



## **Stylistic Features of Antonyms in Proverbs (Based on the Concepts of Scarcity and Abundance)**

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**Abstract.** *Antonyms play a significant role in shaping the semantic depth and expressive impact of proverbs. In particular, antonymic oppositions constructed on the basis of the concepts of scarcity and abundance hold special importance in proverbs from both structural-semantic and stylistic perspectives. Through oppositions such as little–much, singular–plural, and scarcity–abundance, folk wisdom is generalized in a concise and compact manner. This article examines the stylistic functions of antonyms expressing the concepts of scarcity and abundance in proverbs, their role in creating expressiveness, as well as their contribution to syntactic parallelism, antithesis, rhythmic harmony, and linguocultural nuances of meaning. The study demonstrates that scarcity–abundance relations are closely associated with such notions as power, unity, social superiority, and collective consciousness. The analysis of Azerbaijani proverbs has revealed that the concepts of scarcity and abundance play a crucial role in the national mentality and social behavioral patterns of the people.*

**Keywords:** *antonym, proverbs, scarcity, abundance, style, semantics*

### **1. Introduction**

Proverbs occupy a special place in the language system as they preserve the historical memory, cultural heritage, and national mentality of a people. One of the important lexical devices that creates stylistic expressiveness in paremiological structures is antonymy. In world languages, antonyms are understood as words that stand in a semantic relation of opposition. In linguistics, antonyms are defined as lexical units that are opposite in meaning or function as the semantic negation or antithesis of another word, possessing a stable lexical value. In research, antonyms are considered pairs of words that stand in opposition along a certain semantic scale and are often used in a connected manner, becoming lexicalized as opposites (Jones, 2002, p. 179). By creating contrast between concepts belonging to opposing semantic fields, antonyms enhance the imagery and expressiveness of speech. In proverbs, antonyms serve the functions of deepening wisdom, comparison, logical contrast, and deriving ethical conclusions.

The concepts of scarcity and abundance represent universal semantic categories of language. Although these notions function grammatically as indicators of quantity, in proverbs they operate as conceptual units carrying social, moral, philosophical, and cultural meaning. In folk thinking, "little" is often associated with frugality, moderation, quality, wisdom, and simplicity, while "much" is linked to abundance, strength, wealth, and sometimes excess and disorder. The study shows that the relationship between scarcity and abundance in proverb discourse is one of the significant sociocultural constructs. This binary opposition expresses broader semantic layers such as individuality, justice, social pressure, and ethical behavior. As noted in linguistic research, modern studies related to the phenomenon of antonymy in language are characterized by a high scientific level; the achievements obtained in earlier periods regarding antonymy open wide opportunities for studying this phenomenon in theoretical and comparative-typological frameworks, as well as for a deeper understanding of the functional specificity of this semantic category in the language system (Khalilova, 2021, p. 4). In proverbs, antonyms related to scarcity and abundance provide insight into how societies conceptualize relations between individual and collective, weak and strong, and exceptional and ordinary.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

The material of this study consists of Azerbaijani proverbs expressing the concepts of scarcity and abundance. The proverbs were selected according to semantic fields such as quantity, social relations, and the nature of scarcity and abundance. A comprehensive linguistic approach was applied in the study. Descriptive methods were used to identify the semantic and structural features of scarcity and abundance in proverbs; linguocultural methods were employed to examine the place of these concepts in the cultural worldview and collective consciousness of the people; and contextual-pragmatic analysis was applied to clarify the influence of proverbs on social behavior, collectivism, and individual relations.

## **3. Results**

The study revealed that the concepts of scarcity and abundance in proverbs are not merely quantitative indicators but conceptual units carrying social and cultural meanings. In many languages, abundance is generally associated with unity, strength, superiority, and social support, while scarcity is sometimes linked with weakness, isolation, or individuality. However, in Azerbaijani proverbs, scarcity often functions as a symbol of wisdom, quality, and distinction. This demonstrates that although the relations between scarcity and abundance carry universal meanings, their forms of expression and cultural interpretation are shaped by the historical, social, and cultural characteristics of each nation. Thus, it has been established that through proverbs, the concept of scarcity and abundance is formed both at the linguistic and cultural levels and constitutes an essential element of collective thinking.

## **4. Discussion**

In linguistics, antonyms are characterized as lexical units that stand in relations of opposite meaning. As noted, antonymic words cover everything related to the material and spiritual world in reality and allow these to be revealed through comparison (Afandiyeva, 1980, p. 85). They create semantic opposition, thereby generating comparison and contrast in speech. In the lexical-semantic system, antonyms perform functions such as contrast, antithesis formation, emotional expressiveness, generalization, and poetic effect. Antonyms are, in essence, words with different phonetic structures

that express opposite aspects of concepts related to quantity, quality, time, and space (Hasanov, 2005, p. 144). These linguistic units create a unity of structural stability and semantic intensity in proverbs. The use of antonyms in paremiological texts forms deeper layers of meaning.

*Az ye, saz ye, çox yemək xəstəlikdir* — Eat little, eat properly; overeating is a disease.

*Az yeyən rahat görər, çox yeyən cərahət* — He who eats little lives in comfort, he who eats much suffers pain.

*Az yeyər — ariqlar, çox yeyər — zarıldar* — He who eats little becomes thin, he who eats much groans. (Atalar sözləri, 2013, p. 62).

In these examples, the word *az* ("little") denotes a healthy lifestyle, while the repetition of *çox* ("much") creates a quantitative and consequential antonymy. In general, the scarcity–abundance opposition belongs to the main group of quantitative antonyms and has a universal character. Therefore, scholars emphasize that universality is one of the key features of antonymy and an important semantic relation for describing the lexicon of any language (Murphy, 2003, p. 40). Indeed, antonymy is considered an archetype of lexical semantic relations (Cruse, 2000, p. 169).

The concepts of scarcity and abundance are semantic constructs with their own distinctive nature. They are evaluated differently in cultural consciousness. The concepts expressed by antonymic words are related to human activity and attitudes toward the surrounding world (Jafarov, 2007, p. 37). In proverbs, the scarcity concept formed by the antonymy of *az* ("little") and *çox* ("much") expresses moderation, humility, measure, quality, wisdom, and simplicity, while the abundance concept denotes richness, wealth, strength, expansiveness, collectivism, and sometimes excess. This conceptual opposition generates deep philosophical and ethical conclusions in proverbs. For example:

*Az tamah çox bəla gətirər* — Little greed brings much trouble. (Atalar sözü, 2004, p. 46).

One of the main stylistic functions of antonyms in proverbs is the creation of antithesis. Antonyms play an indispensable role in the formation of antithesis and oxymoron, which are powerful expressive means (Hummatova, 2024, p. 45). In paremiological expressions, the opposition between *az* and *çox* strengthens the idea. Antonyms also play an important role in enhancing emotional and logical emphasis.

*Az ilə çoxun oyunu olmaz* — There is no game between little and much.

*Az iş çox sözdən yaxşıdır* — A little work is better than many words.

*Az işdən çox iş çıxar* — From little work, much results. (Atalar sözləri, 2013, p. 61).

In these proverbs, antonymy creates an ethical behavioral model. The rhythmic harmony created by antonyms contributes positively to the memorability of proverbs:

*Az olur, küsür, çox olur, qusur* — When there is little, it is dissatisfied; when there is much, it overflows.

*Aza qane olmayan çoxu tapamaz* — He who is not satisfied with little will not find much. (Atalar sözü, 2004, p. 46).

Here, syntactic parallelism and antonymy form rhythmic unity. Antonyms also play an important role in the concise expression of folk philosophy in proverbs:

*Azı bilməyən çoxu heç bilməz* — He who does not know little cannot know much. (Atalar sözü, 2004, p. 47).

*Çox istəyən azdan da olur* — He who desires much also loses even the little. (Atalar sözü, 2004, p. 76).

*Çox yemək adamı az yeməkdən də qoyar* — Overeating deprives a person even of eating little. (Atalar sözü, 2004, p. 77).

*Az verirsən azdırır, çox verirsən qızdırır* — If you give little, it provokes; if you give much, it excites. (Atalar sözləri, 2013, p. 62).

Proverbs confirm that "little" and "much" constitute the most productive antonymic model. Antonyms increase the expressive power of speech by creating contrast, as their most important feature is opposition to one another (Cavadova, 2022, p. 27). The antonyms "little" and "much" express ethical norms and life philosophy in proverbs in a distinctive way:

*Az danış, çox eşit* — Speak little, listen much.

*Aza qane ol, çoxu Allahdan istə* — Be content with little and ask much from God.

*Aza qane olmayan çoxa yetişməz* — He who is not content with little will not reach much. (Atalar sözləri, 2013, p. 62).

In proverbs, the little–much opposition becomes a generalized expression of social behavior, labor, relationships, wisdom, and life experience. In paremiology, antonyms often have a didactic character, as proverbs are structured as advice, warning, and generalized conclusions.

*Az ye, öz çörəyini ye* — Eat little, eat your own bread. (Atalar sözləri, 2013, p. 62).

As can be seen, a logical relationship is established between antonymic words and the concepts of moderation and honesty. One of the main features distinguishing antonymic words from other lexical units is that they enter human life from an early age; thus, even in early childhood, when full communicative competence is not yet developed, we are able to express oppositions such as sweet candy versus bitter pepper, cold water versus hot tea, and tasty food versus tasteless diet. In this way, initial and primitive ideas about the contradictory nature of life, objects, and relations are formed (Gasimova, 2017, p. 70).

The concepts of scarcity and abundance reflect the national system of thinking of the people. In Azerbaijani paremiology, "little" is most often presented as a value of moderation and moral worth. "Much," on the other hand, is sometimes used as a symbol of excess. In folk thinking, the violation of limits is evaluated negatively. This demonstrates the importance of the principles of balance and measure in cultural codes. The concepts of scarcity and abundance are universal categories of human cognition. In proverbs, this opposition manifests itself in various domains such as quantitative variation and the relationship between quality and quantity. In some cases, "little" acquires a positive connotation of quality, while "much" is associated with a negatively marked semantics. For example:

*Az danış, çox iş gör* — Speak little, do much.

Here, "little" represents a positive behavioral model, while "much" expresses activity and productivity. Antonyms give proverbs emotional intensity:

*Az söylə, çox eşit* — Speak little, listen much. (Atalar sözləri, 2013, p. 62).

*Çox bilib az danışmaq igidin ləngəridir* — A hero's dignity lies in knowing much and speaking little.

*Çox bilirsən, az danış* — If you know much, speak little. (Melikova, 2016, p. 16).

Here, the words "little" and "much" serve didactic and educational functions. Proverbs confirm that the antonymy of scarcity and abundance is an expression of national mentality.

In Azerbaijani proverbs, the concept of scarcity is not equated with weakness; rather, it is presented as a carrier of truth, wisdom, and courage. The scarcity–abundance opposition reflects a philosophical and ethical idea that justice is not always determined by numerical superiority. In proverbs, the relationship between scarcity and abundance goes beyond numerical limits and becomes a cultural metaphor of human relations and social values. In paremiology, the concepts of scarcity and abundance reflect deep socio-cultural and philosophical perceptions related to human relations and moral values. Azerbaijani proverbs show that although abundance may sometimes symbolize negativity, scarcity often functions as an expression of truth, courage, wisdom, and independent thinking. Through metaphor, contrast, and concise linguistic structure, proverbs preserve cultural perspectives on conformity, resistance, justice, and social identity. Thus, the study of scarcity and abundance in proverbs is of significant importance in linguocultural analysis, as it demonstrates the clear expression of social values, relationships, and collective human experience in language.

## 5. Conclusion

In proverbs, antonyms expressing the concepts of scarcity and abundance perform important stylistic, semantic, and linguocultural functions. They express values such as balance and moderation in folk thinking. Their use creates antithesis, syntactic parallelism, rhythmic harmony, and expressiveness. Antonyms are not only structural elements of proverbs but also one of the main mechanisms for expressing folk philosophy through language. The study shows that scarcity–abundance antonymy is a productive semantic model in the Azerbaijani paremiological system. Although these antonyms are related to quantity, they carry evaluative and linguocultural meaning. In Azerbaijani proverbs, antonyms appear as a natural and prominent feature of the language.

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