

# A study entitled “A Linguistic Study Of The Use Of Antonymy By Non-Departmental Students”

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## Abstract:

The learning of a language requires the acquisition of words and their meanings. It is said that words can not be treated as containers or fulfilling specific roles in language; it is agreed up on the fact that they have relations. Vocabulary is considered an important basis for EFL students to speak, listen, read and write. There is no doubt that if EFL teachers' neglect some crucial aspects of vocabulary knowledge, this will be a great reason behind students' inefficient use of vocabulary at University level. Examples of such neglected aspects of vocabulary knowledge are: word homonymy, word basic parts of speech, connotation, synonymy and antonymy. This research is done on the field of antonyms.

The study raises teachers' awareness to the students who English. It will

develop and promote them. It attempts to examine antonymy relations to see the degree to which they are demonstrated in the language classroom at University of Technology / Department of Computer Engineering. Data analysis and statistical results show that teachers at University level seldom demonstrate the aspects of vocabulary knowledge in teaching vocabulary. In addition, the analysis of data has showed how students can acquire more palpable skills in language use if these aspects were handled in teaching vocabulary. The recommendations emphasize the need for introducing these aspects in teaching vocabulary at University of Technology.



## **Keywords**

(antonyms, relations, incompatibility, opposites, negation )

## **Section One**

### **Intoroduction:**

#### **1.1 Statement of the problem**

Semantic relations are considered one of the most important branches in linguistics, specially lexical relation such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, etc. As mentioned by Yule (1996:114) Linguistic semantics deals with the conversional meaning which are conveyed by the use of languages words and sentences.

Antonymy is a term which refers to the oppositeness and it is applied to many kinds of semantic opposition. It is considered a type of lexical – semantic relation. It unites two words which are opposite or contrast in meaning.

It has many characteristics and properties that characterize it from the other semantic relations. It is very useful. Antonym pairs are often used in texts and in a large number of proverbs and idioms in order to achieve rhetorical effects.

This paper investigate the properties of antonym. The researchers in current study want to focus the light on investigating students in technical colleges understanding and use of antonyms. The study shows how students respond to this relation.

The main purpose of this study is to enable learners of English as a second language to use words effectively in order to avoid repetition of words during speaking and writing by the use of antonyms.

The researchers want to focus on investigating students understanding and use of antonyms. The study shows how students respond to such relation.

### **1.2 Objectives of the study:** This study aims at investigating

1. How students of understand antonyms.
2. How students use antonyms.
3. To enable learners of English as second language specially at technical departments to use words effectively, avoiding repetition of words when speaking and writing.

### **1.3 Hypotheses of the study**

The researcher assumes the following hypotheses:

- 1.Students at Computer Engineering Department / University of Technology understand Antonyms perfectly.
- 2.Students of at Computer Engineering Department / University of Technology use antonyms properly.

### **1.4 Significance of the study**

The study is important for the following:

1. It helps English teachers to be aware of their students of English needs as far as synonyms and antonyms are concerned.
2. It shows English teachers the importance of learning antonyms relations.
3. It enriches vocabularies of students of English of antonyms.
4. It supports English syllabus designers with proper vocabularies on antonyms relations.

## **Section Two**

### **Theoretical Background**

#### **2.1 The Study of Meaning**

Semantic is the part of linguistics that studies meaning in language; i.e. the meaning of both words and sentences. There is a

great debates among Philosophers about the word "meaning". The question of meaning is unanswerable. But there are two presuppositions: (1) that what we refer to in English with the word meaning has some type of reality or existence and (2) that everything referred to as meaning is similar if not identical in nature (Lyons, 1981: 136). These words have certain relations such as:

1. Synonym like complex – complicated
2. Antonym such as long – short
3. Subordinate word (Hyponym) tulip – flower
4. Superordinate word (Hyponym) color – red
5. Meronym like page – book
6. Holonym as holocaust
7. Homonym as bear (V.) vs bear (N.)

A good example of Antonyms is the experiment which is made by Postman & Keppel (1970), the results of this experiment are introduced in Table 1 (source: Clark & Clark 1977: 478).

Stimulus	Five most frequent word associations to stimulus words <i>man, boy, long, yellow</i> Number of subjects tested: 1,008					
1. <i>man</i>	woman	boy	girl	dog	lady	OTHERS
	767	65	31	18	17	119
2. <i>boy</i>	girl	man	scout	dog	friend	OTHERS
	768	41	37	10	8	144
3. <i>long</i>	short	fellow	narrow	John	time	OTHERS
	758	11	10	9	9	211
4. <i>yellow</i>	blue	red	color	green	black	OTHERS
	156	115	106	89	73	469

Table 1. Some examples for word associations (adapted from Clark & Clark 1977)

## 2.2 Semantic Relations

In spite of the fact that any word in English Language is mainly recognized by properties of its surface form, this is considered the beginning of the process of accessing lexical – semantic representation.

Lyons (1977) states that the lexical semantic representations can be represented as relational structures; i.e. he points out that the meaning of any word can be determined by its relation to the meanings of many other words.

According to Saeed (1977) the descriptive aims of lexical semantics include an attempt to represent word meaning and to show how meanings of words are interrelated.

It is agreed upon the fact that there are different types of meaning relations. i.e. there are synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy and meronymy. These relations are not considered of equal importance.

Antonymy is considered unique relation among other lexical semantic relations; i.e. it requires relations of one to one, rather than one to many or many to many.

Antonymy, which is the subject of the current paper, is considered an important principle governing a language internal structure, at least with in its lexical store (Deese, 1964; Lyons, 1977 and Richards,1967).

We can observe this through the ways which we are not considered to be similar in that we talk about antonymy and antonymy in everyday English.

- (1) What's the opposite of the word interesting? and
- (2) What's a synonym word for interesting?

While question (1) presupposes a unique opposite, (2) allows for more than an answer. According to Davies (2008:43) inside the Corpus of Contemporary American English we can see the opposite of occurs 1,344 times but an opposite of only twice. Where as, the synonym for occurs only four times while a synonym for occurs 189 times. This has one explanation that good examples of the relation are those that either belong to the sets of semantic which have two members or are the polar categories of something like a dimension, an event or an object, which are described according to the scalar

dimension. The best example of the two-member-set kind is female–male – in that they are the only sexes that English has famous names.

In the polarity case, we can see many adjectives that describe scalar dimensions like short–tall and early–late, and the ‘poles’ of things or events in time or space such as head–foot and start–finish. But while these kinds of ‘naturally binary’ sets provide some of the well-know examples of antonymy, it is not enough to say that the antonymy existence can be described solely by the existence of binary sets in addition to the semantic dimensions with poles. This is due to the fact which says that such an observation will not give a clear explanation of why two words form an antonym pair for a particular dimension/semantic fdiscipline in which the other available synonyms are available (e.g. large–small rather than large–little), nor it can give an explanation to the reason behind some pairs are preferred over others in multidimensional semantic fields, such as taste (sweet–sour or sweet–bitter but we can not say sour–bitter) or even emotion (happy–sad but not happy–afraid).

Antonymys are exceeding valuable in defining the exact meaning of a given word and its synonyms. They enable us to express opposite of a particular thought in brief manner in order to get contrast.

### **2.3 Disscourse Functions of Antonymy**

There are nine discourse functions of antonymy. Two of them are considered major while the other seven are considered major categories (Storjohann,2010).

1. Ancillary Antonymy: According to Jones (2002:45-60) it is said that the most common use of antonyms in language is to focus the attention to the closest contrast.
2. Coordinated Antonymy: the main function of antonymys in most contexts is creating a sense of inclusivity or to exhaust a particular semantic scale.
3. Comparative antonymy: in this kind of antonymy a concept is measured in terms of its relative position in a semantic scale.

4. Distinguished Antonymy: the attention is paid here to the difference holding between the antonymy pair.
5. Transitional Antonymy: the focus is on the change from one antonym state to another.
6. Negated Antonymy: The antonym is negated to bolster the other one.
7. Interrogative Antonymy: the choice between two antonyms is offered.
8. Extreme Antonymy: in this type, the two end points of antonym scale are unified and set up in contrast against the centre ground of the scale.
9. Idiomatic Antonymy: in this last function the antonyms form will be part of a familiar proverb or idiom.

#### **2.4 Classification And Distribution Of Antonymy**

The words antonyms belong to the similar part of speech different in sound and have been characterized by their denotational meaning. Hu (2001: 164-168) points out that there are three types of antonyms:

1. Gradable Antonymy: It is considered the most widespread type of antonymy, pairs like big/small, tall/short are belonging to this kind. They are adjectives and characterized by their difference in terms of degree, they are graded different norms and finally one member of the pair serves as the cover term.
2. Complementary Antonymy: It is characterized only by its binary opposition which may have two members like alive/dead, married/single. Their main property is the ability in dividing up the whole of a semantic field. The norm in this type is absolute and finally there is no cover term for the two members of a pair(Ibid).
3. Converse Antonymy: Antonymy pairs of this kind refer to words which denote one and the same referent like doctor/patient, teacher/student. They have reversal relationship.

## **2.5 Antonymy From A Linguistic Point of View**

According to linguists, there are many kinds of opposites. They agree to apply the term antonymy just to gradable opposites, which was mentioned previously in this paper and has many characteristics.

Cruse (1986) and Lehrer and Lehrer (1982) recognized the factors that decide whether two words are considered antonyms or just near-opposites. These factors are the purity of the semantic opposition, the ease with which a semantic dimension can be imagined, the same in distribution, distance from the mid point of a semantic dimension, correspondence of non-propositional meaning and the dimensions of semantic contrast.

Lyons (1977:27) states that one of the most fundamental principle that govern the structure of languages in binary opposition. Cruse (1986:16) says that words only have meaning in relation to other words; i.e. the meaning of a word is fully reflected in its contextual relation.

## **2.6 Lexicographical, Textual and Psycholinguistic Evidence of Antonymy**

Antonymy is considered a binary contrast which is used to reveal the opposition in different types of communicative modalities and registers whether they are written or spoken, fact or fiction, and formal or informal verities.

Giora etal (2009) states that the importance of antonymy in designing the iconic signs such as traffic signs, in addition to the visual works of different kinds of art. Antonymy is so important to language in that it is the basis of great quotes ; i.e. the most beautiful things are those that madness promotes and reason writes.

## **2.7 Functional Categories of Antonymy**

Antonymy relations are Classified by semanticists according to their logical properties (condition, contrariety, conversances) (Lyons,1977). In recent period, the attention is turned to the use of antonyms in discourse.

According to Jones (2002) there are several functions of antonymy. Each function is loosely connected with a number of contrastive constructions in English. We can divide these functions as follows:

1. Ancillary Antonymy (love-hate)
2. Coordinated Antonymy (large- small)
3. Comparative Antonymy ( dead – alive)
4. Transitional Antonymy (optimism- pessimism)
5. Negated Antonymy (well- not badly)
6. Extreme Antonymy (afraid – unafraid )
7. Idiomatic Antonymy (agree – disagree)
8. Interrogative Antonymy (outside- inside)

### **2.8 The Disagreement Regarding Antonymy**

There has been a conflict about what the term metalinguistic Antonymy should refer to. It is said that this term could be applied to a specific kind of semantic opposition (Lyons, 1977; Cruse, 1980).

Rutu Kempson (1977:84) has a different point of view in that she describes simple binary opposition and he says that antonymy is in general use for oppositeness of meaning.

Other linguists like Jones (2002), Murphy (2003) agree with Kempson, while Jeffries (2010) decided to abandon the term antonym and preferring the informal term "opposition", without excluding the informal term "oppositeness".

## **Section Three**

### **Analytical Framework**

#### **3.1 Analysis of Data**

The researchers in this study used the quantitative, descriptive and analytical method in order to show the number of respondents and

their percentages. The place of the test is University of Technology, English Language Centre. The date is 4/4/2016. The time is 12:30 P.M. The study is limited to the students of technical departments. The symbols of the study are students of first year at Department of Computer Engineering in its two branches: Network and Information Engineering for the academic year 2015-2016. A test is used as a tool to collect the required data. The students were asked to answer the questions within an-hour period and the answer sheets were collected and corrected to get the results. The test is constructed to obtain data from students of non departmental English, who study English Language as one of the materials throughout the year (first and second courses).

It is about investigating the Understanding and Use of Antonyms. The test contained three main questions. Each major question of the test consisted of a number of items in order to investigate the students knowledge and understanding of antonyms.

Test Validity means that the test should measure the aim for which it has been designed. The test also circulated to a number of specialists in order to check its validity and reliability. (Appendix III).

How do students understand antonyms? This question can be answered through the discussion of the table below (The details of data analysis can be found in appendix XI)

Branch	Total No. of Students	Correct Answers	Wrong Answers
Networks	20	8	12
Information Engineering	20	9	11

**Table 1 The Results of Students**

As shown in the above table the total number of students who undertake the test in both branches are 40 students (20 in each). Only 8 out of 20 are succeed in NW and 4 of them have outstanding marks, while the marks of the other students range from 6-18 out of 30.

The matter is similar in IT branch in that only 9 of them succeed and 2 have outstanding marks, while the other students marks range from 6-18.

## **Section Four**

### **Conclusions, Recommendations, Suggestions**

#### **4.1 Conclusions**

Any person, even young children have the ability to answer questions like what is the opposite of big/long/heavy/up/out/etc. but not the difficult words which are not familiar to them.

Throughout the current study, the researchers find out that students at University of Technology / Department of Computer Engineering (Network and IE branches) have weaknesses and problems to use and understand vocabulary effectively to produce language. However, we can not blame the students for such weaknesses. EFL teachers can partially be held responsible for their students weaknesses in using vocabulary. In most occasions, students struggle alone in order to learn vocabulary.

without the guidance which paves the way for them to build a concrete vocabulary stock.

#### **4.2 Recommendations**

The following recommendations are introduced to teachers of English language at non departmental colleges in order to solve the above problem:

1. Students should refer to a dictionary of antonyms.
1. English teachers should be aware of their students of English needs as far as antonyms are concerned. So the subject of oppositeness and antonymys must be included in their syllabus.
2. It shows English teachers the importance of learning antonyms relations, in addition to helping students to enrich their vocabulary.

### 4.3 Suggestions

The Present study investigates the understanding and use of Antonyms. This study can be developed for further studies such as:

1. Investigating Understanding and Use of hyponyms relations.
2. Comparison between Scientific and Humanities Departments understanding and use of Antonyms.

### المستخلص:

إن تعلم اللغة يتطلب اكتساب الكلمات ومعانيها. وكما هو معروف لا يمكن معاملة الكلمات كمحتوى بحد ذاته او ان تنجز دور كامل في اللغة؛ وانما الحقيقة المتفق عليها هو احتوائها على علاقات مرتبطة مع بعضها. وتعتبر المفردات أساسا هاما لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الكلام، الاستماع، القراءة والكتابة. ليس هناك شك في أن اهمال مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لبعض الجوانب الحاسمة للمعرفة سوف يكون سببا كبيرا في عدم كفاءة الطلاب في استخدام المفردات في المستوى الجامعي. ومن الأمثلة على هذه الجوانب المهملة في معرفة المفردات هي التجانس، الأجزاء الأساسية من للكلام، الدلالة، الترادف والتضاد. وسيهتم هذا البحث بالتضاد.

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى لفت انظار مدرسي اللغة الانكليزية للطلاب المتعلمين للغة الإنجليزية من خلال تطويرها والترويج لها. حيث يمكن اعتبارها كمحاولة لدراسة العلاقات المتناقضة لمعرفة مدى استخدامها في الفصول الدراسية للغة الانكليزية في الجامعة التكنولوجية / قسم هندسة الحاسوب. ولقد اظهرت نتائج تحليل البيانات والنتائج الإحصائية قلة تركيز الاساتذة على جوانب المعرفة بالمفردات. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، فقد أظهر تحليل البيانات قدرة الطلاب على اكتساب مهارات أكثر وواضحة في استخدام اللغة إذا تم التعامل مع هذه الجوانب في تدريس المفردات. كما تؤكد التوصيات على ضرورة التركيز على تعليم المفردات في الجامعة التكنولوجية.

## Appendix I

English Antonym Test

Name .....

Department of Computer Science

Class.....

**Q1/** Choose the appropriate opposite word from the following to fill in the blanks

Hate / Cool / Enemy / Sunrise / Cheap / Soft / Pull / Sell / Peace / Alive

1. The opposite of 'Push' is.....
2. The opposite of 'Expensive' is.....
3. The opposite of 'Dead' is.....
4. The opposite of 'Friend' is.....
5. The opposite of 'Sunset' is.....
6. The opposite of 'Buy' is.....
7. The opposite of 'Hard' is.....
8. The opposite of 'Warm' is.....
9. The opposite of 'Love' is.....
10. The opposite of 'War' is.....

**Q2/** Choose A,B,C or D to complete the sentences with the correct antonym

1. My kitchen floor isn't dull. It is.....

(a. clean b. sharp c. dirty d. shiny)

2. Is the glass empty or .....

(a. heavy b. clean c. full d. light )

3. Are his pants loose or.....?

(a. expensive b. fancy c. tight d. wealthy)

4. The ground isn't wet. It's .....

(a. soft b. clean c. hard d. dry)

5. His niece isn't ugly. She's .....

(a. beautiful b. large c. handsome d. heavy)

**Q3/** Find the antonym of the following words:

1. Restive
2. Foment
3. Melt

4. Minor
5. Voluntary

## **Appendix II**

We, undersigned, have taken knowledge of question paper of antonymy test which is being made and submitted to us by L.Mayada Rahim Eesa (University of Technology – English Language Centre),and L.Luma Sabri Danial (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research) consequently, we certify their validity and reliability to be used as test for measuring student comprehension and use regarding the topic of the current research “A Linguistic Study Of The Use Of Antonymy By Non-Departmental Students”

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## **APPendix III**

### **Results of Students of Computer Engineering Department**

Network Branch		Inoformation Technology	
Score	Out of	Score	Out of
18	30	15	30
20	30	16	30
12	30	6	30
14	30	13	30
15	30	28	30
10	30	13	30
14	30	14	30
14	30	20	30
13	30	18	30
11	30	12	30
14	30	11	30
6	30	6	30
9	30	17	30
21	30	10	30
16	30	14	30
13	30	15	30
18	30	9	30
20	30	11	30
20	30	12	30
13	30	13	30

## Appendix IX

### Common Opposites - Antonyms Vocabulary Word List

#### A

absent - present	alive - dead	appear - disappear, vanish
abundant - scarce	all - none, nothing	approve - disapprove
accept - decline, refuse	ally - enemy	arrive - depart
accurate - inaccurate	always - never	artificial - natural
admit - deny	ancient - modern	ascend - descend
advantage - disadvantage	answer - question	attic - cellar
against - for	antonym - synonym	attractive - repulsive
agree - disagree	apart - together	awake - asleep

#### B

backward - forward	better - worse, worst	brave - cowardly
bad - good	big - little, small	build - destroy
beautiful - ugly	black - white	bold - meek, timid
before - after	blame - praise	borrow - lend
begin - end	bless - curse	bound - unbound, free
below - above	bitter - sweet	boundless - limited
bent - straight	borrow - lend	bright - dim, dull
best - worst	bottom - top	brighten - fade
	boy - girl	broad - narrow

#### C

calm - windy, troubled	clockwise - counterclockwise	conceal - reveal
can - cannot, can't	close - far, distant	contract - expand
capable - incapable	closed - ajar, open	cool - warm
captive - free	clumsy - graceful	correct - incorrect, wrong
careful - careless	cold - hot	courage - cowardice
cheap - expensive	combine - separate	create - destroy
cheerful - sad, discouraged, dreary	come - go	crooked - straight
clear - cloudy, opaque	comfort - discomfort	cruel - kind
clever - stupid	common - rare	compulsory - voluntary
		courteous - discourteous, rude

#### D

dangerous - safe	deep - shallow	diseased - healthy
dark - light	definite - indefinite	down - up
day - night	demand - supply	downwards - upwards
daytime - nighttime	despair - hope	dreary - cheerful
dead - alive	dim - bright	dry - moist, wet
decline - accept, increase	disappear - appear	dull - bright, shiny
decrease - increase	discourage - encourage	dusk - dawn

#### E

early - late	encourage - discourage	expand - contract
east - west	end - begin, start	export - import
easy - hard, difficult	enter - exit	exterior - interior
empty - full	even - odd	external - internal

F

fade - brighten	few - many	forget - remember
fail - succeed	find - lose	found - lost
false - true	first - last	fresh - stale
famous - unknown	float - sink	frequent - seldom
far - near	foolish - wise	friend - enemy
fast - slow	fore - aft	for - against
fat - thin	free - bound, captive	fortunate - unfortunate
feeble - strong, powerful	fold - unfold	full - empty

G

generous - stingy	give - receive, take	grant - refuse
gentle - rough	glad - sad, sorry	great - tiny, small, unimportant
get - give	gloomy - cheerful	grow - shrink
giant - tiny, small, dwarf	go - stop	guest - host
girl - boy	good - bad, evil	guilty - innocent

H

happy - sad	healthy - diseased, ill, sick	hill - valley
hard - easy	heaven - hell	hinder - help
hard - soft	heavy - light	honest - dishonest
harmful - harmless	help - hinder	horizontal - vertical
harsh - mild	here - there	hot - cold
hate - love	hero - coward	humble - proud
haves - have-nots	high - low	

I

ill - healthy, well	inferior - superior	interesting - boring
immense - tiny, small	inhale - exhale	interior - exterior
important - trivial	inner - outer	interesting - dull, uninteresting
in - out	inside - outside	internal - external
include - exclude	intelligent - stupid, unintelligent	intentional - accidental
increase - decrease		

J

join - separate	junior - senior	justice - injustice
	just - unjust	

K

knowledge - ignorance	known - unknown
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L

landlord - tenant	lengthen - shorten	long - short
large - small	lenient - strict	loose - tight
last - first	left - right	lose - find
laugh - cry	less - more	loss - win
lawful - unlawful, illegal	light - dark, heavy	loud - quiet
lazy - industrious	like - dislike, hate	love - hate
leader - follower	likely - unlikely	low - high
left - right	limited - boundless	loyal - disloyal
lend - borrow	little - big	

M

mad - happy, sane	melt - freeze	minority - majority
major - minor	merry - sad	miser - spendthrift
many - few	messy - neat	misunderstand - understand
mature - immature	minor - major	more - less
maximum - minimum		

N

nadir - zenith	never - always	no - yes
narrow - wide	new - old	noisy - quiet
near - far, distant	night - day	none - some
neat - messy, untidy	nighttime - daytime	north - south

O

obedient - disobedient	old - new	optimist - pessimist
odd - even	on - off	out - in
offer - refuse	open - closed, shut	outer - inner
old - young	opposite- same, similar	over - under

P

past - present	poetry - prose	pretty - ugly
patient - impatient	polite - rude, impolite	private - public
peace - war	possible - impossible	prudent - imprudent
permanent - temporary	poverty - wealth, riches	pure - impure, contaminated
plentiful - scarce	powerful - weak	push - pull
plural - singular		

Q

qualified - unqualified	question - answer	quiet - loud, noisy
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R

raise - lower	real - fake	right-side-up - upside-down
rapid - slow	rich - poor	rough - smooth
rare - common	right - left, wrong	rude - courteous
regular - irregular		

S

safe - unsafe same - opposite satisfactory - unsatisfactory secure - insecure scatter - collect separate - join, together serious - trivial second-hand - new shallow - deep shrink - grow	sick - healthy, ill simple - complex, hard singular - plural sink - float slim - fat, thick slow - fast sober - drunk soft - hard some - none sorrow - joy	sour - sweet sow - reap straight - crooked start - finish stop - go strict - lenient strong - weak success - failure sunny - cloudy synonym - antonym sweet - sour
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T

take - give tall - short tame - wild them - us there - here	thick - thin tight - loose, slack tiny - big, huge together - apart top - bottom	tough - easy, tender transparent - opaque true - false truth - flasehood, lie, untruth
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U

under - over unfold - fold unknown - known	unqualified - qualified unsafe - safe up - down upside-down - right-side-up	upstairs - downstairs us - them useful - useless
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V

vacant - occupied vanish - appear vast - tiny	victory - defeat virtue - vice	visible - invisible voluntary - compulsory
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X

war - peace wax - wane weak - strong wet - dry	white - black wide - narrow win - lose	wisdom - folly, stupidity within - outside wrong - right
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yes - no	yin - yang	young - old
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Z

zip - unzip	zenith - nadir
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