

## PRAGMATIC REASONS FOR USING OXYMORONS IN DIALOGUES IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH

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**Abstract.** This paper investigates the pragmatic functions of oxymorons in dialogues across two linguistically and culturally distinct languages: Uzbek and English. Oxymorons, as rhetorical figures that juxtapose seemingly contradictory terms, serve diverse pragmatic roles in everyday and literary discourse. These include expressing irony, intensifying emotional nuance, conveying sarcasm, or encapsulating complex social commentary. By analyzing oxymoronic usage within dialogues from literature, media, and spontaneous speech, the study aims to uncover not just linguistic patterns but the underlying cultural worldviews they reflect. The contrastive approach reveals both universal pragmatic strategies and culturally specific meanings tied to oxymoronic expressions.

**Key Words:** Pragmatics, oxymoron, irony, contradiction, Uzbek, English, dialogue, figurative language, sarcasm, cultural discourse

**Аннотация.** В данной статье исследуются прагматические функции оксюморонов в диалогах двух лингвистически и культурно различных языков: узбекского и английского. Оксюмороны как риторические фигуры, сопоставляющие, казалось бы, противоречивые термины, выполняют разнообразные прагматические роли в повседневном и литературном дискурсе. К ним относятся выражение иронии, усиление эмоциональных нюансов, передача сарказма или отражение сложных социальных комментариев. Анализируя использование оксюморонов в диалогах из литературы, средств массовой информации и спонтанной речи, исследование направлено на выявление не только языковых моделей, но и лежащих в их основе культурных мировоззрений, которые они отражают. Контрастный подход выявляет как универсальные прагматические стратегии, так и культурно-специфические значения, связанные с оксюмороническими выражениями.

**Ключевые слова:** Прагматика, оксюморон, ирония, противоречие, узбекский, английский язык, диалог, образный язык, сарказм, культурный дискурс.

### **Introduction**

Language is a multifaceted system that extends beyond the mere transmission of information. It functions as a powerful tool for expressing complex emotions, attitudes, social relations, and cultural ideologies. One of the particularly intriguing linguistic phenomena that exemplify this complexity is the

oxymoron—a figure of speech that brings together contradictory or opposing ideas in a single expression. By doing so, oxymorons invite the listener or reader to engage with a layered meaning that goes beyond the literal interpretation of words.

The paradoxical nature of oxymorons challenges the conventional semantic boundaries of language, revealing how meaning is often shaped by context, speaker intention, and cultural background. For example, the English phrase “deafening silence” evokes an emotional tension between sound and absence, making the silence itself profoundly noticeable. Similarly, Uzbek expressions such as “shirin o‘lim” (sweet death) convey culturally nuanced sentiments about fate, sacrifice, and acceptance that cannot be fully grasped by a literal reading.

This study focuses on the pragmatic dimension of oxymorons, specifically their use in dialogues—the interactive, dynamic exchanges between interlocutors. Unlike monologues or written texts, dialogues are shaped by real-time context, speaker relationships, and social intentions. Therefore, examining oxymorons within dialogues allows for a richer understanding of how speakers use contradictory terms not only to ornament speech but to perform communicative acts such as irony, sarcasm, humor, social criticism, or emotional expression.

From a pragmatic perspective, language use is about meaning in context, which includes implicature, speech acts, politeness strategies, and conversational maxims (Grice, 1975). Oxymorons, with their intrinsic contradiction, often violate these maxims, particularly the maxim of quality (truthfulness) and manner (clarity), creating pragmatic effects that depend heavily on shared knowledge and inferencing by the listener.

The comparative aspect of this research lies in the exploration of oxymorons in two linguistically and culturally distinct languages: Uzbek and English. English, with its rich literary tradition and global usage, has been extensively studied for rhetorical devices including oxymorons. Uzbek, as a Turkic language with deep-rooted oral and literary traditions, offers a unique perspective on how oxymorons function within a different cultural and linguistic framework. Uzbek expressions often embed social values, collective experiences, and philosophical reflections that differ significantly from English pragmatic norms.

Understanding the pragmatic functions of oxymorons in these two languages contributes not only to the field of contrastive linguistics but also to cross-cultural communication, highlighting how speakers from different backgrounds employ similar linguistic devices for divergent communicative purposes. Moreover, it sheds light on the cognitive processes involved in interpreting paradoxical expressions and the cultural knowledge required to decode their meanings.

The key research questions addressed in this study include:

☞ What pragmatic roles do oxymorons fulfill in everyday and literary dialogues in Uzbek and English?

☞ How do cultural differences influence the choice and interpretation of oxymorons in these languages?

☞ In what ways do oxymorons contribute to the interpersonal dynamics and social functions of dialogue?

☞ By answering these questions, the study aims to deepen the understanding of how language users negotiate meaning through contradiction, and how such linguistic strategies reveal broader cultural worldviews

### Methodology

To address these questions, a qualitative approach rooted in pragmatic discourse analysis was adopted. The research was conducted in four main stages:

- **Data Collection:** Dialogic texts were sourced from novels, film scripts, interviews, and social media platforms. For English, samples were taken from Shakespearean drama, contemporary novels, sitcom scripts, and online forums. For Uzbek, sources included works by Qodiriy, television dramas, Uzbek Telegram channels, and conversational transcripts from daily life.

- **Selection Criteria:** Only those expressions clearly exhibiting oxymoronic structure and used within a dialogic context were selected. A total of 150 oxymoronic expressions were documented—75 in English and 75 in Uzbek.

- **Analytical Framework:** Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1975), Grice's Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975), and Relevance Theory were used to interpret the speaker's intention, listener inference, and contextual meaning.

- **Contrastive Analysis:** A comparative approach was taken to identify both linguistic patterns and cultural interpretations, distinguishing universal functions from language-specific or culturally motivated uses.

### Literature review

The study of oxymorons has long occupied a notable place in the fields of rhetoric, stylistics, and semantics, especially within the Western tradition. In classical rhetoric, oxymorons were regarded as stylistic devices used to achieve artistic or poetic effect by introducing tension between contradictory ideas. Over time, their function has expanded into broader communicative domains, including everyday conversation, political discourse, and digital communication. The emergence of pragmatics as a distinct linguistic discipline has allowed for new interpretations of oxymorons not just as stylistic anomalies but as purposeful communicative tools.

In English linguistic studies, scholars such as Geoffrey Leech (1983) provide a foundational understanding of oxymorons as instances of semantic deviation, which serve to enhance expressive force and rhetorical novelty. Leech classifies oxymorons under the category of "irony" and "anomalous collocation," arguing that their primary role is to generate cognitive dissonance that prompts deeper interpretive engagement from the listener or reader (Leech, 1983, p. 72).

This dissonance becomes particularly relevant in dialogue, where oxymorons can fulfill pragmatic goals such as sarcasm, indirect criticism, or social distancing.

Building upon this, John Searle's Speech Act Theory (1975) provides an interpretive framework that aligns with pragmatic analysis. According to Searle, indirect speech acts allow speakers to communicate meanings that differ from the literal content of the utterance (Searle, 1975, pp. 59–60). Oxymorons often operate as such indirect speech acts: a phrase like “sweet sorrow” (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1597) does not merely juxtapose opposites but conveys a farewell filled with love and pain. The speaker's emotional state is encoded in contradiction, yet the listener infers a coherent emotional reality.

H.P. Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) further explains how oxymorons flout conversational maxims to generate implicature. For instance, the maxim of quality (i.e., saying what one believes to be true) is violated in phrases like “honest thief” or “false truth.” These violations are not accidental; they are intended to draw attention to underlying truths, moral ambiguities, or critiques. According to Grice, such flouting is interpreted through shared contextual knowledge and cultural expectations (Grice, 1975, pp. 45–46).

In modern English discourse, the use of oxymorons has grown particularly prevalent in political speech and media, where they function as tools for framing complex realities. As noted by Garmash (2022), oxymorons like “working vacation” or “friendly fire” encapsulate bureaucratic doublespeak and ideological contradictions in a postmodern society. Garmash interprets these expressions as linguistic manifestations of social and political disillusionment, pointing to a cultural shift towards ambiguity and irony in public discourse (Garmash, 2022, p. 40).

In contrast, the study of oxymorons in Uzbek linguistics has historically centered around their role in classical and modern poetry, with relatively limited attention to their pragmatic or dialogic functions. Notable contributions include the work of Yusupov (2020), who explores oxymorons in Uzbek proverbs and oral storytelling traditions. He observes that oxymorons such as “achchiq kulgu” (bitter laughter) or “qayg'uli baxt” (sorrowful happiness) are not merely decorative but serve to convey collective emotional experience, often embedded in moral or ethical commentary (Yusupov, 2020, pp. 98–99).

Uzbek literature, especially the works of Abdulla Qodiriy, is rich in oxymoronic expression. In his novel “O'tkan kunlar” (1925), phrases like “g'amli shodlik” (joyful sorrow) or “dilbar dushman” (beloved enemy) are used to express internal conflict and social irony. These constructions go beyond poetic embellishment; they are devices for social critique, revealing contradictions within family structures, political systems, and individual morality (Qodiriy, 1925).

### **Analysis and result**

The core objective of this study is to explore the pragmatic motivations behind the use of oxymorons in dialogues, as they occur in both Uzbek and

English. The analysis is structured around four major pragmatic functions: irony and sarcasm, emotional complexity, social critique and commentary, and (4) the expression of cultural worldview.

### 1. Irony and Sarcasm in Dialogues

Oxymorons frequently serve as vehicles for irony and sarcasm, especially when speakers wish to indirectly criticize or ridicule a situation. In English, expressions such as:

"organized chaos"

"clearly misunderstood"

"civil war"

illustrate pragmatic irony. For instance, in the sitcom *Friends*, the character Chandler sarcastically comments: "Oh, great, another fun meeting. That'll be an enjoyable nightmare," employing an oxymoron (enjoyable nightmare) to indirectly convey frustration and critique bureaucratic redundancy (NBC, 1999).

In Uzbek, similar pragmatic irony is achieved through oxymorons like:

"ochiq sir" ("an open secret") – often used to criticize institutional hypocrisy.

"soxta rostlik" ("false honesty") – a sarcastic remark on dishonesty disguised as truth.

Such usage demonstrates the violation of Grice's maxim of quality—the speaker says something untrue to imply a deeper truth, creating implicature (Grice, 1975, p. 46). Result: Both English and Uzbek speakers use oxymorons to embed sarcastic intent within seemingly neutral or humorous dialogue. However, English tends to prefer quick, individualized irony, while Uzbek uses them more often for social or institutional critique.

### 2. Emotional Complexity and Psychological Nuance

Oxymorons allow speakers to express emotional contradictions in compact, expressive ways. This is especially significant in interpersonal dialogues, where characters or speakers struggle with complex feelings.

In English literature and film:

"bitter sweet"

"sweet sorrow" (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1597)

"cruel kindness" (used in Austen's *Emma*)

These illustrate layered emotional states—grief mingled with love, or affection with pain.

In Uzbek, such expressions are equally rich:

"shirin azob" ("sweet torment") – expresses a love that is painful yet desired.

"g'amli baxt" ("sorrowful happiness") – used in situations of achievement tinged with loss.

In the novel *O'tkan kunlar* by Abdulla Qodiriy (1925), the character Kumush refers to her love as "azobli shodlik" (joyful suffering), capturing emotional contradiction in one unit. This aligns with Searle's concept of

expressive speech acts, where emotions are performed through indirect language (Searle, 1975, p. 60).

Result: Oxymorons offer a powerful tool for emotional depth in dialogues. Uzbek dialogue leans more toward communal or moral reflection (e.g., family duty vs. personal happiness), while English focuses more on individual emotional tension.

### 3. Social Critique and Commentary

Oxymorons also serve as rhetorical weapons to critique political, social, or ethical contradictions.

In English media and political speech:

"military intelligence" – often used sarcastically to point out incompetence or contradictions in state logic.

"virtual reality" – challenges notions of authenticity in digital life.

"peaceful war" – paradox used in UN discussions on interventions (UN Security Council transcript, 2004).

In Uzbek political satire and social commentary:

"erkin cheklov" ("free restriction") – mocks state policies that promise freedom but impose control.

"tinch norozilik" ("peaceful protest") – often used ironically to refer to suppressed civic expression.

"yolg'on adolat" ("false justice") – challenges legitimacy of legal decisions.

As Karimova (2021, p. 104) found, oxymorons in Uzbek political speech often carry encoded dissent and act as subtle resistance, especially when overt criticism is dangerous.

Result: English oxymorons often lean toward postmodern cynicism, while Uzbek oxymorons serve as encoded resistance in restrictive environments. Both reflect distrust in institutions, but from different historical-political contexts.

### 4. Cultural Worldview and Metaphysical Expression

Beyond functional roles, oxymorons mirror cultural logics. Their usage in dialogues reveals deep-seated beliefs about the nature of life, fate, morality, and human behavior.

In English:

"passive aggression" – captures Western psychological frameworks of suppressed emotion.

"living dead" – a metaphor for psychological trauma or depression.

"deafening silence" – expresses emotional tension within silence.

In Uzbek culture, with its blend of Islamic, Sufi, and collectivist values, oxymorons are more philosophical or fatalistic:

"hayotiy o'lim" ("living death") – often used in stories of emotional or moral sacrifice.

"mehrli dushman" ("affectionate enemy") – reflects relational ambivalence, particularly in family and kinship relations.

"haqiqatli yolg'on" ("truthful lie") – refers to situations where lying serves a moral purpose (e.g., to protect dignity).

These reflect Sufi epistemology, where truth is seen as layered, non-linear, and paradoxical. As Yusupov (2020, p. 99) writes, "paradox in Uzbek proverbs expresses not contradiction, but spiritual reality." Result: English oxymorons often emphasize psychological ambiguity or emotional detachment, while Uzbek oxymorons resonate with spiritual, moral, and relational complexity.

### Conclusion

The study concludes that oxymorons in dialogues perform vital pragmatic functions that go far beyond stylistic ornamentation. They encapsulate irony, deepen emotional meaning, challenge social conventions, and mirror cultural ideologies. Although structurally similar, their use in Uzbek and English reflects different cultural emphases—personal ambiguity versus collective experience, ironic detachment versus moral reflection.

Understanding these pragmatic roles enhances cross-cultural communication and sheds light on how different societies use language to navigate contradiction, express nuance, and construct meaning. Further research might explore the role of oxymorons in digital communication or their acquisition by second-language learners.

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