

OPPOSIT: Semantic Opposition

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Page Discussion

Read

From The Encyclopedia of Arabic Rhetoric

 All rhetorical devices > Linguistic Embellishments (*ʿilm al-baḍīʿ*)

Alphabetical list

Definition

Antithesis (*al-ṭibāq*) is an Arabic rhetorical device involving the juxtaposition of two words whose meanings are mutually opposed — that is, whose meanings cannot coexist simultaneously in the same thing — whether the opposition is literal or figurative. The two words may be nouns, verbs, or particles, and the opposition may be allegorical or non-allegorical.^{[1][2][3][4][5][6][7][8][9]}

Linguistic Operations

Antithesis operates through the juxtaposition of lexical items with opposite meanings within the same proposition or across closely related propositions.^{[1][6]}

From the sources

The opposition can be achieved through:

- Direct antonyms** — two words with inherently opposite meanings.^{[3][6]}
- Negated forms** — a word and its negation, such as *lā takhshū* and *ikhshawn*.^[1]

From the sources

The opposing terms may appear in different grammatical forms:

- Nouns** — such as *al-zulumāt* and *al-nūr*.^[3]
- Verbs** — such as *adhaka* and *abkā*.^[3]
- Particles** — such as *lahā* and *ʿalayhā*.^[1]
- Mixed grammatical categories** — such as a noun paired with a verb.^{[3][7]}
- Clauses** — the corresponding meanings may be expressed by two clauses rather than by individual lexical items.^[9]

Recognition

Encyclopedia Interpretation

The following diagnostic tests aid identification. These criteria are not explicitly presented by the sources as a recognition checklist, but are derived from the source-attested mechanism of the device.

Antithesis may be present when:

- Two words with opposite meanings appear in the same sentence or in closely related sentences.^{[1][6]}
- One term appears in positive form and a related term appears in negated form, producing semantic contrast.^[1]
- Two terms appear to be opposites but the opposition only becomes apparent once the figurative meaning of one or both terms is understood — this may indicate either true antithesis or simulated antithesis (إيهام التضاد).^{[7][6]}

Diagnostic Communicative Enhancements

- Aesthetic enhancement** — the juxtaposition of opposing meanings adds beauty and freshness to expression.^[3]
- Meaning enrichment** (تكميل المعنى) — the opposition strengthens and completes the meaning when it serves the rhetorical purpose of the utterance.^[6]



الطباق

OPPOSIT: Semantic Opposition

Category

Linguistic Embellishments ('ilm al-baḍīʿ)

Subcategory

Contrasts & Inversions

Synonyms

المطابقة، تضادّ

Built upon

8 sources

Annotation Unit

ARDT Code

OPPOSIT

Level

1 (Rhetorical device)

Included in Taxonomy

ARDT

v0.1.1
v0.1.0

External Identifiers

BALAGHAScore

CC-1

BalaghaBase

Q69

OpenAlex

W4415372292

Applications

BalaghaCorpus

See examples

Cite this page

Live DOI

10.64393/balagha.Q69

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Applying the Recognition Framework

The information on this page can be used to evaluate whether this device is present in a candidate [lexical item](#) using the [Specific Device Recognition](#) part of the [Universal Framework for Identifying Arabic Rhetorical Devices](#):

- Use the Definition, Mechanism, and Recognition sections of this page in [Step 1](#).
- Apply the substitution test in [Step 2](#).
- Consider contextual indicators in [Step 3](#).
- Use the Diagnostic Communicative Enhancements section of this page in [Step 4](#).

Subtypes of Antithesis

ANTITH-NN: Non-Negated Antithesis (*tibāq al-ijāb*)

From the sources

The occurrence of two antonyms in a given proposition without negation.^{[1][3]}

Annotation Unit	
ARDT	ANTITH-NN
Level	2 (Subtype)
BalaghaBase	Q384 ↗

Source Example [↗](#)

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ
وَلَا الظُّلُمَاتُ وَلَا النُّورُ

Quran 35:19-20

Not equal are the blind and the seeing; nor are the darkness and the light.

Explanation

The non-negated antithesis is represented by the antonyms (الأعمى / البصير) and (الظلمات / النور).

Source Example [↗](#)

وَنَحْسَبُهُمْ إِنْقَاظًا وَهُمْ رُقُودٌ

Quran 18:18

You would think them awake, whereas they are asleep.

Explanation

The non-negated antithesis is represented by the antonyms *ayqāzan* (awake) and *ruqūd* (asleep).^[8]

Source Example [↗](#)

سَيَجْعَلُ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ عُسْرٍ يُسْرًا

God will grant ease, following hardship (Q65:7).

Explanation

The antonyms *‘usr* (hardship) and *yusr* (ease) are placed in direct proximity.^[10]

Source Example [↗](#)

جلس الأشقاء الأعداء على طاولة المُفاوضات

The enemy brothers sat down on the negotiating table.

Explanation

The antonyms *al-ashqā'* (brothers) and *al-a'dā'* (enemies) are mutually exclusive categories applied simultaneously to the same group.^[10]

Constructed Example

يَبْدَأُ الطُّفْلُ حَيَاتَهُ ضَعِيفًا وَيَنْتَهِي شَيْخًا ضَعِيفًا، غَيْرَ أَنَّهُ يَمُرُّ بَيْنَهُمَا قَوِيًّا.

A person begins life weak and ends it weak, yet passes between the two strong.

Explanation

The non-negated antithesis is represented by the antonyms *da'ifan* (weak) and *qawiyyan* (strong).

ANTITH-NG: Negated Antithesis (*tibāq al-salb*)

From the sources

Opposition achieved through negation, where one of the two opposites appears in negated form, producing semantic contrast.^{[1][3]}

Annotation Unit

ARDT	ANTITH-NG
Level	2 (Subtype)
BalaghaBase	Q385 ↗

Source Example

فَلَا تَخْشَوْا النَّاسَ وَاحْشَوْا

Quran 5:44

Do not fear the people, but fear Me.

Explanation

The negated antithesis is achieved through the opposition between negated and affirmative forms of the same semantic field.

Source Example

وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ يَعْلَمُونَ ظَهْرًا مِنَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا

Quran 30:6–7

But most people do not know. They know an outward appearance of the worldly life.

Explanation

The negated antithesis is achieved through the opposition between *lā ya'lamūna* (they do not know) and *ya'lamūna* (they know) — negated and affirmative forms of the same verb.^[8]

Constructed Example

لَا تَيْئَسُ مِنَ الْعَدُوِّ، بَلْ ارْجُهُ.

Do not despair of tomorrow; rather, hope for it.

Explanation

The negated antithesis is achieved through the opposition between the negated *lā tay'as* (do not despair) and the affirmative *irjuhu* (hope for it), two verbs from the same semantic field of orientation toward the future.

Different From

- **المقابلة (Parallel Antithesis)** — الطباق joins a single pair of opposites, whereas المقابلة extends this to two or more ordered pairs of corresponding opposites.^{[11][12][7]}
- **Simulated Opposition (*ihām al-taḍādd*)** — two expressions may appear to encode opposing meanings at the surface level, but the opposition disappears once the intended figurative or contextual meaning of one expression is resolved. It is therefore not annotated as Semantic Opposition.^{[2][6][13]} For example, in صَحِكَ الْمَشِيبُ بِرَأْسِهِ فَبَكَى ("hoariness laughed on his head, and he wept"), *ḍaḥika* ("laughed") and *bakā* ("wept") appear to be opposites. However, *ḍaḥika al-mashību* is metaphorical, conveying the appearance or spread of grey hair rather than literal laughter. The contextually intended meanings are therefore not themselves opposed.
-  **COLCOMB: Colour Combination** where the opposition is specifically between colours.

Compound Devices

Parallel Antithesis (*al-muqābala*)

[Encyclopedia Interpretation](#) -> [Compound Device](#)

Definition

In classical Arabic rhetoric, المقابلة is an independent rhetorical device in which two or more meanings are followed by their corresponding opposites in the same order.^{[11][12][7][14][8][15]} The Encyclopedia analyses this as a compound configuration of [Antithesis](#) and [Parallelism](#).

Subtypes

Classical sources identify subtypes by the number of paired terms.^{[12][7]}

- **Two against two** (مقابلة اثنين باثنين) — two meanings followed by their two opposites in order
- **Three against three** (مقابلة ثلاثة بثلاثة) — three meanings followed by their three opposites in order
- **Four against four** (مقابلة أربعة بأربعة) — four meanings followed by their four opposites in order

Validity condition

The corresponding oppositions occur in the same order; classical sources treat violation of this ordered correspondence as faulty (فاسدة).^{[11][12][15]}

Source Example

يُجِلُّ لَهُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَيُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْخَبَائِثَ

Quran 7:157

He makes lawful for them the good things and forbids them the evil things.

Explanation

This passage exhibits three ordered oppositions: *yuhillu* / *yuharrimu*, *lahum* / *'alayhim*, and *al-ṭayyibāt* / *al-khabā'ith*. It is therefore an example of مقابلة ثلاثة بثلاثة — three against three.^{[16][14]}

Source Example

فَلْيَضْحَكُوا قَلِيلًا وَلْيَبْكُوا كَثِيرًا

Quran 9:82

Let them laugh a little and weep much.

Explanation

This passage exhibits two ordered oppositions: *falyadhakū* (let them laugh) / *walyabkū* (let them weep), and *qalīlan* (a little) / *kathīran* (much). It is therefore an example of مقابلة اثنين باثنين — two against two.^[8]

Source Example

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أَعْطَى وَاتَّقَىٰ وَصَدَّقَ بِالْحُسْنَىٰ فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُ لِلْيُسْرَىٰ وَأَمَّا مَنْ بَخِلَ وَاسْتَغْنَىٰ وَكَذَّبَ بِالْحُسْنَىٰ فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُ لِلْعُسْرَىٰ

Quran 92:5–10

As for he who gives and fears God and believes in the best reward, We will ease him toward ease. But as for he who withholds and considers himself free of need and denies the best reward, We will ease him toward difficulty.

Explanation

This passage exhibits four ordered oppositions: *a'tā* / *bakhīla*, *ittaqa* / *istaghna*, *ṣaddaqa* / *kadhdhaba*, and *al-yusrā* / *al-'usrā*. It is therefore an example of المقابلة rather than simple الطباق.^{[1][7][14]}

Source Example

أُزَوِّرُهُمْ وَسَوَادُ اللَّيْلِ يَشْفَعُ لِي
وَأُنْثِي وَيَبَاضُ الصُّبْحُ يُغْرِي بِي

al-Mutanabbī

I visit them in secret, while the darkness of night intercedes for me,
And turn away while the brightness of morning incites against me.

Explanation

The verse arranges corresponding oppositions across its two hemistichs, including *sawād al-layl* (the darkness of night) / *bayāḍ al-ṣubḥ* (the brightness of morning), and *yashfa' u lī* (intercedes for me) / *yughri bī* (incites against me). Cachia cites it as an example of المقابلة.^[15]

Constructed Example

يَنْتَعِشُ الْأَمَلُ فِي الْقُلُوبِ الْحَيَّةِ، وَيَمُوتُ الْيَأْسُ فِي الْقُلُوبِ الْمَيِّتَةِ.

Hope flourishes in living hearts, and despair dies in dead hearts.

Explanation

This passage exhibits two ordered oppositions: *yanta'ishu* (flourishes) / *yamūtu* (dies), and *al-amalu* (hope) / *al-yā'su* (despair), with the further reinforcing opposition of *al-hayya* (living) / *al-mayyita* (dead). It is therefore an example of مقابلة اثنين باثنين — two against two.

Technical

Encyclopedia Interpretation

Al-Nābulusī defines *al-tibāq* in terms of bringing together two corresponding or opposed meanings (المعنيين المتقابلين), and includes several kinds of opposition or correspondence beyond straightforward lexical antonymy, including affirmation and negation, privation and possession, and relational opposition.^[9] Cachia consequently describes the category as wider than “antithesis.” The Encyclopedia nevertheless identifies the device through semantic opposition rather than treating Cachia’s English label “Parallelism” as evidence of the independent structural device [Parallelism](#).

References

1. ↑ ^{a b c d e f g h i} Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Arabic Rhetoric: A Pragmatic Analysis*  (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), 245-246, ISBN 9780415386098. DOI: 10.4324/9780203965399 

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4. ↑ Inʿām Fawwāl ʿAkkāwī, *Al-Muʿjam al-Mufaṣṣal fī ʿUlūm al-Balāgha: Al-Badīʿ wa-al-Bayān wa-al-Maʿānī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1996), 596-598.

5. ↑ Inʿām Fawwāl ʿAkkāwī, *Al-Muʿjam al-Mufaṣṣal fī ʿUlūm al-Balāgha: Al-Badīʿ wa-al-Bayān wa-al-Maʿānī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1996), 476-477.

6. ↑ ^{a b c d e f g} ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Atīq, *ʿIlm al-Badīʿ* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍa al-ʿArabiyya lil-Ṭibāʿa wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 2002), 76-84.

7. ↑ ^{a b c d e f g} Faḍl Ḥasan ʿAbbās, *Al-Balāgha: Funūnuhā wa-Afnānuhā - ʿIlm al-Bayān wa-al-Badīʿ* (Amman: Dār al-Furqān lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 2007), 279-284.

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9. ↑ ^{a b c} Pierre Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician: Or The Schemer’s Skimmer: A Handbook of Late Arabic Badīʿ Drawn from ʿAbd al-Ghanī an-Nābulusī’s Nafahāt al-Azhār ʿala Nasamāt al-Ashār* , Studies in Arabic Language and Literature 3 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), pp. 51-52; §79, ISBN 9783447040327.

10. ↑ ^{a b} Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Arabic Rhetoric: A Pragmatic Analysis*  (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), 252-254, ISBN 9780415386098. DOI: 10.4324/9780203965399 

11. ↑ ^{a b c} Inʿām Fawwāl ʿAkkāwī, *Al-Muʿjam al-Mufaṣṣal fī ʿUlūm al-Balāgha: Al-Badīʿ wa-al-Bayān wa-al-Maʿānī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1996), 655-656.

12. ↑ ^{a b c d} ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Atīq, *ʿIlm al-Badīʿ* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍa al-ʿArabiyya lil-Ṭibāʿa wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 2002), 84-91.

13. ↑ Inʿām Fawwāl ʿAkkāwī, *Al-Muʿjam al-Mufaṣṣal fī ʿUlūm al-Balāgha: Al-Badīʿ wa-al-Bayān wa-al-Maʿānī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1996), 252-253.

14. ↑ ^{a b c} Aḥmad al-Hāshimī, *Jawāhir al-Balāgha fī al-Maʿānī wa-al-Bayān wa-al-Badīʿ*  (Windsor: Hindāwī Foundation, 2019), 366, ISBN 9781527316386.

15. ↑ ^{a b c} Pierre Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician: Or The Schemer’s Skimmer: A Handbook of Late Arabic Badīʿ Drawn from ʿAbd al-Ghanī an-Nābulusī’s Nafahāt al-Azhār ʿala Nasamāt al-Ashār* , Studies in Arabic Language and Literature 3 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), pp. 49-50; §76, ISBN 9783447040327.

16. ↑ Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Arabic Rhetoric: A Pragmatic Analysis*  (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), 252-253, ISBN 9780415386098. DOI: 10.4324/9780203965399 

Page History

- 2026-04-28 - Updated to incorporate [OXYMORN: Oxymoron](#) as an instance of [Non-Negated Antithesis](#).
- 2026-02-16 - Added [Parallel Antithesis](#) to Compound Devices section.
- 2026-02-10 - [Migration to Semantic Device Identifiers](#): Renamed from [CB-1: Antithesis](#) to [ANTITH: Antithesis](#).
- 2025-11-20 - [Page](#) incorporated into the [Arabic Rhetorical Device Taxonomy \(v0.1.1\)](#).
- 2024-04-22 - Page created: [Antithesis](#).

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Categories: [Arabic Rhetorical Devices](#) | [Linguistic Embellishments \(ʿilm al-badīʿ\)](#) | [Contrasts & Inversions](#) | [ARDT v0.1.1](#)

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