

## Antonomasia in English and Arabic: A Contrastive Study

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### ABSTRACT

This contrastive study deals with the word formation process of antonomasia in both English and Arabic respectively. The main focus of this study is to investigate the expansion on the meaning of utterances in both English and Arabic. The basic and explicitly adoptive linguistic phenomenon responsible for this expansion is antonomasia in English and its counterpart كناية, نعت in Arabic. The study sheds the light on the similarities and differences of this phenomenon in both language systems. It will also focus its resources and classifications in both languages. The study also aims at investigating the purposes behind using antonomasia in the languages under investigation. Among the major similarities concluded from this contrastive analysis is the fact that this phenomenon is explicitly existent in both English and Arabic, in addition to the features of turning a proper noun or epithet to the meaning of the well-known word. Moreover, in both languages, the resources of this phenomena antonomasia is depend on the deep literary, religious and historical origins. Therefore, during the process of translation finding an equivalent endangers the meaning. With regards to the major differences concluded from contrasting the two languages, on the one hand English antonomasia focuses heavily on names of literature while Arabic antonomasia depends on verbs and acts. In Arabic, there is an additional mechanism for creating antonomasia which depends on collocation in utilizing the metonymic meaning.

### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 26<sup>th</sup> March 2022

Revised: 26<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Accepted: 8<sup>th</sup> June 2022

### KEY WORDS:

Antonomasia,  
Metonymic,  
Metaphorical, Linguistic,  
Stylistic

### 1. Introduction

Using a proper name to refer to something else with that name's attribute, or the use of a general term to represent a referent with a proper famous name is known as "antonomasia". It is the employment of a proper name in place of the common word it represents, as in referring to a philanderer as Don Juan.

However, the object of the current study is to highlight the importance of this word formation process thorough showing its forms and/or functions in English and Arabic. Also, it differentiates between the closely related concepts of antonomasia.

The overall organization of this study is arranged in two foundational divisions, namely, the parallel description then the comparison. Basically, the description begins with the English language. The second

half focuses on the side of the Arabic language. Then, conclusions are made to highlight the contrast of the two languages.

## 2. Antonomasia in English

### Defining English Antonomasia

Antonomasia is a "figure of speech" that is frequently employed in literary works. It is a kind of "trope" as a rhetorical term or an expression with transferable meaning such as a metaphor (Bussmann 1996: 1227)

e.g., *the Almighty-God, The eternal city-Rome.*

e.g. *an Odyssey, or the Paris of the West -San Francisco*

Accordingly, it is seen as a stylistic device that substitutes words for other words or names to portrait a particular image in the mind of the recipient. Such substitution is characterized by an expanded and more colorful expression of accentuation, variation, or explanation (Kagramanov, 2003: 23) such as in definition which represents a special type of periphrasis:

*Berlin* was '*the divided city*,'

*Ireland* is '*the Emerald Isle*.'

Galperin (1974:164) explains the nature antonomasia when he states that it is based on the interaction of nominal and logical meanings which are realized simultaneously.

e.g. *hooligan* and *boycott*,

### 2.2 Types of English Antonomasia

As antonomasia is a process of forming the name of a person or a place into a common noun, verb or adjective from. Therefore, it classified into different types according to the different views of scholars.

Bukhardit and Nerlich (2010:17) relate the different kinds of antonomasia with the different semantic mechanisms of this process by classifying it into two types:

i. metonymic and

ii. metaphorical.

Metonymic mechanism is done by using regular noun instead of a proper name,

e.g., '*The thunder*' to stand for '*Zeus*'.

Skrebnev (1994: 57) mentions that when a proper name is given to a person, such as, *Don Juan* and *Cicero*, it is called metaphorical antonomasia. It should also be emphasized that metaphoric antonomasia is frequently regarded as a type of allusion, i.e., an implied reference to a literary, historical, mythological or biblical explanation through the use of a word or phrase (ibid). Thus, he apparently divides it into four kinds according to:

i. Using a historical figure's proper name, e.g., *he would be a Napoleon of peace, or a Bismarck.*

ii. Adopting biblical names, such as *Ismael, the exile, and Judas, the traitor.*

iii. Mythological names, such as *He was a new Apollo for her.*

iv. employing literary names, such as *Casanova and Scrooge.*

Bukhardit and Nerlich (2010:17) indicate that when a personal name stands for something related to the bearer of the name who formerly existed, such as a writer's, painter's, or sculptor's work of art, metonymic antonomasia occurs. For example:

1. *He has sold his Vandykes.* (Hurst).

2. *This is my real Goya* (Galsworthy).

3. *Wonderful Rubens.*

Such form of antonomasia is common in normal speech and political jargon, such as "*Wall Street*" and "*Down Street*" (the residence of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom) (ibid). It's worth mentioning that the case of metonymic antonomasia is controversial. Scholars disagree on whether this phenomenon is to be classified as metonymic antonomasia or one of the varieties of metonymy. It is incorrect to consider the transfer of the artist's name to his work of art as antonomasia, according to Kagramanov (2003: 53), because it is a metonymic correlation. At the same time, Kramsch (1990) claims that it is metonymic antonomasia, since people witness the employment of a proper name, which becomes one of the qualities of the topic to which it indicates (Kramsch 1990: 82)

Widdowson (1992) proposes another classification of the phenomenon of antonomasia when he differentiates between linguistic and stylistic (Widdowson 1992:102):

i. Linguistic antonomasia: it occurs when proper names become nominal and lose their vibrant expressiveness.

e.g. *Mackintosh*.

Other words remain their connectedness with their proper names while yet retaining their expressiveness such as:

*uncle Sam* – an American,

*Patric* – an Irishman,

*John Bull* - an Englishman.

ii. stylistic antonomasia is of two types:

a. Using a proper name to refer to things associated with an attribute(s) such as:

Calling '*Einstein*' for a genius student or person.

'*Solomon*' to a leader or a person as a wise ruler.

b. Using a generic term that refers to a thing that already has a proper name. It is widely used by satirists, writers, humorists, etc. for example: "Cactus state" refers to New Mexico; "The Iron Lady" to Margaret Thatcher.

### 2.3 Functions of English Antonomasia

Pedash (2003: 23) notices that speakers can produce antonomasia by almost all parts of speech. Nowadays, this usage is often used in the realm of publications and the style of newspapers. For instance:

*"I suspect that the Noes and Don't Knows would far outnumber the Yesses."*

Kagramanov (2003:17) declares that antonomasia indirectly takes the most eminent feature or the leading one of people or an event which is used by satirists and humorists. For example: *Mr. Snake*, *Miss Languish*, etc.

Sort (1989) also suggests that this process helps giving "concrete expression for abstract notion". Such usage is a highly context-dependent.

For example: "Your Mrs. What's-her-name seems so English".

On the other hand, the aesthetic effect of antonomasia is strongly dependent on the unexpectedness of the name being communicated by the combination of words (Sort 1989: 73).

## 3. Antonomasia in Arabic

### 3.1 Defining Arabic Antonomasia

Antonomasia is a widespread process in the Arabic language which enriched the Arabic rhetoric with the variety of styles and types. This notion comes under the term of الكناية which is defined by منظور ابن (d. 711 A.H.1970). It refers to the usage an utterance for "a meaning which is not its lexical or sometimes connotative one."

For example, احمد كبير القلب (*Ahmad has a big heart*)

This sentence does not mean that he has a heart of a big size but to refer the compassion or the mercy of that person.

It is also expressed by شيخون (1974: 4) as "an utterance that is used beyond its mere lexical meaning to achieve its essential characteristics in other intention of the speaker".

الشيخ أمين (1982: 34) defines the process of antonomasia in Arabic as it is "valid in three factors that work simultaneously to constitute it which are: the utterance utilized in antonomasia, the intended meaning or metonymy, and the semantic relation between the utterance and intended meaning."

Many Arab scholars believe that whether Antonomasia should be considered a grammatical or rhetorical component of the language, it is a contentious question. It is a linguistic component of the language, according to سبيويه (d.180 A.H 1960: 2/248), because it can be used as an elliptical device, such as in the interjection of some unknown masculine person. Antonomasia is, likewise, viewed as a linguistic device

by الفراء (d.207 A.H. 1980: 104) since it reflects two essentially linguistic applications of the language, namely pronouns and synonyms.

الجاحظ (d. 255 A.H. 1960: 432) classifies this phenomenon as "a purely rhetorical device which is used widely in Arabic literature to achieve a type of meaning with a stylistic nature of more impact than using a simple lexical one." Furthermore, الفراء (d. 285A.H. 1956: 2/5-6) affirms that speakers utilize antonomasia solely for stylistic purposes like: "indirect intention, hyperbolic description, and euphemism."

This controversy among the Arab scholars has created an impact on practical studies. The most important one was the interpretation of the Holly Quran. On which the used both perspectives depending on the huge heritage of the poetry and prose of Arabic language and the effort of those scholars.

### 3.2 Types Arabic Antonomasia

Many Arab scholars like الجرجاني (d. 471 A.H/ 1984: 66) and السكاكي (d. 626 A.H/ 1964: 637) divide antonomasia in the form of tree types:

الكناية عن الموصوف (adjectival antonomasia),  
(substantive antonomasia), and  
الكناية بالنسبة (relative antonomasia):

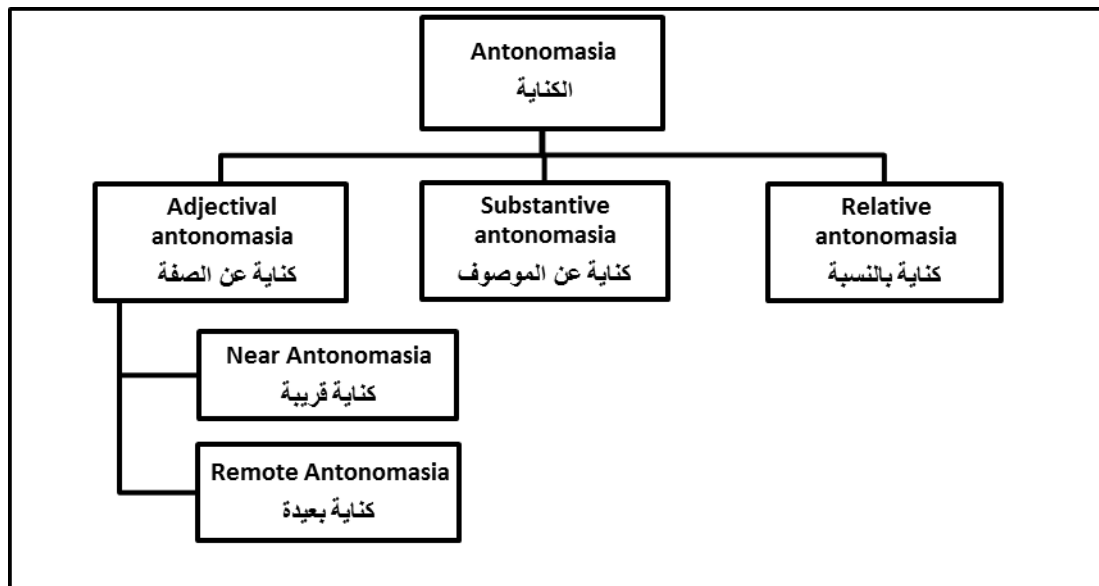


Figure (1) Types of Antonomasia in Arabic

The figure shows that the first type of antonomasia in the Arabic language is adjectival antonomasia. This kind requires similarity between the features of the real meaning and the metonymic meaning as it is in the holy Glorious Quran:

(ووجوه يومئذ عليها غبرة. ترهقها قترة) سورة عبس الآية 40-41

"And other faces, that Day, will be **dust-stained**;. **Darkness** will cover them," Abasa 40-40

This Quranic verse describes the unbelievers on "Judgment Day" as being "dust-stained and covered with darkness as a sign of being unbelievers". So. The adjective darkness is a metonymic kind of antonomasia of unbelief.

This type of antonomasia can be subclassified into two kinds according to the mental configuration:

- i. near and
- ii. remote one.

The first one "near" does not involve power mental processes to connect the relation between the intention and the lexical meaning (d. 471 A.H/ 1984: 66) as in: الجرجاني

(ومن يعمل من الصالحات من ذكر أو أنثى وهو مؤمن فأولئك يدخلون الجنة ولا يظلمون نقيرا)  
سورة النساء الآية 124

- "And whoever does righteous good deeds, male or female, and is a true believer, such will enter Paradise and not the least injustice, even to the size of a speck on the back of a date stone, will be done to them".  
An-Nisa' 124

The word نقيير, in this Quranic verse "speck" refers to smallness or accuracy. The speaker can make this direct conclusion concerning the relation between the two meanings.

Remote antonomasia, on the other hand, needs some level of thinking to relate the connection between the intention and the lexical meaning as in: (He spends a lot of ash.) . فلان كثير الرماد .

The expression "a lot of ashes" in this example is a sign of being generous and hospitable, however, the intention of this meaning needs a series of conclusions to be reached through like a lot of ash means a lot of fire which means a lot of food to be cooked which eventually means a lot of guests.

The second kind of Arabic antonomasia is a substantive one. The attributive or subordinate attribute of the speaker's intended meaning is used to create this type. The Arabic scholar السكاكي (d. 626 A.H/ 1964: 640) assures that this type of antonomasia is concentrated on the more explicit features through the secondary ones of the lexical meaning:

(ولا تجعل يدك مغلولة الى عنقك ولا تبسطها كل البسط فتقعد ملوما محسورا) سورة الاسراء الآية 29

- "And let not your hand be tied to your neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach, so that you become blameworthy and in severe poverty." Isra': 29

In this verse, the act of hand demonstrates the two concepts of being a miser and a spendthrift.

All in all, the last type of antonomasia is relative antonomasia in which the relation between the described characteristic and the bearer of it is indirect. In fact, the connection is created with a non-essential but integral portion of the quality carrier. For example:

His dress is generosity الكرم ثوبه

The relationship between generosity and clothes is immaterial in this example, but it can be associated with the bearer of the attribute by pointing to one of the basic concepts that regularly co-occur.

### 3.3 Functions of Antonomasia in Arabic

In Arabic, Antonomasia plays a significant influence in the speakers' morality; this could be its primary role. The usage of antonomasia, according to المبرد (d. 285 A.H. 1956: 2/7), is a requirement for avoiding abusive or morally improper remarks, especially when it comes to the sexual relationship between men and women. For instance is the Ayah from the Holly Quranic Verse:

قال تعالى (لا جناح عليكم ان طلقتم النساء ما لم تمسوهن) سورة البقرة الآية 236

- "There is no sin on you, if you divorce women while yet you have not touched (had sexual relation with) them" (Al-Baqara 236)

The Glorious Quran uses antonomasia to avoid the use of direct words of sexual relations and utilizes, instead, the verb يمس (to touch).

The other function of antonomasia in Arabic is to glorify, show respect or praise people. According to المبرد (d. 285 A.H. 1956: 2/5) this function takes a central role in antonomasia. One of the most common instances of this function is when a man is referred to by his son's name rather than his own as a matter of giving respect.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The contrastive analysis conducted so far in regards to the notion of assimilation has highlighted some of the most important facts regarding this process of word formation in the two respective languages, English and Arabic. Over and above, despite the universality of this phenomenon, the research has made it clear that both languages approach antonomasia differently in terms of its various linguistically annotated forms and functions. With that being said, certain conclusions can be deduced. The first group is related to the similarities found in both English and Arabic concerning the use of antonomasia. While the second one is related to the differences in both language systems concerning this phenomena.

##### **1. The similarities:**

- a. The same nature of this phenomenon is existed in both English and Arabic, in addition to the features of turning a proper noun or epithet to the meaning of the commonized word.
- b. In both languages, the resources of this phenomena antonomasia in depend on the deep literary, religious and historical origins. Therefore, during the process of translation finding an equivalent endangers the meaning.
- c. The process using and classifying the kinds of antonomasia in both languages depend on semantic mechanisms and processes.

##### **2. The differences:**

- a. The phenomenon of antonomasia English is either linguistic and stylistic according to purpose, while there is a controversy in Arabic whether it is a linguistic or a stylistic.
- b. English antonomasia focuses heavily on names of literature while Arabic antonomasia depends on verbs and acts.
- c. In Arabic, there is an additional mechanism for creating antonomasia which depends on collocation in utilizing the metonymic meaning.

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