

serves as a plank to take up other more specialized texts in the field. I would highly recommend this book for teachers and teacher educators.

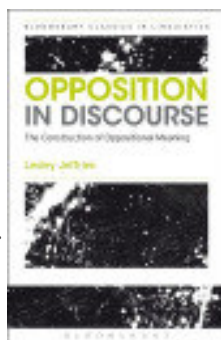
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**Opposition in  
Discourse: The  
Construction of  
Oppositional Meaning.**

London: Bloomsbury (147).  
Lesley Jeffries. (2014).

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(hardback)



Reviewed by: **Saumya Sharma**

Lesley Jeffries looks at a hitherto under-researched but over-used phenomenon, namely, the creation of opposites in language. Unlike works that begin with a theoretical exposition, Jeffries begins with a few examples from different genres, setting the tone and thematic concern of the book. The first example, taken from the British political elections, draws on the opposition between being British and being Black. Jeffries states that opposites are manufactured in a discourse with an ideological agenda while the subsequent example from poetry emphasizes that opposites are often used by poets as a structural device.

The first chapter provides a historical overview of opposition from the time of Aristotle, and its relevance in mathematics and child language acquisition. The author emphasizes on how opposition is fundamental to thought, to the extent that people think and talk of the world around them in terms of opposites—a weak version of the Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis. The chapter also includes a detailed discussion on the types of

opposites (binaries, complementaries, gradable antonyms, etc.). The author explains that complementaries (such as husband-wife) are mutually exclusive terms that divide and explain the concrete world and are used in news reporting; reverses are words that are the opposite of each other (tie-untie); gradable antonyms are a group of words on a scale such as 'boiling hot' to 'freezing' and are quite commonly employed in texts. The basic point is that a pair of opposites mostly share the same attributes, with a difference in just one trait or characteristic. Thus there is a thin line dividing them, for instance, genius and madness or button and unbutton. However, the creation of some common opposites does not affect other terms in the spectrum, for example, male-female are treated as a complete case of antonymy, even though they co-exist with the term hermaphrodite, that has its own sociopolitical history. The description and discussion of the types of opposites is a valuable contribution, however their relevance to language teaching does not form a part of the book, a point that will be dealt with later.

Before proceeding to the analysis of opposition in different texts, Jeffries elaborates on the lexical and syntactic triggers in language. A considerable portion of the work is dedicated to the use of negation or negative markers such as "not", which highlight complementary antonyms in a text. These triggers can also be linked to schema theory and how children acquire and use opposites such as "good" and "bad" to understand their environment. The use of comparatives (less than, more than) and coordinating conjunctions (and, but, or) indicate opposites just as juxtaposition of dissimilar words. For instance, "human" and "aloof" (2014, p. 37) are used to contrast politicians who mingle with the public versus those who maintain their distance. The lexical triggers include explicit mention of verbs of change such as "transform", "change" and "alter", or the differentiation of

specific words in a text to emphasize a point. Such contrasts can also happen through conventional opposites. The difference between "helplessness" and "rage" or "packaging" and "content" are examples of such a phenomena (2014, pp. 51-52). Jeffries also relates her study of opposition to the current debate in cognitive linguistics, particularly the influential metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and Wierzbicka's (1992) semantic primitives good/bad (1992). She proposes that opposition is fundamental to human thought and it exists as an image schema, pre-conceptually structuring the way humans think and feel about people, objects and events in their surroundings.

The latter part of the book is about analyses of literary and non-literary texts, their aim, according to Jeffries, being the investigation of opposites across text types to find similarities and dissimilarities. The literary data consists of a comparative evaluation of the writings of two women poets Mebdh McGuckian and Carol Ann Duffy, and one poem by Philip Larkin. Jeffries finds that opposition helps to create local textual meanings in the poetry of women writers, but in Larkin's work it is a stable, repetitive device that develops the narration. The book also includes observations on a qualitative analysis of the opening lines of hundred stories from adult and children's fiction across genres. These observations provide interesting insights into the working of opposition. A significant insight that emerges is that opposition might not be used in the opening sentence but in the first page to highlight aspects of characters, their activities, the plot structure and to challenge accepted ideologies about the human world. However, firstly, there is no systematic basis for the selection and quantification of the opening sentences in fiction. Secondly, the literary sample could have been enlarged to study the effect of opposition in poetry.

In the non-literary genres, Jeffries analyses data from a larger database culled from newspaper reports about the British elections, news articles on the 9/11 terror attacks, data on how the female body is described in magazines and British news reports on the controversy surrounding the Danish cartoons of the Prophet. She finds that in the British political elections, complementaries are used to put forward the various ideologies, policies and schemes of the competing political leaders to the point that they can be successful in structuring the worldview of newspaper readers. In comparison, in the articles on terrorism, opposition in the form of oxymorons serves to highlight the historical context and the feelings of the writers and the public through co-occurring images. The analysis of gender highlights the inscription of the female body with multiple ideological terms (natural/unnatural, healthy/unhealthy, good/bad) to promote certain social beliefs about natural birth in pregnancy, and breast implants as natural, yet abnormal. News reports about the cartoon controversy portray the varied meanings of free speech in relation to censorship, religious views, fundamental rights, etc. Both literary and non-literary texts are of interpretative value, and such analyses confirm the ubiquity of opposition in the media and human thought, and its exploitation by different social groups to perpetuate certain ideologies.

The book is written in an easy, accessible style with simple explanations of the technical jargon used. The bibliography is informative and though it is touted as a work in stylistics, there are many useful references to semantics also. It is a valuable contribution to the ever-burgeoning field of stylistics, yet there are some weaknesses. There are references to psychology such as the schema theory and how children acquire opposites, yet the book does not include how opposition is processed and understood by the readers of literature and news reports. Jeffries repeatedly states that opposition creates local

textual meanings, enabling the readers to understand the text and the world, yet the analysis is purely textual, with few speculations about the psychology of the interpreters. The reader's reception of the texts that have been analysed would have supported Jeffries claims, demonstrating their psychology and discourse processing. Another issue is that even though the different types of opposition have been very well described and explained, there is no mention of how they can be employed in language teaching. However, I believe that the study of opposites has direct relevance for language teachers and educators. If opposites can be taught contextually through authentic texts such as newspapers, magazines and political speeches by focusing on their type, use and function rather than through wordlists, then the simple topic of opposition can enrich the way in which learners think and respond to texts and the world around them. The work thus, has a wide appeal and can be of interest to college level students and teachers at the school or university levels in the fields of linguistics, language education and literature.

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## Website Review

### Teaching Poetry: A Review of Some Websites

*Shreesh Chaudhary*

Poetry is perhaps the oldest and most popular genre of literature globally. Yet poetry remains under-utilized in language classrooms and also a source of lot of anxiety. In India, poetry is taught mostly as a part of literature component in the syllabus. However, can it also be used in the "language" classrooms? Can it be used for teaching language? How can it be best taught for its own sake? Is it possible to teach how to write poetry? Is it possible to create among students a liking for (English) poetry? These are some of the questions that fuel our anxieties in using poetry to teach language. At the center of this anxiety is the asymmetry that use of language purely for informational purposes has over using language for aesthetic reasons in classrooms. There is a change coming; research shows that our knowledge of language, among other things, includes our ability to decode sentences, but 'motivation' plays a central role in language acquisition. With this awareness there has arisen a not too-well articulated but an ever-growing need in language classrooms in India for new material that is both authentic and interesting. Poems as songs have always answered this need. Today they are available easily and aplenty at the Internet.

When we google the words "Teaching poetry" the site of the Poetry Society of the United Kingdom comes up right on top. This site gives the "Top Tips for Teaching Poetry"<sup>1</sup>. Closely following it at number two is the site of the American Academy of Poets, which offers "Tips for Teaching Poetry"<sup>2</sup>. The first page of the result of the search "Teaching poetry" also gives links to other popular sites. These are: