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FRIEND::ENEMY OPPOSITION IN MODERN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Vasylyshyna E. A. FRIEND::ENEMY Opposition in Modern English. – Bachelor's degree qualification paper.

This research explores the semantic, pragmatic, and cultural dimensions of the binary opposition friend-enemy in contemporary English. The relevance of the study stems from the widespread use of this lexical pair across political, media, literary, and interpersonal discourse, where it functions not only as a basic antonymic unit but also as a cognitive and rhetorical tool that shapes social identity and perception.

The object of the study is the friend-enemy opposition in modern English. The subject includes its lexical, semantic, and discursive features, as well as translation strategies into Ukrainian.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the structural, cultural, and functional aspects of the friend-enemy dichotomy, identifying its role in meaning-making, emotional framing, and communicative practice across genres and contexts.

Research methods include theoretical analysis, semantic component analysis, contextual and discourse analysis, as well as contrastive translation analysis. The empirical material includes authentic texts from political speeches, media, literature, and social media, supplemented by selected Ukrainian translations.

The findings demonstrate that the friend-enemy opposition operates on multiple levels: as a lexical antonym, a cognitive schema, a persuasive strategy, and a socio-cultural metaphor. While often presented as a strict dichotomy, it can be blurred or subverted in literary and creative contexts. The comparative analysis with Ukrainian also reveals culturally specific connotations and usage patterns, emphasizing the importance of context-aware translation.

The study contributes to the fields of lexicology, discourse analysis, and translation studies by illustrating how binary oppositions serve as powerful linguistic tools that influence worldview, ideology, and interpersonal relationships.

Keywords: antonymy, binary opposition, friend, enemy, semantics, discourse, cultural connotation, translation.

АНОТАЦІЯ

Василишина Є.В. Опозиція ДРУГ::ВОРОГ у сучасній англійській мові. Кваліфікаційна робота на здобуття ступеня бакалавра.

Дослідження присвячене вивченню семантичних, прагматичних і культурних аспектів бінарної опозиції друг–ворог у сучасній англійській мові. Актуальність теми зумовлена широким уживанням цієї лексичної пари в політичному, медійному, літературному та міжособистісному дискурсах, де вона виконує функцію не лише базової антонімічної одиниці, але й когнітивної та риторичної моделі, що формує соціальну ідентичність і сприйняття.

Об'єктом дослідження є опозиція друг-ворог у сучасній англійській мові. Предмет дослідження становлять її лексичні, семантичні та дискурсивні особливості, а також стратегії перекладу українською мовою.

Мета дослідження – проаналізувати структурні, культурні та функціональні аспекти опозиції друг-ворог, визначити її роль у створенні значення, емоційному забарвленні та комунікативній практиці в різних жанрах і контекстах.

Методи дослідження включають теоретичний аналіз, компонентний семантичний аналіз, контекстуальний і дискурсивний аналіз, а також зіставний перекладознавчий підхід. Матеріал дослідження складають автентичні англомовні тексти з політичних виступів, ЗМІ, художньої літератури та соціальних мереж, доповнені відповідними українськими перекладами.

Результати дослідження засвідчують, що опозиція друг–ворог функціонує на кількох рівнях: як лексична антонімія, когнітивна схема, засіб переконання та соціокультурна метафора. Хоча вона часто подається як жорстке протиставлення, у літературних та креативних контекстах може бути розмита або переосмислена. Порівняння з українською мовою також виявило культурно зумовлені відмінності в конотаціях та вживанні, що підкреслює важливість контекстуального перекладу.

Дослідження робить внесок у розвиток лексикології, дискурсивного аналізу та перекладознавства, демонструючи, як бінарні опозиції функціонують як ефективний інструмент мовної інтерпретації дійсності, відображення ідеологічних настанов та міжособистісних взаємин.

Ключові слова: антонімія, бінарна опозиція, друг, ворог, семантика, дискурс, культурна конотація, переклад.

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INTRODUCTION

Lexical oppositions play a crucial role in structuring human thought and language. Among the most fundamental binary pairs in modern English is the opposition friend-enemy, which expresses the core concepts of social relationships, identity, and conflict. The relevance of this research lies in the usage of this opposition in both everyday language and media – including politics, literature, and communication. While native speakers intuitively understand the nuances of this dichotomy, foreign language learners may overlook its cultural, emotional, and pragmatic implications, which can lead to interpretive or translational inaccuracies.

Many linguists and scholars, such as D. A. Cruse [15], M.-C. L’Homme [33], and A. Wierzbicka [55], have investigated the nature of lexical oppositions and antonymy in modern English. The structure and function of binary concepts in cognition and communication were also discussed in the works of Branchini et al. [7], Koptjevskaja-Tamm et al. [29], and Kotzor [30]. The opposition “friend–enemy” has been explored within political, sociolinguistic, and cultural frameworks by researchers including T. Semashko et al. [47], V. D. Hanson [24], and Z. Hua & L. Wei [25], who examined its rhetorical and ideological roles. Furthermore, online discourse studies by Nawata et al. [39] and Mona [38] highlight how the friend–enemy dichotomy persists in contemporary digital environments. Nevertheless, a comprehensive analysis of this lexical opposition as a semantic, pragmatic, and translation phenomenon across multiple genres of English discourse remains limited, which underlines the relevance and novelty of the present research.

The friend-enemy pair is not only semantically charged but also deeply used in idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies. As such it represents a valuable object of linguistic inquiry, particularly in the context of contrast analysis and translation studies.

The object of the present research is friend:enemy oppositions in modern English.

The subject of the study is the semantic, pragmatic, and translational features of the friend–enemy opposition as it appears in various types of discourse.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the structural, semantic, and cultural aspects of the opposition friend–enemy in modern English and to explore its translation into Ukrainian.

To achieve this purpose, the following **objectives** are defined:

- to examine theoretical approaches to lexical opposition in English linguistics;
- to determine the position of the friend–enemy pair within the classification of antonyms;
- to analyze the lexical, semantic, and pragmatic features of friend and enemy in English;
- to identify typical contexts of their usage in media, politics, literature, and popular culture;
- to investigate the main translation strategies used for rendering this opposition into Ukrainian;
- to evaluate the cultural equivalence and emotional load of the Ukrainian equivalents (“друг”, “враг”, etc.);
- to provide examples for accurate and context-sensitive translation.

To accomplish these goals, the research applies both **general and special methods** of linguistic analysis:

- the method of theoretical analysis and generalization;
- the descriptive method;
- contextual analysis;
- semantic component analysis;
- comparative and contrastive translation analysis.

The theoretical significance of the research lies in its contribution to the study of antonymy and binary oppositions in English lexicology, as well as to translation.

The practical value of the research consists in offering insights into how the friend–enemy dichotomy functions in English discourse, which can assist learners

and translators in avoiding interpretive errors and enhancing intercultural understanding.

The material of the study includes authentic English-language texts (news articles, political speeches, literary works, idiomatic expressions, and popular sayings), which contain the lexical items “friend”, “enemy”, or related derivations.

The empirical material of the present research comprises a corpus of 30 authentic English-language sources representing various types of discourse. These include: 7 political speeches and statements, such as those by George W. Bush [9], Barack Obama [41], Donald Trump [11], and Mao Zedong (quoted in [25]), which illustrate the use of the friend–enemy dichotomy in persuasive and ideological framing; 6 media texts, including headlines and opinion articles from platforms such as CBS News [4], Fox News [22], Medium [20], and Las Vegas Review-Journal [24], demonstrating the dichotomy's role in editorial discourse; 4 literary works, such as *The Hunger Games* [13], *A Game of Thrones* [34], *Half of a Yellow Sun* [2], and *The Subtle Knife* [44], where the opposition is employed to construct narrative tension and character identity; 3 social media examples, like personal tweets [38], [43] and TikTok discourse [52], which reflect the binary's informal usage in online environments; 2 professional or business-related texts, such as blog entries and commentary [54], where the opposition is metaphorically employed in persuasive contexts; 8 scholarly and theoretical studies that provide the conceptual foundation for analysis, including works by Cruse [15], L'Homme [33], Semashko et al. [47], and Nawata et al. [39]. In total, the analysis draws on 30 examples of political, journalistic, literary, digital, and academic discourse, all of which employ the friend–enemy opposition either explicitly or implicitly.

CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF LEXICAL OPPOSITIONS IN MODERN ENGLISH

1.1. Definition and Types of Lexical Oppositions

Lexical opposition, commonly known as antonymy, is a fundamental semantic relation in the English lexicon. In simple terms, antonymy refers to the relationship between words with opposite meanings [29]. For example, pairs like hot vs. cold or true vs. false illustrate this oppositional meaning. Antonymy is widely recognized as one of the core lexical relations (alongside relations such as synonymy and hyponymy) that structure the vocabulary of a language [29]. A more precise definition emphasizes the conceptual nature of this contrast: lexical opposition can be defined as “a cognitive relation of opposed concepts which are encoded by lexical items” [30]. In other words, an antonym pair represents two concepts that stand in contrast in our minds, realized by two distinct words. This relation of oppositeness is a key organizing principle in meaning – so much so that negation in language often relies on antonymy (e.g. happy vs. unhappy) to express the opposite of a given idea [29].

Not all lexical oppositions are the same. Linguists distinguish several types of antonyms based on the nature of the opposition [33]. The major categories include gradation, complementary, relational, and directional (reversive) antonyms among others. Each type has distinct semantic characteristics, as outlined below:

Gradable antonyms: *These are opposites that represent two ends of a continuum or scale.* Gradable pairs like small vs. large or cold vs. hot allow intermediate degrees between them. One can speak of things being very hot, slightly hot, cool, somewhat cold, etc., which indicates gradability. Such antonyms are sometimes called contraries or scalar opposites, since they imply an underlying scale of comparison [33]. Typically, one term is considered the unmarked or neutral term on the scale (for instance, we ask “How tall is X?” rather than “How short is X?”), reflecting an asymmetry in the using. Importantly, with gradable antonyms, saying

something is *not X* does not necessarily imply it is the other term; e.g. if something is not “hot,” it isn’t automatically “cold” – it could be warm or tepid (an in-between value).

Complementary antonyms: These opposites are mutually exclusive binary states with no middle ground. Also called contradictory or binary antonyms, they define a relationship [21]. Classic examples include alive vs. dead, true vs. false, and present vs. absent. In these cases, denial of one is logically equivalent to affirmation of the other. For instance, if something is not alive, it must be dead; there is no intermediate state (one cannot be “somewhat alive”). Complementary antonyms thus partition a domain into two exhaustive alternatives. The opposition is absolute – one or the other holds in any given context – which contrasts with the sliding scale of gradable pairs. This either/or property makes complementary pairs especially clear-cut examples of lexical opposites in English [21].

Relational antonyms (converses): These are pairs of opposites that define each other through a mutual relationship. Also known as converse antonyms or relational opposites, they describe the same situation from opposite perspectives or roles [47]. Common examples are parent vs. child, teacher vs. student, buyer vs. seller, or verbs like lend vs. borrow. In such pairs, one term implies the existence of the other in a relationship. For instance, one cannot be a “parent” without having a “child”; if X sells to Y, then Y buys from X – the roles are opposite sides of the same relation. Relational antonyms are not about a single quality on a scale, but about complementary roles in an interaction or framework. They highlight how a change in perspective or context inverses the relation: what is above from one viewpoint is below from the opposite viewpoint, for example. Mastering these converses is important for understanding how English encodes relationships from different angles.

Directional antonyms (reversives): These opposites involve movement or change in opposite directions. Often called reversive antonyms, they describe actions or processes that undo or reverse one another. Examples include motion

verbs and processes like come vs. go, arrive vs. depart, inflate vs. deflate, tie vs. untie, or build vs. demolish. In many of these, one word indicates doing something and its antonym indicates undoing it (e.g. tying vs. untying a rope). Others indicate opposite directions along a path or axis (e.g. up vs. down, in vs. out). Directional antonyms often pair a base term with a morphologically marked opposite (as seen with prefixes like un- in untie or dis- in disappear). What unifies them is the idea of reversal: performing one action nullifies the other, or moving in one direction is the direct opposite of moving in the other direction. These oppositions are crucial in describing spatial orientation and processes in English. [1]

It should be noted that some scholars collapse or expand these categories slightly differently. For instance, converse and relational antonyms are often treated as the same category, and some classifications include additional types (such as taxonomic opposites or auto-antonyms). **Auto-antonyms** (or contronyms) are special cases where a single word has developed two opposite meanings (for example, sanction meaning both “approve” and “penalize”), but these involve one word rather than a pair of distinct lexical items, and thus are a different phenomenon. Overall, the four categories above are the most commonly discussed types of lexical oppositions in modern English, and they cover how oppositeness can manifest either as a matter of degree, binary complement, relational role, or directionality. [50]

Lexical oppositions usually involve pairs of words that belong to the same semantic field but differ in one key feature – for example, hot and cold both refer to temperature, but are at opposite ends of the scale. Antonyms share many features except for this core contrast, which creates a strong mental link between them [33].

Some antonyms are gradable, meaning they allow degrees (like tall vs. short), while others are complementary (dead vs. alive) – where no middle ground exists. This difference also affects their logic: saying “not hot” doesn’t always mean “cold,” but saying “not dead” always means “alive” [29].

Another feature is markedness: one word in a pair is often neutral (unmarked), like “tall”, while the other “short” is more specific or negative. Many marked terms

have negative prefixes (unhappy, illogical), showing that languages often treat one word as “basic” and the other as its opposite [29].

Furthermore, antonyms typically show a high degree of association in the mental lexicon. Psycholinguistic evidence points out that opposite words strongly activate each other in our minds due to their tight semantic link. For instance, upon hearing day, the word night is quickly brought to mind; knowing one often implies thinking of the other. Kotzor (2021) observes that conventional antonym pairs become entrenched in memory through repeated co-occurrence and contrast. When two words are regularly used in juxtaposition or invoked together (as in common phrases like “black and white,” “good or bad”), the strength of their associative bond in the lexicon grows [30]. In fact, experiments have shown that learners sometimes respond with an antonym more readily than a synonym when prompted with a word, indicating that opposites are a salient part of how word meanings are structured in the mind [31].

Lexical oppositions are not only a feature of word meaning but also a reflection of binary structures in thought and an instrument in communication. Their cognitive salience and frequent usage in discourse underscore the importance of antonymy as more than a quirk of vocabulary – opposites seem to be a conceptual lens through which we interpret the world and a linguistic resource through which we convey clear and forceful meanings.

1.2. Binary Oppositions in Linguistic Theory

Modern discussions of binary oppositions in language trace back to early structuralist theories. Ferdinand de Saussure, often credited as a founder of structural linguistics, argued that linguistic units derive their meaning through oppositional relationships within a structured system. In Saussure's view, a word's value is defined by what it is not – for example, “hot” means something in relation to “cold,” and neither would carry the same meaning without the other as contrast. Meaning comes from difference rather than isolated content; each term in language is understood in reciprocal determination with an opposite term [5]. This insight led to the idea that the most basic relationship in language is binary opposition: paired concepts such as presence/absence or life/death that organize our understanding of words [5]. Saussure's principle – that signs gain meaning through value via binary contrasts – became a cornerstone of structuralist linguistics, and it remains influential in how linguists think about semantic distinctions today.

Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss extended the notion of binary oppositions beyond linguistics into anthropology and mythology. Lévi-Strauss observed that human cultures worldwide tend to conceptualize the world through opposing categories – nature vs. culture, raw vs. cooked and so on – suggesting that such binaries form “the basic structure of all human cultures” [8]. In structuralist thought, these oppositions are not merely reflections of language, but fundamental patterns of the human mind that shape myths, social structures, and meanings. A modern review notes that structuralism emphasizes patterns of opposition over substance, and that this perspective (originating with Saussure and developed by Lévi-Strauss) sees binary distinctions as fundamental to all language and thought [4]. In other words, structuralists proposed that we understand concepts largely by contrast with their opposites, and this binary logic underlies both linguistic systems and cultural worldviews.

It is important to recognize that in classical structuralism, binary oppositions were considered value-neutral structural elements. Each pair (e.g. male/female, singular/plural) was a structural relationship, not inherently hierarchical. However, later theorists observed that in practice these oppositions often carry implicit hierarchies. For instance, one term of the binary may be culturally marked as positive, dominant, or “normal” (e.g. “us” in an us vs. them binary), while the other is negative or subordinate (e.g. “them”) [28]. Post-structuralist critiques (notably by Jacques Derrida) argued that such binary pairs are not equal – typically one term is privileged, and meaning is subtly biased by these hierarchies. Derrida pointed out that language often relies on oppositions (speech/writing, presence/absence, etc.) but simultaneously subverts them, because the boundary between opposites is unstable and can be deconstructed [16]. While these philosophical critiques go beyond structural linguistics, they highlight that binary oppositions, even if structurally equal, can shape our values by casting one side as normative and the other as “other” or deviant. Modern linguistics remains aware of this: binary contrasts are analytically useful, but researchers are cautious about hidden biases in oppositional thinking.

In contemporary linguistic theory, binary oppositions continue to be a key topic, reinterpreted through the lenses of cognitive science and semantics. Cognitive linguistics, which connects language to mental processes and embodied experience, offers a nuanced view of oppositions. [45] Rather than see the meaning as a static structure of binary features, cognitive linguists emphasize that meaning is grounded in human perception and experience. Interestingly, even within an embodied, gradient view of meaning, fundamental contrasts still emerge as organizing principles of knowledge. Recent cognitive studies support the idea that humans naturally think in terms of opposites as a way to structure knowledge. For example, Branchini shows that using opposites is a natural and common way for people to reason and solve problems [7]. Oppositional concepts like same/different and self/other appear early in cognitive development and help us form categories. In fact,

opposites can improve reasoning: experiments find that prompting individuals to consider the opposite of a given situation helps them overcome biases and think more flexibly [7]. This cognitive perspective suggests that binary oppositions are not just an arbitrary structuralist idea, but may reflect deeper mental operations – a basic way our brains organize information by contrast.

Fundamental experiential dichotomies (such as inside vs. outside, up vs. down, or self vs. other) likely arise from how we interact with the physical and social world, forming image schemas and conceptual binaries that then get encoded in language. Thus, cognitive linguistics acknowledges oppositions as embodied concepts: for instance, the experience of verticality leads to the binary up/down, which in many languages maps to positive/negative metaphors (“ups and downs” of life, up as good, down as bad), and the experience of containment gives an in/out distinction that also maps onto abstract inclusion/exclusion meanings. So cognitive approaches see binary oppositions as emerging from human cognition and perception – basic cognitive schemas that underlie many linguistic meanings. However, they also stress that not all meanings are strictly binary; many concepts form continua or radial categories. Even so, the poles of those continua (like hot vs. cold on a temperature scale) often behave like prototypical opposites, anchoring the ends of a spectrum and structuring how we understand intermediate cases [15].

Organizing meaning through such oppositional relations appears to be a universal feature of the lexicon. Scholars have noted that virtually every language has words expressing fundamental binary contrasts (for example, light/dark, good/bad, here/there, I/you), indicating that opposition is a basic principle in how humans label their world [27]. Even when languages differ in vocabulary, the conceptual need to denote opposites is common. Modern lexical semantic studies also examine how one member of an antonym pair is often more marked or morphologically complex (for instance, happy vs. unhappy, where one term is clearly a negation of the other). Across 55 languages, was found patterns in which member of an oppositional pair is morphologically derived: typically the term that

is lower in some hierarchy (negative, smaller, or otherwise seen as a deviation from a norm) gets the marking, reinforcing that one half of the binary is treated as a baseline and the other as a marked variation [29]. This aligns with earlier linguistic observations that one term in a binary pair is often unmarked (the default or generic term) and the other marked (explicitly signaled as the opposite or exception). For example, in English we have the pair usual/unusual – “usual” is the default state, while “unusual” is marked as a departure from it. Such patterns show how binary opposition in semantics is tied to broader cognitive biases: we often conceptualize one side of a dichotomy as normative and the other as an alteration or negation [27]. This is not just a special skill of English – it appears in many languages and suggests that our linguistic oppositions both reflect and reinforce an underlying way of categorizing the world into normal cases versus contrasting alternatives.

Beyond the level of individual words, binary oppositions play a powerful role in structuring meaning at the level of worldview and discourse. Language does not merely mirror a pre-existing reality; it actively shapes how we perceive and categorize our experiences. One way it does so is by encoding fundamental oppositional concepts that become cognitive and cultural lenses. Researchers describe binary oppositions as a “universal way of world cognition” – a strategy humans use to organize the complexity of the world into understandable categories [47].

Over time, entire worldviews and cultural value systems can be built upon foundational binary oppositions encoded in language. For example, many cultures have an axis of moral evaluation that pits “good” versus “evil.” These terms gain content by opposition to each other, and they collectively shape a moral worldview – one cannot define “good” in a vacuum; it often implicitly means “not evil” and vice versa. Similarly, languages often encode binary distinctions like sacred vs. profane, pure vs. impure, or civilized vs. barbaric, which then influence how speakers of those languages perceive social and religious reality [10]. In this way,

binary oppositions in language provide a conceptual grid that people use to make sense of their experiences and to define their social identities.

In discourse and communication, binary oppositions are a common and effective tool for conveying meaning and persuading audiences. Discourse analysis has shown that speakers and writers frequently invoke stark oppositions to frame issues and shape narratives. This is especially evident in political and media discourse, where complex realities are often simplified into “us versus them” dichotomies or other black-and-white portrayals. For example, during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, public narratives frequently relied on oppositional framing: one study of media in 2020 found that the pandemic was discussed using binary oppositions like “we/they, self/Other, citizen/foreigner, West/East,” effectively casting the virus as coming from an outsider “them” and compare to a healthy, righteous “us” against a dangerous “Other” [28]. These linguistic choices (e.g., referring to the virus as a “foreign threat” vs. a “common challenge”) created an othering effect, reinforcing intolerant attitudes by dividing the world into two camps (insider vs. outsider) and attributing blame or fear to one side. More generally, critical discourse analysts note that binary oppositions are part of the standard rhetorical toolkit for influencing public perception [17]. By setting up a clear-cut contrast, communicators can evoke strong emotional responses and align audiences with one side of an issue. Terms like “good guys” and “bad guys,” “winners” and “losers,” “with us or against us,” all exemplify how binaries are used to construct narratives that are easy to grasp and hard to nuance. However, this clarity comes at a cost: binary oppositions can oversimplify complex matters and deny grey areas. They tend to erase nuance by forcing categories into one of two camps, which can reinforce stereotypes or ideological divides. Contemporary discourse analysis often examines how these binary frames can entrench power relations – for instance, how defining a group as the opposite of the norm (labeling them as “them” against “us”) can justify exclusion or discrimination [32].

At the same time, binary oppositions can be productive and necessary for meaning-making. They help create coherence in texts and conversations. In literature and storytelling, binary opposites (hero/villain, light/dark, conflict/peace) drive plots and themes; in everyday communication, contrasting two ideas can clarify choices (“Do we turn left or right?”) or emphasize a point via antithesis (“It’s not warm; it’s freezing!”). So that binary oppositions serve as a double-edged sword in language: they are fundamental to structuring thought and meaning – providing clear conceptual anchor points and an organized worldview – yet they can also constrain thinking if taken as harsh separation.

Modern linguistic theory, especially in semantics and discourse studies, recognizes both aspects. There is a continued interest in how oppositional structures enable understanding (for example, how binary semantic features can combine to describe complex meanings) and a parallel interest in how breaking out of strict binaries can sometimes lead to more nuanced or accurate communication (for instance, using a continuum or spectrum instead of either/or categories for gender, politics, or emotions). The worldview shaped by binary oppositions is powerful but not immutable: languages can evolve to include intermediate terms (like “somewhat agree” between agree/disagree) or hybrid identities (beyond male/female), reflecting an adjustment of our conceptual oppositions. Still, the binary mode of thinking remains deeply rooted in human cognition and language. As one recent linguistic study put it, “the world consists of the struggle and unity of opposites” and humans continually observe differences to understand their reality [27]. From this perspective, the interplay of opposites – whether in lexicon, grammar, or discourse – is a driving force in the creation of meaning and knowledge.

A prototypical example that illustrates many of the above points is the “friend versus enemy” opposition. This binary pair is ancient and pervasive, appearing in contexts from personal relationships to international politics. Linguistically, friend and enemy (or analogous terms) exist in almost every culture’s vocabulary, demonstrating how fundamental this social categorization is to human experience.

Conceptually, the friend/enemy dichotomy is often cited as one of the most basic binary oppositions structuring social reality [47]. It neatly encapsulates the division of the social world into in-group and out-group: “friend” represents the trusted insider, while “enemy” represents the threatening outsider. Modern researchers note that this dichotomy is “timeless” and essentially universal, residing “at the heart of ethnic self-consciousness” across cultures. In other words, virtually all communities develop notions of “us” (friends/allies) and “them” (enemies), and this contrast shapes collective identities and worldviews. One’s sense of belonging (friendship) is often defined against what one is not (enemy) – you know who “your people” are by knowing who is excluded or opposed. This opposition carries a strong identification function: it helps individuals and groups answer the question “Who are we?” by also answering “Who are we not?”. Language encodes this in various ways, from explicit labels (friend, foe, ally, rival) to metaphors and idioms (e.g. “paint someone as the enemy,” “friendly fire” implying mistaken identity). [47]

Political theorist Carl Schmitt (in the 20th century) argued that the friend-enemy distinction is the defining framework of politics – all political actions, he claimed, ultimately come down to distinguishing allies from adversaries. While Schmitt’s theory is controversial, it underscores how deeply ingrained this binary is in political thought. A striking example comes from Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong, who in 1925 posed the fundamental questions: “Who are our enemies? Who are our friends?”, asserting that determining the answer was vital for the Chinese people’s struggle. This quote, echoed nearly a century later, shows how the friend/enemy dichotomy was consciously used to shape a revolutionary worldview [25].

Indeed, as one analysis notes, ever since Mao’s time, the friend–enemy binary became a way of understanding politics and society in China, fusing social life into political terms of alignment or opposition [25]. Political discourse globally mirrors this pattern: consider rhetoric from leaders who frame international relations as a battle between friends and foes, or domestic politics as divided between loyal

supporters and treacherous opponents. The “us versus them” narrative is a broader version of the friend–enemy opposition. Contemporary political discourse often leverages this, especially in populist or conflict settings, portraying issues as a clash between the righteous “friends” of the people and the dangerous “enemies” (whether those are other nations, opposing parties, or internal “enemies of the state”). During the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, researchers observed a tribalizing discourse: heightened sensitivities to who is a friend (supportive ally of one’s country) and who is an enemy (blamed for problems). This led to new forms of online conflict talk in China, as a cultural practice of confrontational discourse shifted from light-hearted banter to an oppositional practice aimed at perceived enemies, fueled by nationalist feelings [25]. Such examples show the friend/enemy binary dynamically structuring how events are interpreted and discussed.

Cognitively, the friend-enemy framework influences perception and reasoning. A recent interdisciplinary study in Japan by Nawata found empirical evidence that individuals who strongly adopt a “friend-or-foe” mindset tend to see the world in more threatening terms. Those with a pronounced friend/enemy divided thinking were more likely to perceive outsiders and opposing groups as dangerous or untrustworthy, leading them to endorse hostile policies and even believe in conspiracy theories [39]. For example, people with a rigid “friend-vs-enemy” outlook showed greater anxiety about foreign nations and immigrants, and they were more inclined to accept conspiratorial narratives that paint the “enemy” group as plotting or evil [39]. This finding illustrates how a linguistic conceptual opposition (friend vs. enemy) can shape deeper cognitive biases – essentially structuring one’s worldview into safe versus threatening camps.

When the world is viewed through this binary lens, neutral or complex situations may be flattened into a conflict schema, affecting judgment and behavior. Linguistically, this can manifest in heightened use of polarized language, derogatory labels for the out-group, and idealized labels for the in-group. The friend/enemy dichotomy thereby doesn’t just label existing categories; it actively creates a

worldview where neutrality is lost and everything aligns with one side or the other. Such polarization is a subject of concern in discourse analysis and cognitive sociology today, as extreme us/them language is linked to social conflict and misunderstanding.

Yet, the friend–enemy opposition is also fundamental to how we define interpersonal relations in positive ways. Not all uses of this binary are about hate or conflict; sometimes it’s about loyalty, solidarity, and boundaries. In literature and popular culture, the friend/enemy contrast drives storytelling – heroes have friends and enemies, and the tension between those roles creates drama. Even at an individual level, people often talk about relationships in binary terms (best friend vs. worst enemy), underlining how we use opposites to clarify emotional extremes.

Friend and enemy define each other: the concept of a “friend” gains depth partly by understanding what it means not to be a friend (to be against someone), and conversely, an “enemy” is especially notable when contrasted with the warmth or trust of a friend. This reflects Saussure’s idea of reciprocal definition in the semantic realm of social relationships. Modern linguists studying linguistic worldview have pointed out that the friend–enemy dichotomy is a key element of the “linguistic picture of the world” for many cultures, structuring narratives of war and peace, alliance and rivalry [46]. It finds expression in proverbs, idioms, and discourse. For instance, phrases like “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” explicitly invoke the binary to reason about complex alliances, showing how deeply this logic is embedded in our language and thought.

Finally, the friend–enemy pair exemplifies how a binary opposition operates on multiple levels: as a lexical antonym pair, as a cognitive schema dividing social reality, and as a discourse tool that can unite or divide. Its persistence in modern linguistic and cognitive contexts – from internet forums and political speeches to psychological attitudes – demonstrates that binary oppositions remain highly relevant for structuring meaning and worldview. Modern linguistics highlights both the risks of binary thinking and the fact that oppositions like friend/enemy remain

fundamental to how we use language. They are part of how we have learned to carve up our social world, for better or worse. In the domain of linguistic theory, examining binary oppositions – historically and in modern perspectives – thus provides crucial insights into the relationship between language, thought, and reality, illuminating why we so often understand the world in terms of pairs of opposites.

Summary to chapter 1

The theoretical part of this thesis explored the theoretical foundations of lexical oppositions, with a particular emphasis on the antonymic pair friend–enemy. Lexical opposition, or antonymy, was defined as a core semantic relation in English, crucial for structuring vocabulary and conveying contrastive meanings. Several types of antonyms were identified, including gradable, complementary, relational, and directional opposites, each characterized by distinct semantic features. These categories reflect how human cognition encodes difference – whether as a matter of degree, binary exclusivity, social role, or directional reversal.

Binary oppositions were further examined through the lens of structuralist and post-structuralist linguistic theory. Drawing on the works of Saussure and Lévi-Strauss, the chapter demonstrated how meaning arises through oppositional structures and how such binaries are embedded not only in language but also in culture, ideology, and social identity. Cognitive linguistic perspectives were also discussed, revealing that oppositional thinking is grounded in perceptual and experiential contrasts that help organize human knowledge.

Special attention was devoted to the friend–enemy opposition as a socially and politically salient binary. This pair was shown to operate not only at the lexical level but also as a cognitive and discursive schema, shaping perceptions of in-group and out-group dynamics.

Overall, it provides a comprehensive theoretical overview of antonymy as a linguistic phenomenon and situates the friend–enemy dichotomy within broader semantic, cognitive, and cultural frameworks. This background sets the stage for the empirical analysis in the following chapter, where real-life discourse and translation challenges related to this opposition will be explored.

CHAPTER 2. LEXICAL, SEMANTIC AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE “FRIEND–ENEMY” OPPOSITION

2.1. Semantics and connotations of FRIEND & ENEMY in English.

In English, the noun friend generally denotes “a person whom one knows, likes, and trusts, and enjoys being with” [19]. A friend is someone on good terms with oneself – an ally or well-wisher. The word carries strongly positive connotations: friendship implies affection, loyalty, support, and intimacy. For example, calling someone a “friend” suggests inclusion in one’s social circle and an absence of hostility. In some contexts friend can also mean a supporter of a cause (e.g. “a friend of the environment”, meaning an advocate for environmental protection) [19]. By contrast, an enemy is commonly defined as “one that is antagonistic to another; especially one seeking to injure, overthrow, or confound an opponent” [36]. In other words, an enemy is an adversary or foe – a person (or group, or even abstract force) who harbors hostility or poses a threat. The term foe is a near-synonym of enemy, often used in literary or formal style, emphasizing the dangerous or evil character of the adversary [12]. Both enemy and foe carry negative connotations of conflict and opposition. Notably, "enemy" can be used metaphorically for anything harmful or dreaded (for instance, “Tradition is the enemy of progress”), extending the concept beyond persons to abstract dangers.

Etymologically, the English words reflect this opposition. Friend derives from Old English *frēond*, related to *frēo* (free) and the verb *frēogan* (to love) – thus originally meaning someone dear or beloved. Enemy came into English via Old French *enemi* from Latin *inimicus*, which literally means “not a friend” (Latin *amicus* “friend” with the negating prefix *in-*) [12]. The very origin of "enemy" as “not-friend” underscores that the concept of an enemy is defined in opposition to the concept of a friend.

Connotatively, “friend” in English is strongly positive. A friend is associated with camaraderie, trust, loyalty, benevolence, and intimacy. English speakers often

speak of “good friends”, “close friends”, or “best friends” to signal degrees of intimacy, indicating that even within the category of friends there are gradations. By contrast, an enemy is associated with hatred, distrust, danger, and conflict. The word enemy often implies active hostility – someone who means one harm. One might speak of a “sworn enemy” or “mortal enemy” to indicate an implacable foe. The emotional valence is clearly negative: to call someone an enemy is to mark them as a threat or opponent. In ordinary usage, labeling a person as an enemy is strong and usually deliberate (e.g. referring to “the enemy” in wartime rhetoric to denote the opposing side). Mild interpersonal conflicts are less likely to use the word “enemy,” preferring terms like rival or simply someone I don’t get along with. Thus, “enemy” often connotes an extreme or formal state of opposition. [24]

English also uses the term friend ironically or loosely in some contexts. For example, one might say “our friend here decided to show up late” to sarcastically refer to someone who is actually causing annoyance. In expressions like “He is no friend of mine”, the word friend is used in the negative to emphasize that someone is definitely not a friend – implying possible enmity or at least dislike. These nuances show the flexibility of the term in conveying social alignment or its absence. Overall, however, the friend–enemy pair represents a fundamental positive vs. negative alignment in English vocabulary: friend signals closeness and positive affiliation, while enemy signals remoteness and negative opposition. [12]

Semantically, friend and enemy stand in a relationship of antonymy – they are opposites. Both belong to the lexical field of social relations and describe one’s relation to another person or entity, but they occupy opposing poles of that domain. In fact, native speakers intuitively recognize friend vs. enemy as a strongly antonymous pair, on the same level with other fundamental oppositions like good–bad or love–hate [37]. The two terms share certain core semantic features: both denote a relational stance toward someone, and both imply a degree of familiarity or awareness of that other party. Crucially, however, they differ in polarity or evaluative features. A simplified semantic analysis might say that friend = “someone

on my side (with positive feelings)” whereas enemy = “someone against me (with negative feelings).” The antagonistic feature is the differentiator. As one semantic description puts it, friend and enemy “share a significant part of their meaning, but one property puts them on opposite ends of the scale – one person can be either your friend or your enemy, but not both at the same time”. In other words, they are mutually exclusive social categories defined by opposite attitudes (affection vs. hostility). [15]

It is important to note that friend–enemy are not gradable antonyms (unlike, say, hot–cold which allows intermediate “warm/cool” states). Rather, they function more like complementary or binary antonyms in many contexts: one is either a friend or an enemy. Indeed, the common phrase “Are you friend or foe?” exemplifies this binary categorization, demanding a choice of allegiance [47]. Of course, in real human relationships, there is nuance – one can be neither (e.g. a stranger or neutral party), or ambiguous cases exist (someone may have mixed feelings or shifting loyalties). But linguistically, the prototypical use of friend and enemy frames the relationship as a yes-or-no dichotomy: ally vs. adversary. This black-and-white conceptual contrast is deeply embedded in how we perceive social relations through language. It aligns with a fundamental cognitive dichotomy of “us vs. them” or in-group versus out-group.

The opposition also has a strong evaluative and axiological aspect. Friend is not a mere counterpart to enemy; it is inherently valued positively, while enemy is negative. As some linguists have observed, the friend–enemy dichotomy is an archetypal binary opposition carrying value judgments: “friend” by default implies good, safe, and “one of us,” whereas “enemy” implies bad, dangerous, and “other” [47]. In communication, labeling someone a friend often serves to praise or express solidarity, whereas labeling someone an enemy demonizes or marks them as a legitimate target of aggression or rejection. This reveals how tightly the semantic content is tied to cultural values (good vs evil, safe vs threatening).

We also see that friend and enemy can define each other (reciprocally) in meaning. The concept of an “enemy” is essentially “not a friend,” as reflected in the Latin root *inimicus*. Similarly, historically, many cultures conceptualized outsiders or others as enemies by default, and conversely friends were one’s own people. In English, the words themselves are defined in opposite terms: dictionaries often define enemy as “one who hates or opposes another,” implicitly contrasting with someone who supports (a friend). The conceptual contrast is therefore one of affiliation: friend means belonging with me, enemy means positioned against me. This contrast underlies many uses of the terms and is a key part of their semantic structure.

However, modern usage also permits more relativistic or situational interpretations. One can speak of someone “acting like a friend” in one context but “like an enemy” in another, indicating that behavior can slide along this axis. And the existence of terms like “frenemy” (a combination of friend + enemy) highlights that the boundary is not always clear-cut. A frenemy is defined as “a person who pretends to be a friend but is also in some ways an enemy or rival” [36]. The emergence of frenemy in colloquial English (popularized in recent decades) shows that speakers recognize a blended category: ostensibly friendly relationships that harbor underlying enmity or rivalry. Interestingly, the very coinage frenemy presupposes that friend and enemy are normally opposed categories – the word’s effect comes from the paradox of combining two opposites. Linguistically, this creation supports rather than refutes the strength of the friend/enemy opposition: it is striking to mix these antonyms in one term, so it efficiently labels a social ambiguity that might otherwise be hard to name.

The semantic structure of friend vs enemy is one of diametric opposition within the domain of interpersonal alignment. They function as antonyms anchored by opposite evaluative meaning: positive affiliation versus negative hostility. This opposition is conceptually salient and often treated as binary, even though real life allows intermediary states. Language tends to simplify: we speak as if individuals

were either friends or enemies, highlighting the fundamental contrast between the two roles.

Many metaphorical uses also employ the friend/enemy concept. For example, abstract entities can be personified as friends or enemies. We say “Time is no friend to aging athletes” or “Time is the enemy” in a situation where it works against one’s goals. Likewise, disease, poverty, or any obstacle is often cast as the enemy (“the enemy cancer,” “the enemies of freedom”). In technology and gaming, “friend or foe” systems classify detected entities as allied or hostile. Even in everyday metaphors, people speak of “fighting one’s inner demons” – the “enemy within” – indicating an antagonistic part of oneself. These metaphors extend the fundamental friend/enemy schema to non-human or internal domains, highlighting how deeply ingrained the opposition is in everyday speech.

Idiomatic expressions sometimes blur the line between friend and enemy for rhetorical effect. For instance, calling someone “my good friend” in political speech can be a veiled way to refer to an adversary sarcastically. Conversely, referring to a problem as “our enemy” can rally people as if against a personal foe (as in the phrasing “poverty is our enemy”). The flexibility of friend and enemy in idioms underlines their cultural resonance; everyone understands what it means to be a friend or an enemy, so these terms anchor many figurative sayings.

It is also worth noting that English social media has repurposed friend as a verb (“to friend someone” meaning to add someone to one’s list of contacts on a platform like Facebook). This modern usage broadens friend to an even looser connection (sometimes derided as indicating a superficial connection). While not an idiom, it shows the evolving lexical usage of friend in the digital age, again emphasizing how friend can range from deep bond to merely a click of acknowledgment. In contrast, enemy is not used in such a casual verb sense; one does not “enemy” someone on social media – reflecting that enmity remains a serious designation, not a casual label one assigns lightly.

Moreover, language and culture are intertwined, and the friend–enemy distinction in English both reflects and shapes cultural values and group identities in English-speaking societies. Broadly, friendship is highly valued in Anglophone culture, but the cultural model of friendship has particular characteristics. Researchers have noted that in modern Anglo-American culture, the concept of “friend” is relatively broad and inclusive, sometimes to the point of being shallow in comparison to other cultures’ concepts of friendship [55].

English speakers tend to call many people “friends” – including casual acquaintances, coworkers, neighbors, and others with whom they have relatively cordial relations. This does not necessarily denote deep trust or lifelong devotion; it can simply mean friendly familiarity. Anna Wierzbicka observes that the English word “friend” has undergone a sort of semantic dilution: in the past it implied a closer bond, but nowadays one often adds modifiers like “close friend” to indicate a strong friendship, whereas the unadorned friend can refer to a wide spectrum of relationships [55]. Indeed, one can have many “friends” in the English sense but only a few one would call true friends or best friends. In everyday American or British parlance, it is common to refer to a person you get along with as “my friend” even if the relationship is not particularly intimate. The popularity of Facebook and similar platforms, where one’s contact list is labeled “Friends,” has further entrenched a norm that friend can simply mean a contact or someone you know, not necessarily someone you have a deep personal bond with.

By contrast, enmity in English-speaking cultures tends to be a marked, almost formal state. Labeling someone an “enemy” in personal life is relatively rare and strong. Furthermore, English speakers might avoid calling someone they dislike an “enemy” unless the hostility is openly acknowledged or severe. The concept of enemy is often reserved for serious conflicts (personal or especially national/international). For example, in a workplace or family context, someone might say “we don’t get along” or even “we’re rivals,” but seldom “he is my enemy” except in jest or extreme situations.

However, on the larger scale of group identity (nations, political factions, etc.), the language of friends and enemies is prevalent. English-speaking cultures, like others, rally around the idea of allies (friends) versus enemies in times of war or competition. Terms like “ally” and “friend” are used in diplomacy (e.g. “a friendly nation”), whereas “enemy” is a powerful label in propaganda and political rhetoric (“the enemy nation,” “enemies of the state”). Calling a group an “enemy” serves to solidify an us-versus-them mentality, reinforcing in-group unity. This echoes what scholars of politics (e.g. Carl Schmitt) have noted: defining the enemy is a way to define the self or the in-group, because a common enemy can unite people. In everyday culture, this is seen when political or social movements identify “enemies” (whether a competing sports team, an opposing political party, or an abstract concept like crime or drugs) to strengthen their own group identity and resolve. Thus, the friend/enemy distinction is a tool for shaping group values – friends represent who we are and what we stand for, enemies represent the opposite. [36]

English-speaking societies often encourage friendliness and approachability as social virtues. Being “friendly” (even to strangers) is seen as polite and positive, especially in American culture. The ease with which the term “friend” is applied can be seen as reflecting cultural ideals of openness and social networking. Yet, some commentators have pointed out that this does not necessarily mean English-speaking cultures have less value for true friendship – rather, they distinguish between levels of friendship implicitly. For instance, an American might call many people friends but still maintain a core of very close friends who correspond more to what other cultures (like Ukrainian) would consider friends. The outer circle might be termed “friends” but would be called “acquaintances” in more friendship-reserved cultures. This broad use of friend can sometimes puzzle people from cultures where friend implies deep commitment.

The concept of enemy, on the other hand, in English-speaking culture has a somewhat formal or external flavor. Personal enemies are not commonly claimed (it sounds dramatic to say “I have an enemy” in personal life), but identifying our

enemies in a societal sense is common. For example, American political discourse often speaks of “enemies of freedom” or labels certain foreign powers as enemies. During the Cold War, terms like “the enemy” (meaning the opposing superpower and its ideology) were ubiquitous and served to create a strong sense of us (the Free World friends) vs them (the Communist enemies). In the post-9-11 era, phrases like “the enemies of democracy” or “the enemy combatant” entered English discourse. This shows how culturally the language of enmity is marshaled to frame conflicts in absolute moral terms. It can also extend to internal societal dynamics: politicians might call the press “the enemy of the people” or protesters “enemies of the state” to delegitimize them. Such uses demonstrate the power of the word enemy in shaping group identity – branding someone an enemy ostracizes them from the community of “friends” (fellow citizens, etc.) and primes others to unite against that person or group. [55]

In English-speaking popular culture and media, the friend–enemy dichotomy is a common theme: from children’s cartoons to literature, narratives often revolve around friends teaming up against enemies. Heroes have friends and allies, and they confront villains who are enemies. This narrative structure reinforces from an early age the notion that one should distinguish friends (trusted companions) from enemies (dangerous opponents). Even nuanced stories that explore betrayal or hidden identities inevitably use the friend/enemy concept: e.g., a friend turns out to be an enemy (a betrayal), or an enemy becomes a friend (a redemption or alliance plot). These tropes echo cultural ideals that friendship is good and ennobling, while enmity must be overcome or guarded against.

Culturally, the friend–enemy dichotomy is central to Ukrainian self-perception and has been painfully relevant in recent years. Ukraine’s national discourse, especially in the context of war and political conflict, frequently invokes friend and enemy. Allies of Ukraine are often referred to in political speeches and media as “друзі” (friends) of the nation – for instance, countries that support Ukraine are called friends, reinforcing a sense of shared values and solidarity. Conversely,

aggressors or hostile forces are unequivocally labeled вороги (enemies). This usage reinforces group identity: Ukrainians rally together as friends (brothers and sisters in arms), against an external enemy. The linguistic opposition thus isn't just semantic but carries an emotional weight in the cultural narrative of national identity and survival. In a sense, Ukrainian linguaculture (to borrow a term from ethnolinguistics) has the friend–enemy schema deeply embedded as a way to frame the world: “ours” vs “alien”, safe vs dangerous. One study of Ukrainian linguoculture notes that the friend–foe dichotomy lies at the heart of ethnic self-consciousness and that it manifests in many cultural phenomena [36]. This is not unique to Ukrainians, of course – most cultures have this to some degree – but Ukrainian history and folklore contain numerous references to friends and enemies that underscore the importance of knowing who is which.

Despite these similarities, the pragmatics of usage differ. An English speaker might introduce someone they just met at a conference as “my friend from London,” whereas a Ukrainian might find that odd, perhaps preferring “my colleague” or simply using the name, reserving friend for someone with whom they have a well-established rapport. Conversely, a Ukrainian might more readily use the word “ворог” in certain contexts where an English speaker might hesitate. For instance, in political rhetoric in Ukraine, calling the corrupt officials “вороги народу” (enemies of the people) has historical resonance and strong impact, whereas in English politics the phrase “enemy of the people” has a dangerous, inflammatory ring (due to its history and more individualistic culture that is wary of such collectivist condemnation). This indicates that cultural-linguistic context can make the same friend/enemy language carry different weight or acceptability.

Another cultural-linguistic point is group identity terminology. In Ukrainian, there is the concept of “свій” vs “чужий” – roughly “one’s own” vs “outsider.” This is not exactly friend/enemy, but closely related. Свій (sviy, one of ours) is someone from our community, to be trusted; чужий (chuzhyy, stranger/outsider) is not one of us, potentially a foe. The friend–enemy distinction often aligns with this; a friend

is *sviy*, an enemy is *chuzhyy*. English doesn't have single words that exactly mirror *sviy/chuzhyy*, but phrases like "one of us" or "one of them" capture a similar idea. The presence of such concepts in Ukrainian shows how deeply ingrained the friend-vs-foe paradigm is – it extends beyond individual relationships to group taxonomy. English-speaking cultures also have in-group terms (e.g., "insider" vs "outsider"), but the emotional and moral coloring of friend vs enemy may be somewhat less pervasive in daily social categorization than in cultures that have experienced more stark life-and-death distinctions between friend and foe historically. [36]

Therefore, comparing English and Ukrainian reveals that while the lexical opposition of friend and enemy exists in both, their usage and nuances reflect cultural attitudes. English uses *friend* more liberally for a range of positive relationships, whereas Ukrainian reserves *друг* for the true friend and otherwise uses terms for lesser degrees of affiliation. Both languages laud the loyal friend and condemn the "false friend" or covert enemy, often with similar proverbs, indicating a shared human appreciation for trust and betrayal themes. Yet, due to cultural history and social norms, a Ukrainian might perceive the world more keenly through a friend–enemy lens in terms of group identity (who is with us or against us), a perspective reinforced by language (e.g., clear labels for outsiders, rich patriotic vocabulary of friends/allies vs enemies). English speakers also use *friend/enemy* for group identity but often with a bit more abstraction or reluctance in personal settings.

2.2. Usage of “FRIEND–ENEMY” in Various Types of Discourse

The binary opposition of friend vs. enemy is a powerful rhetorical and communicative tool across various domains of modern English discourse. It appears in political oratory, media headlines, social media posts, literature, and other contexts, often to persuade, provoke emotion, frame group identities, or illustrate conflict.

2.2.1. Political Discourse

The friend–enemy dichotomy is especially prominent in political rhetoric, where it serves as a device to define national identity, mobilize support, and frame international relations. Politicians frequently invoke this opposition to distinguish allies from adversaries, appeal to emotions, and justify policy decisions.

The friend–enemy dichotomy is often employed in political speeches to emphasize national unity and moral authority. A clear example appears in George W. Bush’s 2004 address during the post-9/11 War on Terror. In his remarks at the National Republican Congressional Committee Dinner, Bush stated: “*Today no friend or enemy doubts the word of the United States.*” [9] By framing both allies (“friend”) and adversaries (“enemy”) as acknowledging America’s resolve, Bush underscores the country’s credibility, strength, and unwavering position. This rhetorical strategy simplifies global relations into a binary and bolsters the persuasive power of the message by reinforcing the United States’ trustworthiness and determination.

The friend-enemy opposition may also be used in political discourse to advocate for reconciliation and the overcoming of historical divides. This rhetorical shift is evident in President Barack Obama’s 2016 speech delivered in Havana, Cuba, where he references the renowned Cuban poet José Martí: “*In his most famous poem, José Martí made this offering of friendship and peace to both his friend and his enemy.*” [41] By citing Martí’s symbolic gesture of extending a “rose” even to one’s enemy, Obama appeals to shared humanity and mutual respect. The literary

allusion functions within the political context to soften the rigid dichotomy between friend and enemy, suggesting that goodwill can transcend former hostilities. The opposition is employed not to reinforce conflict, but rather to invite former adversaries into a new era of cooperation. Through this framing, Obama encourages listeners to view the evolving U.S.:Cuba relationship as one that is moving beyond the entrenched friend-versus-enemy paradigm toward peace and partnership.

The friend–enemy binary in political discourse is sometimes strategically acknowledged only to be undermined, reflecting a pragmatic or diplomatic stance. This approach is illustrated in Donald Trump’s 2018 remarks during a NATO summit press conference, where he stated: “*He’s representing Russia. I’m representing the United States. So in a sense we’re competitors, not a question of friend or enemy. He’s not my enemy... Hopefully someday maybe he’ll be a friend.*”

[11] Although Trump explicitly references the friend-or-enemy framework, he does so to step outside of it, positioning Vladimir Putin instead as a “competitor.” This rhetorical move downplays direct hostility by denying enmity (“not my enemy”) while also withholding affirmation of friendship. In doing so, Trump projects an image of diplomatic realism, suggesting openness to future cooperation without emotional investment. By resisting a rigid dichotomy, yet still invoking it, Trump acknowledges the persuasive power of the binary while simultaneously moderating its implications, signaling a calculated flexibility in international relations.

The friend–enemy dichotomy is not limited to spoken political discourse; it also appears in literary and institutional critique. For instance, in her 2015 book *Honourable Friends? Parliament and the Fight for Change*, Green Party MP Caroline Lucas draws on the formal language of the British Parliament to highlight the contrast between rhetorical politeness and political reality. The phrase “*Honourable Friends*” is used ironically to question whether the courtesies exchanged in Parliament reflect sincere collegiality or simply conceal deeper antagonisms. [51] Through this ironic framing, Lucas challenges institutional norms and underscores how language can mask, rather than resolve, adversarial relationships.

In contrast, political rhetoric can also employ the friend–enemy binary in its most rigid and uncompromising form, particularly during times of national crisis. For example, in his 2001 address to Congress following the September 11 attacks, President George W. Bush famously declared: “*Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.*” [56] This statement eliminates the possibility of neutrality, forcing a binary moral alignment with the United States or with its enemies. By framing the global response to terrorism in such absolute terms, Bush reinforces a stark division between ally and adversary, effectively compelling other nations to declare allegiance or risk being perceived as hostile. The rhetoric emphasizes unity and moral clarity, but also suppresses nuance and ambiguity in international relations.

2.2.2. Media Discourse (News & Opinion)

In media discourse, the friend–enemy opposition often appears in headlines and opinion pieces as a tool for dramatization, simplification, and audience engagement. By framing issues in binary terms, journalists and editors appeal to emotional response and moral judgment, guiding the reader’s interpretation from the outset.

The friend–enemy dichotomy is frequently employed in media discourse to frame new developments in simplified, emotionally engaging terms. This binary often appears in headlines, where it serves as a rhetorical hook to draw readers into complex issues by casting them as potential threats or allies. A clear example can be found in a 2021 CBS News headline: “*Friend or foe? Home-buying bots enter real estate market.*” [4] This phrasing immediately introduces a sense of conflict and uncertainty—are these algorithmic buyers a helpful innovation or a disruptive force? The opposition of “friend or foe” invites readers to evaluate the technology in binary terms, priming them for a debate over its consequences. While the issue of bots in real estate is nuanced, the use of the friend–enemy framework simplifies the narrative into a familiar structure of trust versus danger, thereby enhancing emotional engagement and encouraging further reading.

In opinion journalism, the friend–enemy dichotomy is often employed to stir emotional response and frame foreign policy debates in morally charged terms. By reducing complex international dynamics to questions of loyalty and betrayal, commentators can provoke strong public reactions and push for more decisive policy stances. This strategy is evident in a 2025 opinion column by conservative commentator Victor Davis Hanson, who writes: “*Who then is our friend, and who is our enemy?*” [24] Positioned within a discussion of U.S.:Mexico relations, Hanson raises this rhetorical question after listing various adversarial actions such as cross-border crime and fentanyl trafficking. The use of the friend/enemy binary serves to dramatize the relationship between the two nations, encouraging readers to view Mexico not through a lens of diplomacy or nuance, but through a simplified moral filter. By invoking this stark opposition, the writer appeals to patriotic sentiment and casts doubt on the sincerity of neighboring allies, ultimately reinforcing the argument for a more confrontational and skeptical U.S. foreign policy approach.

Media discourse often employs the friend–enemy framework to shape public opinion by morally polarizing social groups. Through selective labeling, complex social movements can be reframed into simplistic conflicts between loyalty and disorder. A striking example of this appears in a 2022 Fox News segment titled “*Patriots vs. Protesters.*” [22] The juxtaposition in the title positions “*patriots*” as defenders of national values and stability, while “*protesters*” are implicitly cast as disruptive or even un-American. By framing civil unrest through such a binary lens, the segment promotes a moral distinction that valorizes one group and delegitimizes the other. This rhetorical strategy reduces multifaceted political and social tensions to a clear-cut opposition, thereby influencing public perception. Particularly in a polarized political climate, such framing is highly effective in steering audience beliefs and reinforcing ideological divisions.

The friend–enemy dichotomy in media can be adapted into more nuanced binaries that still function to frame complex issues in accessible, emotionally charged terms. In public discourse about technology, this often takes the form of

contrasting positive and negative roles assigned to powerful institutions. For example, a Medium headline asks: “*Tech Giants: Guardians or Gatekeepers?*” [20] This formulation positions major technology companies within a dual framework—either as “*guardians*” who protect progress and innovation or as “*gatekeepers*” who threaten privacy, freedom, and democratic access. By invoking this binary opposition, the headline distills a broad societal debate into a digestible contrast. It prompts readers to reflect on the ambivalent role of big tech firms, weighing the promises of innovation against the dangers of surveillance and control. The rhetorical effect is one of simplification and engagement: by offering a conceptual either/or structure, the headline draws in the audience and invites them to consider the stakes of technological power within a familiar moral framework.

2.2.3. Social Media Discourse

On social media platforms, the friend–enemy dichotomy is often expressed in personal, emotionally charged language. Users employ this binary to signal loyalty, define social alliances, and create a sense of belonging within online communities. The simplicity and immediacy of such discourse make oppositional framing especially persuasive in digital interaction.

The friend–enemy dichotomy functions not only in formal political or media discourse but also in everyday interpersonal communication, particularly on social media. In such informal contexts, the binary is often used to express emotional loyalty and collective identity within peer groups. A telling example appears in a 2025 tweet that reads: “*Your friend’s enemy is your enemy. That’s a friendship rule.*” [38] Though not authored by a public figure, the post exemplifies widely shared social media vernacular and asserts a familiar credo of interpersonal solidarity. By directly linking “friend” and “enemy” as opposing categories, the tweet frames allegiance to one’s friends as a moral obligation, where shared enemies become a marker of true loyalty. This rhetorical use of the friend-enemy binary reinforces in-group cohesion and identifies clear out-groups, functioning as a persuasive appeal

rooted in emotion and collective defense. Its phrasing resonates with common social experiences, making the message relatable and reinforcing normative ideas of what it means to be a “real” friend.

The friend–enemy opposition can also be strategically invoked in everyday discourse to critique political inconsistency and expose the instability of alliances. On social media, such usage often reflects public cynicism about political motives and rhetorical loyalty. A 2025 tweet illustrates this dynamic: “*Really no permanent friend or enemy in politics, only permanent interest.*” [43] Written by an ordinary user commenting on current affairs, the tweet references a well-known political adage to express frustration with shifting allegiances. By juxtaposing the terms “friend” and “enemy” within the phrase “no permanent X,” the author questions the sincerity of political relationships and frames them as transactional rather than genuine. The tone is clearly cynical, suggesting that political actors prioritize convenience and interest over principle. This metacommunicative use of the binary highlights the reversibility of roles: today’s enemy may become tomorrow’s ally—thereby undermining the legitimacy of rigid oppositions. As a rhetorical move, it fosters skepticism and potentially disillusionment, presenting politics as a domain where the labels of friend and enemy are fluid and instrumental, not absolute.

The friend-enemy dichotomy often reemerges in digital culture through adjacent narrative binaries, particularly in how users construct identity and social dynamics online. On platforms like TikTok and Twitter, individuals frequently frame their experiences through the lens of fictional storytelling, positioning themselves as heroes and others as obstacles or antagonists. A clear example of this appears in the widespread use of “*main character*” vs. “*villain*” discourse”. [52] Users describe themselves as the “*main character*,” suggesting they are the central, morally justified figure in their own narrative. In contrast, those who challenge or oppose them are labeled as “*villains*” or “*side characters*,” reducing interpersonal complexities into dramatic oppositions. This binary framing mirrors the friend-enemy logic by dividing social space into protagonists and antagonists, self and

other, right and wrong. It simplifies real-life relationships into emotionally compelling roles, encouraging users to interpret everyday conflicts through a cinematic lens that reinforces a sense of individual significance and moral clarity.

2.2.4. Literary Discourse

In literature, the friend–enemy dichotomy is often employed not only to build tension but also to challenge moral oversimplification by deliberately subverting reader expectations. Authors may invoke this binary framework to highlight deeper ethical ambiguity or to question the adequacy of such classifications in complex situations. A powerful example occurs in Philip Pullman’s 1997 fantasy novel *The Subtle Knife*, where a character asks a truth-telling device, the alethiometer, “*What is he? A friend or an enemy?*” [44] The binary is explicitly invoked, reflecting the character’s urgent need to categorize another figure as either ally or threat. However, the response: “*He is a murderer*” defies that expected dichotomy. Instead of placing the individual within the friend/enemy spectrum, the answer introduces an entirely different and morally charged identity. Pullman thus uses the rhetorical setup of the binary only to subvert it, deepening the narrative’s ethical complexity. This moment communicates to the reader that surface-level alliances are insufficient in grasping the true nature of individuals within the story. The friend–enemy opposition, therefore, serves not as a final answer but as a narrative device to expose its own limitations and to intensify the shock of a more disturbing truth.

The friend–enemy opposition can also serve as a poetic device in literary nonfiction, capturing the emotional ambivalence that often accompanies deeply personal experiences. When used metaphorically, the binary helps articulate internal conflict, especially in situations where something both nurtures and wounds. A poignant example of this appears in Wendy C. Ortiz’s 2015 memoir, where she writes: “*It has become friend and enemy.*” [42] The unnamed “it” – likely an experience, emotion, or recurring behavior referenced earlier in the text is described using two opposing roles simultaneously. The paradox of naming something both a

“friend” and an “enemy” highlights its dual nature: it may offer comfort or routine (friend), while also causing harm or emotional distress (enemy). This metaphorical opposition captures the speaker’s internal struggle and the impossibility of reducing the subject to a single category. Rhetorically, the phrasing invites the reader to empathize with the complexity of the relationship, evoking the universal experience of love-hate dynamics. In this context, the friend–enemy binary does not simplify but rather intensifies emotional nuance, functioning as a literary tool to frame psychological ambivalence and inner tension.

Even when the explicit terms “friend” and “enemy” are absent, literature often employs alternative binaries that evoke the same underlying structure of moral evaluation and trust. These oppositions serve to highlight ambiguity in relationships and to challenge simplistic notions of allegiance. A notable example appears in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), where Dumbledore tells Harry: *“You are the one who has to decide whether it's worth trusting me. Whether I'm a fool or your ally.”* [45] Although the binary presented is “fool” versus “ally” rather than “enemy” versus “friend,” it carries similar rhetorical weight. Harry is invited to classify Dumbledore either as a reliable supporter or as a dangerous, perhaps deluded figure. This moment underscores the emotional uncertainty and moral ambiguity that run throughout the novel. Rather than reinforcing a simple good-versus-evil framework, the opposition destabilizes it, encouraging both Harry and the reader to question appearances and consider the fluidity of trust. The rhetorical effect is to complicate loyalty and to suggest that alliances in times of conflict are not always clearly defined.

The friend-enemy dichotomy is often used in literature to heighten narrative tension and reflect a protagonist’s internal conflict, particularly in settings marked by danger, survival, and moral ambiguity. This rhetorical strategy forces characters and readers to navigate uncertainty, questioning whom to trust. A clear example appears in Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* (2008), when Katniss reflects: *“Peeta Mellark just saved my life. I think. He gave me bread. [...] But then, what’s*

he doing with the Careers? Friend or foe?” [13] The phrase “Friend or foe?” directly invokes the binary opposition, encapsulating Katniss’s confusion about Peeta’s loyalty. She is caught between gratitude for his earlier kindness and suspicion over his alliance with her adversaries. This moment dramatizes the theme of mistrust in the novel’s dystopian context, where alliances are fluid and survival often depends on perception rather than truth. Rhetorically, the friend-enemy framework captures Katniss’s emotional turmoil and highlights the danger of applying rigid moral categories to complex human relationships. The opposition is not resolved immediately but functions to sustain suspense and reflect the protagonist’s evolving understanding of loyalty and betrayal.

Literary narratives often challenge the friend-enemy dichotomy by introducing alternative binaries that complicate notions of justice, leadership, and moral responsibility. These rhetorical strategies invite readers to reconsider the ethical treatment of those labeled as enemies, especially in the context of power and violence. In George R.R. Martin’s *A Game of Thrones* (1996), Lord Eddard Stark asserts: “*The man who passes the sentence should swing the sword.*” [34] While the quote does not explicitly invoke the friend-enemy opposition, it establishes a moral binary between the just leader who assumes personal responsibility for punishment and the detached executioner, who enacts violence without accountability. This framing suggests that even those considered enemies are owed a degree of dignity and that their execution must carry moral weight. By highlighting the human cost of enmity, the quote complicates simplistic judgments about good and evil. Rhetorically, it urges the reader to reflect on how power is exercised and to question the ethics of impersonal violence. In doing so, the text reframes enmity not as a justification for cruelty, but as a test of one’s integrity and capacity for justice.

Also the friend-enemy dichotomy is often used to portray the psychological consequences of conflict, especially how war distorts personal relationships and erodes trust. Such framing captures the emotional devastation that occurs when familiar bonds are severed by violence or ideology. A striking example appears in

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), where the narrator reflects: "*The war changed everything. Even people you loved became strangers, or worse – enemies with familiar faces.*" [2] This line presents a chilling progression: loved ones turn into strangers, and eventually into enemies. The war functions as the catalyst for this transformation, illustrating how intimacy can be undone by trauma and political division. By framing former loved ones as "*enemies with familiar faces,*" the text emphasizes the emotional dissonance and personal tragedy of such shifts. Rhetorically, the opposition dramatizes how war destabilizes identity and loyalty, underscoring the fragility of human connection under extreme pressure. The friend-enemy dichotomy thus becomes a powerful tool to convey the inner rupture that mirrors external chaos.

2.2.4. Professional Discourse

The friend–enemy dichotomy is also found in professional and business-oriented contexts, where it is used metaphorically to emphasize potential risks and benefits. In such cases, the binary serves as a rhetorical device that simplifies complex professional decisions and appeals to the reader's emotional and practical reasoning.

The friend–enemy opposition is not limited to political or literary contexts; it is also widely used in professional and commercial discourse to create vivid, persuasive metaphors that simplify complex ideas. In business communication, such framing often serves to dramatize the consequences of strategic decisions and encourage proactive behavior. An illustrative example appears in a 2013 professional development blog post, which advises: "*Your website can be your business' best friend or its worst enemy.*" [54] By personifying the company website as either a loyal ally or a harmful adversary, the author employs the friend–enemy binary to underscore the critical role of web presence in modern commerce. The metaphor intensifies the stakes: a well-designed website supports and enhances the business (like a helpful friend), while a poorly executed one undermines its success

(like an internal enemy). This binary phrasing functions rhetorically as the article's attention-grabbing thesis, simplifying a multifaceted issue into a memorable either-or scenario. In doing so, it motivates readers (particularly business owners) to take their digital strategy seriously. The opposition frames the website not as a neutral tool, but as an active force that can either work for or against the company, thereby generating a sense of urgency and responsibility through emotionally charged language.

Across political, media, literary, and digital contexts, the friend–enemy binary emerges as a deeply embedded rhetorical frame that shapes how individuals and societies interpret relationships, loyalty, and conflict. Whether invoked to build national unity, dramatize geopolitical tensions, critique political pragmatism, or convey emotional turmoil, this opposition simplifies complex dynamics into accessible moral categories. Yet, as shown in literature and song, it can also be subverted, blurred, or internalized, reflecting the fluid and often paradoxical nature of human connection. Ultimately, the persistent presence of this binary across diverse genres affirms its communicative power—capable of both clarifying and complicating meaning in modern English discourse.

Summary to chapter 2

The friend–enemy dichotomy is employed across political speeches, journalistic headlines, literary texts, popular culture, social media, and everyday communication. Its communicative function varies by context: in politics, it often serves to mobilize, polarize, or persuade; in journalism, to frame debates or critique ideological simplifications; in literature and music, to explore themes of betrayal, identity, and emotional ambiguity. The dichotomy frequently functions as a cognitive shortcut, helping speakers and audiences to frame allies and adversaries in clear, emotionally resonant terms. Yet in creative discourse, the line between friend and enemy is often blurred, inverted, or internalized, giving rise to irony and psychological complexity.

A comparative analysis of five original English texts (from politics, literature, journalism, and social media) revealed both patterns and divergences in how the friend–enemy opposition is expressed. While political and social media texts tended to use the binary to divide audiences and emphasize in-group/out-group dynamics, texts favored introspective or ironic uses of the same opposition to evoke empathy or reflect inner conflict. Journalistic texts often adopted or critiqued the dichotomy depending on context, aiming to inform rather than incite. Overall, the comparative approach highlighted how context, purpose, and genre shape the tone, intention, and interpretation of friend–enemy oppositional language.

While the friend–enemy pair is a simple lexical opposition, its rhetorical versatility allows it to serve diverse communicative purposes – from ideological persuasion to emotional storytelling. This reinforces its relevance not only in theoretical semantics, but in real-world discourse and linguistic practice.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has examined the lexical, semantic, and cultural dimensions of the friend–enemy opposition in modern English, establishing it as one of the most pervasive and conceptually loaded binary pairs in the language. The study demonstrates that this opposition functions not only at the lexical level, as a complementary antonym pair, but also as a powerful rhetorical, cognitive, and cultural schema that shapes discourse across a wide range of communicative domains.

The theoretical foundation outlined the nature of lexical oppositions, situating friend-enemy within the broader framework of antonymy and binary contrast. Structuralist and post-structuralist perspectives helped illuminate how oppositional logic organizes language and thought, while cognitive linguistics emphasized the experiential and conceptual roots of this dichotomy. The friend–enemy pair emerges as a prototypical binary used to encode social alignment and exclusion, frequently employed to construct notions of identity, group belonging, and threat.

The empirical analysis confirmed the adaptability and rhetorical utility of the friend–enemy opposition in real-life discourse. Across political speeches, media headlines, literary works, and social media posts, the dichotomy is used to simplify complexity, evoke emotional responses, and persuade audiences. While political and journalistic discourse often exploits the binary for ideological or persuasive purposes, literary and personal texts tend to blur, invert, or reflect upon the friend-enemy divide, revealing its instability and emotional resonance.

Moreover, the contrastive analysis with Ukrainian highlighted both linguistic parallels and cultural divergences. While both English and Ukrainian encode the friend–enemy schema in deeply rooted ways, their pragmatic applications and emotional intensities differ, reflecting broader cultural worldviews regarding group identity, conflict, and loyalty.

In general, the friend-enemy opposition exemplifies how binary structures in language carry profound semantic, ideological, and emotional weight. Its widespread use across genres attests to its communicative power, yet also warns of the risks of oversimplification and polarization. Understanding how such oppositions function helps us decode the narratives that shape public opinion, identity formation, and interpersonal dynamics.

This research contributes to lexicology, discourse analysis, and translation studies by offering a detailed account of how a fundamental binary opposition operates both as a linguistic form and as a social and cognitive construct. Future investigations might expand upon this study through corpus-based or psycholinguistic approaches, or by comparing additional cultural frameworks to further explore how language encodes difference, allegiance, and otherness.

РЕЗЮМЕ

У цій роботі було досліджено лексичні, семантичні та культурні аспекти опозиції друг–ворог у сучасній англійській мові, що дало змогу встановити її як одну з найпоширеніших та концептуально навантажених бінарних пар у мові. Дослідження показало, що ця опозиція функціонує не лише на лексичному рівні, як пара комплементарних антонімів, але й як потужна риторична, когнітивна та культурна схема, яка формує дискурс у найрізноманітніших комунікативних сферах.

Теоретичне підґрунтя окреслило природу лексичних опозицій, розмістивши пару друг-ворог у ширшому контексті антонімії та бінарного протиставлення. Структуралістські й постструктуралістські підходи допомогли висвітлити, як опозиційна логіка організовує мову й мислення, тоді як когнітивна лінгвістика підкреслила досвідні та концептуальні витoki цієї дихотомії. Пара друг-ворог постає як прототипова бінарність, що використовується для кодування соціальної належності та відчуження, і часто застосовується для побудови уявлень про ідентичність, приналежність до групи та загрозу.

Емпіричний аналіз підтвердив адаптивність і риторичну ефективність опозиції друг-ворог у реальному дискурсі. У політичних промовах, заголовках ЗМІ, художніх текстах і дописах у соцмережах ця дихотомія використовується для спрощення складного, викликання емоційної реакції та переконання аудиторії. Якщо в політичному й журналістському дискурсі бінарність часто експлуатується з ідеологічною чи переконливою метою, то в художніх і особистих текстах вона, як правило, розмивається, переосмислюється або ставиться під сумнів, що виявляє її нестійкість та емоційний відтінок.

Крім того, контрастивний аналіз із українською мовою висвітлив як лексичні паралелі, так і культурні відмінності. Хоча як в англійській, так і в українській мові схема друг-ворог глибоко закорінена, їхні прагматичні

реалізації й емоційна насиченість відрізняються, що відображає ширші культурні уявлення про групову ідентичність, конфлікт і вірність.

Отже, опозиція друг-ворог демонструє, як бінарні структури в мові несуть у собі глибоке семантичне, ідеологічне та емоційне навантаження. Її поширене використання у різних жанрах засвідчує її комунікативну силу, але водночас застерігає від ризиків надмірного спрощення та поляризації. Розуміння того, як функціонують подібні опозиції, допомагає нам розшифровувати наративи, що формують громадську думку, ідентичність і міжособистісну взаємодію.

Це дослідження робить внесок у лексикологію, дискурс-аналіз і перекладознавство, пропонуючи детальний огляд того, як фундаментальна бінарна опозиція функціонує як мовна форма та як соціальний і когнітивний конструкт. У подальших дослідженнях можна було б розширити цю роботу за допомогою корпусного або психолінгвістичного підходу, а також порівняння інших культурних систем для глибшого вивчення того, як мова кодує відмінність, приналежність і "інакшість".

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