception or an entire fictional world around a pair of antonymic concepts. It is argued here that the use of one term from such a pair presupposes, for the reader, the continued relevance of its opposite, even where that opposite is never explicitly named in the same sentence. This mechanism has received comparatively little attention in the presupposition literature, which has traditionally focused on aspectual verbs and definite descriptions [Karttunen, 1973; Levinson, 1983] rather than on the lexical-semantic structure of antonym pairs as such [Lyons, 1977; Cruse, 1986].

Following the classical lexical-semantic classification, three types of antonymy are relevant to this analysis: gradable antonyms (young/old, strong/weak), which admit degrees and an implicit scalar norm; contradictory antonyms (alive/dead, sane/insane), which admit no middle ground and encode a binary switch; and converse antonyms (buy/sell, track/elude), which encode a reciprocal social relation between two role-defined categories of participant. A key theoretical premise of this study, following Cruse, is that antonyms are never processed in isolation: the very act of lexicalizing one pole of an opposition cognitively activates its counterpart as part of the same semantic field, regardless of whether that counterpart is mentioned in the same sentence. Literary authors, it is argued here, exploit this automatic co-activation as a resource for presupposing thematic content without asserting it.

Analysis: Converse Antonymy in "The Candy House"

In Jennifer Egan's novel "The Candy House" (2022), the fictional world is divided into two converse-antonymic categories: "eluders," who refuse to upload their memories to the collective-consciousness technology "Own Your Unconscious," and "counters," the data specialists who track them. The novel characterizes the counters as people who, as the text puts it, "understood numbers before...language" (p. 81). This lexicalized definition itself carries a converse-type antonymic presupposition: describing counters as understanding numbers before language presupposes, by contrast, the existence of an unmarked human norm - understanding language before, or instead of, numbers - against which the counters' quantifying mindset is being marked as deviant.

The publisher's own description of the opposing category deepens this analysis: eluders are introduced as those who "understand the price of taking a bite of the Candy House," a phrase that presupposes, via the fairy-tale allusion embedded in the title itself (the candy house of Hansel and Gretel), a shared cultural expectation that a house made

of sweets conceals danger - an expectation the counters, by definition, are presupposed not to share, or not to act upon. The reader cannot process the marked category "counter" without presupposing the unmarked linguistic/human norm the phrase implicitly invokes; and this presupposed norm is precisely what the antonymic "eluders" are said to defend by refusing the technology altogether. It is worth noting that this converse pair is reinforced at the level of plot through the character of Gregory Bouton, Bix's own son, whose choice to become an eluder retroactively presupposes an implicit family-level norm - that a Bouton would naturally be a counter - which his decision is then narratively marked as violating.

Analysis: Gradable Antonymy in "Muvozanat"

A comparable antonymic presupposition, expressed through a character's own interior monologue, appears in Ulug'bek Hamdam's novel "Muvozanat" ("Balance", 2003). Lying alone after a moment of painful reflection, the protagonist Yusuf asks himself: "qirchillama qirq yosh ostonasida nega bunchalar abgorman, bunchalar xo'rlanganman?" ("why, on the threshold of a vigorous fortieth year, am I so broken, so humiliated?"). The adjective qirchillama ("vigorous, in one's prime") and the predicate abgor/xo'rlangan ("broken, humiliated") form a culturally gradable antonym pair built into a single rhetorical question. The word qirchillama alone presupposes a socially shared norm - that a man at this stage of life is expected to be strong and flourishing - and it is precisely this presupposed norm that Yusuf's factual state (abgor, xo'rlangan) is measured against and found to violate.

This gradable antonymic presupposition also resonates at the level of conceptual metaphor: following Lakoff and Johnson's account of how abstract states are structured by embodied, physical source domains, the very title muvozanat ("balance") invokes the physical image schema of an upright, stable body, against which Yusuf's abgor state is conceptualized as a kind of fall or collapse. The antonym pair qirchillama/abgor is thus not a purely lexical opposition but is grounded in this broader metaphorical structure, which allows a single adjective to presuppose an entire evaluative framework - physical, social and moral - through which the reader is expected to judge the protagonist's situation.

Discussion

Structurally, the Uzbek example differs from Egan's converse-antonym pair in an important respect: while counter/eluder describes a static social role assigned to different individuals, qirchillama/abgor describes a single individual's deviation from a scalar, age-linked norm, situating the presupposition within the psychology of one character rather than within a systemic social taxonomy. This distinction has a further theoretical implication: gradable antonym-based presupposition, as in the Uzbek example, typically requires the reader to reconstruct an implicit norm located on a scale (a certain degree of vigor "expected" at a certain age), whereas converse antonym-based presupposition, as in the English example, requires the reader to reconstruct an entire social system of roles (counters as a class defined against eluders as a class).

Comparing the two cases shows that antonymic presupposition can operate at the level of a systemic social taxonomy (Egan's counters/eluders) as well as at the level of a single character's self-directed rhetorical question (Hamdam's qirchillama/abgor), and, in Egan's case, can further be reinforced by cultural allusion embedded in the antonym pair itself (candy house/danger), while in Hamdam's case it is reinforced by an embodied conceptual metaphor (balance/collapse). In both English and Uzbek material, the mechanism proves productive and textually verifiable: the presupposed pole of the antonym pair is never asserted, yet it is precisely what gives the asserted, opposite pole its narrative and emotional force.

Conclusion

For comparative and translation studies, this suggests that rendering such antonym-based titles and character-defining terms in a target language requires preserving not only the denotative opposition but also the implicit normative or cultural expectation the opposition presupposes; a lexicographically "accurate" translation of qirchillama as merely "vigorous" or of eluder as merely "one who evades," for instance, would strip the term of the very presuppositional weight that gives it its literary function. Recognizing antonymy-based presupposition as a distinct mechanism therefore refines the classical typology of presupposition triggers and offers a productive avenue for further comparative research into English and Uzbek literary discourse, particularly in genres - such as the psychological novel and the near-future dystopia - where a text's central conceptual opposition is often encoded in its very title.

References:

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