Auto-antonyms in Arabic

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Abstract

This research is an attempt to study the semantic class of auto-antonyms in Arabic and English. The study indicated different viewpoints about the subject. Besides, some reasons for auto-antonyms are dealt with, such as: augmentation, language borrowing, different varieties, entailing opposite meanings and metaphor. In English, other reasons are mentioned, e.g. using the term as different parts of speech, having different etymological sources and meaning development. As for the functions of auto-antonyms, the study reveals that the pragmatic functions which are targeted by auto-antonyms in Arabic are more than those in English. They include euphemism, optimism, augmentation, fear of envy and sarcasm. On the other hand, sarcasm is the only function aimed at by auto-antonyms in English. Referring to the characteristic of universality, the study encourages researchers to show interest in auto-antonyms in Arabic, English or other languages. Furthermore, special concern is directed to the use of auto-antonyms in the Holy Quran.

The sources upon which this study is based consist primarily of books, articles and internet web-sites. To achieve the goal of the study, the researcher relies on the earlier Arab linguists who tackle auto-antonyms in their studies, such as: Al-aṣma'i, Qutrub, Ibn Fares, and Ibn Manthour;