



# LUND UNIVERSITY

## What makes a good antonym pair? A corpus-based study of patterns of use in context

Paradis, Carita; Löhndorf, Simone; van de Weijer, Joost; Willners, Caroline

2012

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Paradis, C., Löhndorf, S., van de Weijer, J., & Willners, C. (2012). *What makes a good antonym pair? A corpus-based study of patterns of use in context*. Abstract from AELCO, VIII Congreso Internacional, 2012, Almeria, Spain.

*Total number of authors:*

4

### General rights

Unless other specific re-use rights are stated the following general rights apply:

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Read more about Creative commons licenses: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117  
221 00 Lund  
+46 46-222 00 00

# What makes a good antonym pair?

## A corpus study of patterns of use in context

KEYWORDS: opposition, adjectives, symmetry, scale

Carita Paradis, Simone Löhndorf, Joost van de Weijer & Caroline Willners  
Lund University, Sweden

Recent research has established that there are a number of opposable words in language that have special status as canonical antonyms (Paradis et al. 2009). Antonym canonicity is defined as the degree to which antonymous word forms are entrenched in memory and conventionalized as pairs in language. Examples of antonym pairs that are strongly canonical are also expressive of properties of a salient dimension, e.g. SPEED *slow–fast*, LUMINOSITY *dark–light*, STRENGTH *weak–strong*, SIZE *small–large*, WIDTH *narrow–wide*, MERIT *bad–good* and THICKNESS *thin–thick*. Corpus-driven as well as corpus-based investigations, using the BNC for English data, show that these pairs are frequent in language as individual words, and they co-occur significantly more often in the same sentence than other semantically related word pairs.

In search for robust answers to *why* some antonymous word pairs have special status as canonical antonyms, this paper presents the results of a corpus investigation of the pairwise usage patterns of 18 pairs in terms of the semantics of the adjectives themselves, the nominals they modify, the constructions in which they are used, and the extent to which they are used in metaphorical contexts or not. The fact that they are all high frequency words in language, suggests that they are ontologically versatile and useful across a wide range of different contexts, genres and registers, and their high co-occurrence frequencies, in particular in frames (Murphy, Paradis, Willners & Jones 2009), are indicative of symmetry of usage patterns across the members of the pairs. This paper explores the hypothesis that symmetry of usage is an important factor for antonym canonicity. We investigate the usage profiles of the above-mentioned pairs of canonical antonyms in English in order to find out to what extent their usage patterns are symmetrical across the above 18 pairs. The data consist of 500 randomly selected occurrences of each adjective in their contexts (approx. 18 000 occurrences). Descriptive statistics points to similarities across the pairs, but a regression analysis will be carried out in order to establish to what extent the usage patterns are symmetrical across all 18 pairs.

### References

- Murphy, M.L., C. Paradis, C. Willners & S. Jones. 2009. Discourse functions of antonymy: a cross-linguistic investigation of Swedish and English. *Journal of pragmatics* 41.(11). 2159–2184.
- Paradis, C., C. Willners & S. Jones. 2009. Good and bad opposites: using textual and experimental techniques to measure antonym canonicity. *The Mental Lexicon* 4(3). 380–429.

