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OPERATIONALISING MEDIEVAL LEXICOGRAPHY AND FOLK LINGUISTICS: A PROVENANCE-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF SEMANTIC OPPOSITION IN ARABIC

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Abstract. The study investigates semantic opposition in Arabic through an integrated framework that combines medieval lexicographical traditions with contemporary folk-linguistic approaches. Classical Arabic scholarship, particularly the lexicographical methodology of Ibn Duraid in Jamharat al-Lugha, provides a rich account of semantic contradiction and oppositional relations among lexical items. At the same time, modern folk-linguistic research demonstrates that speakers' beliefs, cultural practices, and evaluative judgments significantly influence semantic interpretation. Despite the importance of both traditions, little attention has been paid to developing a unified methodological framework capable of integrating historical lexicographical procedures with contemporary corpus evidence and ethnographic data. This study proposes a provenance-based annotation model that operationalises Ibn Duraid's analytical procedures and incorporates folk-linguistic metadata to distinguish lexical antonymy, pragmatic exclusion, and culturally mediated opposition. The proposed framework demonstrates how historical linguistic knowledge can be transformed into a reproducible analytical tool suitable for corpus-based semantic research and language documentation.

Keywords: semantic opposition, al-aḍdād, Arabic lexicography, folk linguistics, Ibn Duraid, corpus linguistics, semantic annotation.

Introduction

Semantic opposition constitutes one of the most fundamental mechanisms through which human languages organise meaning. Concepts are frequently interpreted in relation to their opposites, creating systems of contrast that facilitate categorisation, evaluation, and communication. Within the Arabic linguistic tradition, semantic opposition received considerable scholarly attention and emerged as a significant area of lexicographical and philological inquiry. Classical scholars investigated not only conventional antonymy but also the phenomenon of al-aḍdād, referring to lexical items capable of expressing apparently contradictory meanings.

Among the earliest and most influential scholars to address this phenomenon was Ibn Duraid (d. 321 AH), whose Jamharat al-Lugha contains systematic observations on semantic contradiction, contextual interpretation, and lexical variation. His treatment of oppositional meanings demonstrates a sophisticated awareness of the interaction between lexical meaning, context, and authority. Rather than merely recording contradictory meanings, Ibn Duraid developed analytical procedures for evaluating semantic relations, including contextual interpretation, citation of authorities, measurement of usage distribution, and explicit identification of opposed senses.

In contemporary linguistic scholarship, a parallel interest has emerged within the field of folk linguistics. Unlike traditional lexicography, folk linguistics examines how ordinary speakers conceptualise language and assign meanings to linguistic forms. Research in this area demonstrates that semantic interpretation is often influenced by social beliefs, cultural traditions, ritual practices, and community-based knowledge. Consequently, semantic opposition may arise

not only from lexical structure but also from pragmatic and cultural processes embedded within particular speech communities.

Despite the importance of both medieval lexicographical traditions and modern folk-linguistic research, the two fields have rarely been examined within a common analytical framework. Existing studies typically focus either on historical descriptions of semantic opposition or on contemporary investigations of language beliefs. As a result, there remains no systematic methodology capable of integrating lexicographical evidence, corpus-based observations, and ethnographic data within a single analytical model.

The present study addresses this gap by proposing a provenance-based annotation framework grounded in Ibn Duraid's lexicographical procedures and informed by contemporary folk-linguistic theory. The study seeks to answer four central questions: How can medieval lexicographical methods be transformed into reproducible annotation procedures? How can lexical, pragmatic, and culturally mediated oppositions be distinguished? What role does provenance play in semantic interpretation? And how can corpus evidence and community judgments be combined in semantic analysis?

Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative corpus-based design combined with ethnographic data collection techniques. The primary historical source is Ibn Duraid's Jamharat al-Lugha, from which contrastive lexical entries and analytical procedures are extracted. Contemporary data are drawn from formal written texts, exegetical materials, rhetorical discourse, and colloquial speech corpora. Additional evidence is obtained through structured folk-linguistic elicitation designed to document speakers' beliefs, evaluative judgments, and culturally embedded semantic practices.

The annotation framework is based on ten analytical features derived from Ibn Duraid's methodology, including contextual interpretation, quotation, declaration of opposed senses, pronunciation judgments, temporal references, derivational relations, distributional evidence, and citation of authorities. These features are operationalised as annotation categories supported by provenance metadata.

Each annotated instance contains four layers of information: lexical classification, source provenance, transmission status, and folk-linguistic evaluation. The framework distinguishes three principal categories of semantic opposition: lexical antonymy, pragmatic exclusion, and culturally mediated opposition. Classification decisions are informed by corpus distributions, contextual analysis, authority-based evidence, and informant consensus.

To ensure methodological transparency, annotators undergo calibration procedures based on historical exemplars extracted from Jamharat al-Lugha. Inter-annotator agreement is measured through standard reliability metrics, while ethnographic protocols document elicitation procedures and community-level semantic judgments.

Results

Application of the proposed framework demonstrates that semantic opposition in Arabic cannot be explained exclusively through lexical structure. A substantial proportion of oppositional relationships correspond to conventional lexical antonymy and remain stable across registers. However, numerous instances reveal context-dependent patterns in which discourse conditions trigger the exclusion of alternative meanings.

The analysis also identifies a third category characterised by strong dependence on cultural practices, ritual usage, and authority-based transmission. In such cases, semantic opposition is not primarily encoded in lexical structure but emerges through historically and socially mediated interpretive traditions. The incorporation of provenance metadata significantly improves the transparency of classification procedures and facilitates the reconstruction of interpretive decisions.

Furthermore, annotation reliability increases when historical exemplars and provenance information are available during adjudication. Informant data likewise contribute to distinguishing

pragmatic exclusions from culturally mediated oppositions, highlighting the importance of integrating ethnographic evidence within semantic analysis.

Discussion

The findings support a multidimensional understanding of semantic opposition. Rather than representing a purely lexical phenomenon, oppositional meaning emerges from the interaction of lexical structure, discourse context, cultural practice, and historical authority. This observation aligns with both medieval lexicographical insights and contemporary folk-linguistic perspectives.

The study further demonstrates that Ibn Duraid's analytical procedures possess considerable methodological value for contemporary linguistic research. When operationalised as annotation categories, these procedures provide transparent criteria for semantic classification and reduce ambiguity in the analysis of oppositional meanings. At the same time, the inclusion of folk-linguistic metadata broadens the explanatory scope of semantic research by recognising the role of community beliefs and cultural practices.

The provenance-based framework also offers practical implications for lexicography, corpus linguistics, and language documentation. By recording authority relations, transmission histories, and community evaluations, the framework enables more nuanced representations of semantic meaning and provides an auditable basis for linguistic analysis.

Conclusion

This study has proposed a provenance-based framework for the analysis of semantic opposition in Arabic through the integration of medieval lexicographical traditions and contemporary folk-linguistic approaches. Drawing on Ibn Duraid's Jamharat al-Lugha and modern ethnographic methodologies, the framework operationalises historical analytical procedures as reproducible annotation categories capable of supporting corpus-based semantic research.

The findings indicate that semantic opposition in Arabic encompasses lexical, pragmatic, and culturally mediated dimensions that cannot be adequately captured through conventional antonymy alone. Provenance information, community-based evaluations, and contextual analysis emerge as essential components of reliable semantic classification. By bridging historical scholarship and contemporary linguistic methodology, the study contributes a transparent and replicable model for investigating semantic opposition and offers a foundation for future comparative and corpus-based research in Arabic linguistics.

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