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Kolaković, Nina

UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Nina Kolaković

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(M.A. Thesis)

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FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Department of English Language and Literature

Nina Kolaković

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Supervisor: Dr Branka Drljača Margić

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ABSTRACT

As a language with a turbulent history and almost over billion of speakers, English never ceases to amaze both the native and non-native speakers. Although English has been around for centuries, there always seems to be something intriguing enough to make one wonder and question certain aspects of English. One such aspect is certainly its morphology. A language as rich in word formation processes as English seems not to have yielded a satisfactory solution, or even an explanation, for some thought-provoking English words. One can be *disheveled*, but never *sheveled*. One might be *overwhelmed* or *underwhelmed*, but he is never just *whelmed*. Someone may be *ruthless*, but rarely will we hear: "He has got no *ruth*." As odd as it may seem, some words tend to appear only in their negative form, leaving the language user in awe of their lost positive pair. Some are rather common, so there is no need to question their forgotten or maybe suppressed, corresponding positive antonyms. Others, on the other hand, are quite rare in their negative form, let alone in their seemingly nonexistent positive form. But, if one chooses to believe the claim that humans evaluate their experiences on a basis of two words at the opposite ends of the spectrum, then the case of a missing antonym might be too valuable to ignore.

Key words: unpaired words, corresponding positive, missing antonym

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1 Introduction

While it seems there is nothing left to explore in and about English, it is important to bear in mind that (any) language is constantly evolving and changing as the people using it change as well. It is easy for us to use English now when there is both prescriptive and descriptive grammar which tell us how (not) to use English. However, there are many discrepancies and exceptions to the rule that may be unknown to the native speaker, let alone non-native speaker. There is a constant struggle with prepositions, conditionals, phrasal verbs, irregular verbs, and sometimes even spelling. Yet, somehow one manages to 'learn' all these aspects, or simply remembers the most frequent examples. In contrast, there are certain aspects of English morphology that remain unresolved and some even unstudied to this day.

Nobody seems to have a clear-cut answer to the question of why certain words that ought to have opposites actually do not have their corresponding counterpart. How come one can be described as *unkempt*, but if it were quite the opposite, *kempt* would not be our first choice? In one of his works (1994), Jacob "Jack" Hoeksema raises the following question: "Why is it that certain words and idioms have the peculiar property of occurring only in negative, interrogative or conditional contexts?" (Hoeksema, 1994: 273). By analogy, one might ask a very similar question: Why is it that certain words, mostly adjectives, are used only in their negative form? Speaking from the standpoint of semantics, if a word tends to gravitate toward its negative pole, then it is the reflection of the meaning of the word itself (Hoeksema, 1994). In other words, if a word has some semantic features which serve as a basis for its predominately negative use, then one could venture the guess that it is not even necessary to have an existing positive counterpart. To make this a bit clearer, let us consider the following example. If someone described his town tour as an 'unmitigated disaster', that would mean that the tour failed miserably and was a total

or absolute disaster. Were it the other way around, one would not (and actually could not) use the adjective *mitigated* not only because it is almost never used, but also because the word itself has a rather negative connotation.

Although the majority would think that positive words (and expressions) are easier to remember and thus more likely to be used, it seems to be just the opposite. Since one is always more struck by a negative comment than a positive one, the same could be applied to these negative-formed adjectives. A 'negative' word would then have more chances for survival if the environment surrounding its use is also negative. Therefore, if a person – ideally speaking, the word's creator – constantly encounters a certain word in a negative context (environment), he would have no need to use the word's positive counterpart. That leads us to two possible explanations regarding the issue of the missing corresponding counterpart. There are words which were created by adding a prefix that do not have opposites, e.g. *disgruntled, inane* or *impetuous*. The 'force' surrounding such words is generally very negative, which would imply their 'negativity' is almost impossible to diminish or even get rid of. And if it were possible, it would require a more demanding cosmetic procedure than just removing the prefix. On the other hand, words like *impeccable*, *immaculate* or *unrequited* have their positive antonyms, but are rather rare of have completely fallen out of popular usage. One might assume that since it is easy to create a word by adding a prefix (or a suffix), it should be equally easy to drop the prefix and enjoy the fruits of your "labor" – a newly (re)created word. However, as shown in the famous example *inflammable* vs. *flammable*, removing the prefix does not necessarily mean changing the word's meaning and making it positive. That is why one should be first introduced with the notion of antonymy and different word formation processes used to (re)create words.

1.1. Antonymy

Although the concept of antonymy seems rather easy to define, especially if opposed to synonymy, most of the problems concerning antonymy arise from its terminology. Interestingly enough, the Oxford English Dictionary[1] does not offer the word 'antonymy', but a word 'antonym' instead. In layman's terms, an antonym is therefore defined as "a word opposite in meaning to another". But antonymy has a very broad meaning, as it can be equated with different types of oppositions (Lehrer and Lehrer, 1982), including contradictories (*true* – *false*), contraries (*big* – *small*), conversives (*buy* – *sell*) and reversives (*tie* – *untie*). According to the oppositions available, antonymy has sometimes been defined as simply oppositeness, contrariness or even polarity. Some contemporary philosophers of language might thus label this concept as primitive and decide not to pay attention to it at all. In more modern linguistics literature, one might stumble upon an 'updated' and rather a narrow definition of antonymy, one that refers to gradable antonyms. The key characteristic of such antonyms is that two words, each at the opposite end of the spectrum, "name opposite sections of a single scale containing a midinterval" (Lehrer and Lehrer, 1982: 484). So, there would be no confusion when describing someone who is either short or tall, but there can also be someone who is in between – neither short nor tall. Surely there is nothing controversial in antonymy if it is based on a dimensional scale such as length, height, weight, distance, width, temperature, beauty, and goodness. One might even argue that one member of an antonymous pair covers a positive semantic field, while the other covers a more negative one. For example, if one says something is *heavy*, it has a rather negative connotation, as opposed to its positive contrary item – *light*. This leads to a problem of markedness.

[1] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/antonym, retrieved on June 12, 2018.

Most authors who write on the subject of markedness "describe one member of an antonym pair as marked (e.g. *small*) and the other as unmarked (e.g. *large*)" (Lehrer, 1985: 398). Following that terminological policy, Lehrer suggests that there are markedness properties of antonym pairs. One of them claims that "if one member of the pair consists of an affix added to the antonym, [then] the affix form is *marked*" (Lehrer, 1985: 400). Taking into consideration the already mentioned example of *unmitigated* and *mitigated*, the affix-formed adjective *unmitigated* would thus be marked, while *mitigated* would be unmarked. The author also mentions that "the *unmarked* member denotes more of a quality, [while] the *marked* denotes less" (Ibid.). This should not come as a surprise since any prefix or a suffix creating a negative counterpart, the marked member, usually implies a lack of something. What corresponds best to the relationship between the positive and negative counterpart is the following property: "The *unmarked* member is evaluatively positive; the *marked* is negative" (Ibid.). The speakers would then evaluate (label) the adjective *unmitigated* as negative, primarily due to its affix form, i.e. prefix *un-*. When used in a context, it would also denote less of a quality, implying there is a lack of mitigation.

As there are many different ways in which one can describe a person, an object, event or anything being experienced at that moment, he can choose to focus either on the positive traits or the negative traits. Consequently, the object of description will be described with a word from a positive pole or a word from a negative pole. Some researchers even claim that antonyms are used by the speakers to subtly incorporate irony or sarcasm into their utterances. Despite the fact that humans have a tendency to 'polarize' and 'think in opposites', it remains unclear whether the issue of markedness belongs to the pragmatic or semantic aspect of language.

1.2. Word formation process(es)

Apart from derivation and inflection, which are the most productive word formation processes in any language, English relies on many other processes when creating a new word (Brala-Vukanović, 2013). Given that English is heavily influenced by other languages, such as Latin, French or Italian, there are many words that came into the language through borrowing. There are also words that already existed in English, but their grammatical function changed (conversion) or the word started being used in a new context (metaphorical extension). Some processes combine two words to make new ones (compounding, blending), while others yield new words by combining their initials (acronyms) or by welcoming brand names into the lexicon (word coinage). Some of the processes actually do not result in an entirely new word but change the form of the existent word instead. Such processes are clipping and backformation. Since clipping implies only shortening the word's form, and backformation "creation of new lexemes by means of affix removal" (Brala-Vukanović, 2013: 75), for the purposes of this paper, we will focus only on backformation, as it suits the proposed issue best. If one suggests that the positive member of an antonymous pair may be created by removing the affix, then it would be reasonable to assume that many such (positive) words are the result of backformation.

Backformation refers to "the process of creating a new lexeme by means of removing affixes" (Brala-Vukanović, 2008: 60). The word is analogically created from an existing word which is sometimes falsely perceived as its derivative. Although such reasoning is misguided, it is rational when looking at the morphology of the source word. In English, this process usually changes the word's syntactic category, but there are many examples of backformation of adjectives. In most backformation words, the change occurs at the word's end – the affix that is removed is a suffix. Although speakers initially approach such words with skepticism, many of

them eventually start being used alongside other standard terms. While they are very rare, there are also words created by removing the prefixes (e.g. *chalant*, *peccable*). Such words are not welcomed with open arms, as they can be recognized as incorrect or inappropriate for formal use. Some may even say there is no need for them because the semantic domain they aim to fulfill has already been filled by their (negative) antonyms. The words that are created in this way are by no means wrong, but, as will be shown later, can be redundant.

1.3. The 'cranberry' morpheme

In his 1994 *New Yorker* piece[2] "How I Met My Wife", Jack Winter describes meeting his wife for the first time: "She was a descript person, a woman in a state of total array. Her hair was kempt, her clothing shevelled, and she moved in a gainly way." (The full text can be found in the Appendix A, page 32). Here you can see only a few examples of what it seems to be a textbook example of unpaired words. The words that Winter uses are all positive counterparts of, one might say, negative words that we would normally use, i.e. *nondescript*, *disarray*, *unkempt*, *disheveled*, *ungainly*. Surely these are all quite normal and common words in English. But what happens if we take their prefix away? One might say that nothing unprecedented happens as he simply (re)creates a new word. However, these words are hardly considered to be words since it seems mandatory for them to stand along another word in order to have a (proper) meaning. In linguistics, such words are called bound morphemes.

A morpheme is usually defined "as the smallest unit of language that has meaning" (Brala-Vukanović, 2013: 71). If a morpheme does not have a meaning when alone, it has to be attached to another morpheme to gain meaning. This is called the bound morpheme. Consider the

[2] https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1994/07/25/how-i-met-my-wife, retrieved on June 8, 2018.

following example. *Blueberry* and *cranberry* seem to be pretty simple words. They also have something in common – the morpheme *berry*. If we take the *berry* from the *blueberry*, we get another word that can stand on its own and even be used to create other words – *blue*. However, if one does the same to *cranberry*, he ends up with the word *cran* which is not really a word. So, the word *berry* must necessarily accompany the word *cran* to have a meaning. The same analogy could be applied to the aforementioned words. Words like *descript, array, kempt, shevelled* and *gainly* would thus be considered bound, 'cranberry', morphemes because they cannot stand alone without their prefixes.

Since there are not many studies exploring the notion of such words, linguists use different terms to refer to them. Considering the fact there are many other types of missing words (e.g. If there is *arrival* from 'arrive', why isn't there a *describal* from 'describe'?), some try to find an umbrella term for all of these words. Numerous linguists use the term of a *lexical* or *accidental* gap, but their definitions differ. In his paper on lexical gaps, Wang (2017) gives out several definitions offered by different linguists: "…Lyons (1977, pp. 301-305) defines lexical gaps as slots in a patterning. Among Chinese linguists, Wang (1989) defines lexical gaps as empty linguistic symbols and Fan (1989) defines them as empty spaces in a lexeme cluster" (Wang, 2017: 748). When these definitions are applied to the case of unpaired words, we describe them as having a space provided for their positive counterparts which could potentially materialize, but don't actually do so. In other words, it is normal to expect a word will have both its negative and positive form because the language and our minds seek equilibrium. When that balance is disrupted, we come across a lexical gap. Naturally, one wishes to fill this kind of gap, and so reaches for antonymous expressions. As will be shown later in the section 'Positive

opposites throughout history', these positives in antonymous pairs may occasionally raise some eyebrows and get laughs or maybe disapproving looks.

We have mentioned bound and 'cranberry' morphemes, but there are others, as well. Those unpaired words have a base morpheme which has been preserved but only in its negative sense. That should not come as a surprise as it is easier to define something in terms of what it is *not*. The positive counterparts simply disappeared; they are now obscure and not used in everyday life. That is why they are sometimes called *fossilized morphemes* or *fossilized terms*[3]. Robert Trask's *Dictionary of Historical and Comparative Linguistics* also mentions the *fossilized form* defined as "a functionless grammatical marker resulting from fossilization" (Trask, 2000: 126). It is not that their positive counterparts do not exist – they do, but they are, as the name says it, fossilized and therefore have no real function in contemporary language.

[3] https://thebettereditor.wordpress.com/2012/04/06/inevitable-inept-and-the-cranberry-morpheme/, retrieved on June 8, 2018.

2 The present study

2.1. Aims

The main purpose of this study was twofold. Firstly, the study focused on the notion of 'negative' unpaired adjectives which are most commonly used in the English language. The aim was to gather more than a dozen of most frequent adjectives that seem to be used only in their negative forms. Secondly, the study provides a historical overview of the adjectives' positive counterparts which are nonexistent, very rare or have eventually fallen out of popular usage.

2.2. Research method

As this was a longitudinal study, the data were collected by the means of observation and note-taking (recording). The examples were collected over a period of three months (February, March, and April 2018). The examples were collected from different areas of human interest – movies, books, TV shows, newspapers, and music – and were selected on the basis of two criteria. The first one refers to the word's class and form – the selected words are all adjectives whose form (i.e. presence of a prefix or a suffix) implies that a word has a negative meaning and/or is used in a negative sense. The second criterion refers to the assumption that a word has its positive counterpart or at least had at some time in history.

3 Results

Since there are many more unpaired words, it should be noted that the list of words gathered during this research is by no means final. As this study focused only on the word class of adjectives, it contains only the most common unpaired adjectives that one encounters in literature, news, the media, on the Internet, as well as in everyday life when describing people, objects or even natural phenomena. Other examples, not included in this study, can be found in the Appendix B, on page 34.

The research provides insight into fifteen words. They are all 'negative' adjectives, i.e. negative antonymous pairs whose positive opposites are seemingly lost or nonexistent. The majority of them seem to have been created by adding different prefixes: *un-* (*uncouth, unkempt, unruly, unscathed, unwieldy, ungainly*), *in-* (*inept, insolent*), *im-* (*impeccable*), *dis-* (*disgruntled, discombobulated, disabled*). Although it seems the word *disheveled* would also belong to the group of words with a prefix *dis-*, the word's French origin claims otherwise. Since the word *disheveled* comes from an Old French word, there never was a prefix-free word *sheveled* to attach the prefix to. Only two words presented in this study were created by adding a suffix *-less* (*hapless, ruthless*). They represent a unique example where the removal of an affix (suffix) results in changing the words' category. They do not become positive adjectival counterparts, but archaic mass nouns.

3.1. Positive opposites throughout history

Although these seemingly unpaired negative words can today be a source of fun, or, as in this case, a basis for scientific research, they do have a real place in language. It might be better, though, to look at these words from a different angle and say that their positive opposites, which are claimed to be nonexistent, were once used on a daily basis. Such words would today be a subject of mockery or maybe an indicator of poor education. Some of them were also, at some point, revived but were used only in a humorous context. Nonetheless, many of these unpaired negatives were at some time accompanied by their corresponding positive.

One of the first examples to be mentioned in this section is a relatively new and sometimes even controversial word in contemporary societies – the word *disabled*[4] and its opposite ***abled***. The word *abled* was first used in the 16th and 17th century to describe someone who is capable of/for something or thriving. However, it eventually died out until it was revived in the 1980s as a backformation contrast to *disabled*. To avoid the negative-felt word *disabled*, used to refer to people with physical or mental disabilities, those who want to be politically correct started combining the word *abled* with other words (e.g. *differently-abled*). However, such words have been criticized as condescending or over-euphemistic and are thus not generally accepted.

There was once the word ***couth***, which was a form of the Old English word *cunnan* with the then meaning of 'well-known'. The adjective *couth*[5] reappeared in the late 19th century as a result of backformation from an Old English word *uncouth*. The negative initially meant 'foreign', but its more modern meaning, that of 'lacking good manners or grace', developed in the 16th century. The positive form was first used in 1896 by Sir Maximilian Beerbohm, an

[4] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/disabled, retrieved on June 25, 2018.
[5] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/couth, retrieved on June 14, 2018.

English essayist, parodist, and caricaturist, when he praised his fellow colleague, Walter Pater, speaking about the "couth solemnity of his mind". It was then used in a rather humorous way and seems to have been put back on the track. It has even been used in Scotland for a short period of time.

One of the youngest words on the list, *discombobulated*, originally appeared in the United States in the late 19th century, as a fanciful word used instead of disconcerted, discomposed, or simply confused. But, its positive antonym ***combobulated*** does not exist in the Oxford English Dictionary[6] nor is it ever heard from an English speaker. Surely, if one tries to use the positive counterpart as a backformation, assuming it is in a humorous context, he would most likely be understood, but it is doubtful that his interlocutor would follow his example.

Although the OED does not list the word ***ept***, its negative antonym *inept* generates several other forms, including *ineptitude*, *ineptly* and *ineptness*. The word *inept*[7] dates back to the 16th century when it was used in a sense of 'not being suitable or apt', but the word itself comes from a Latin word *ineptus*. Since *inept* has a rather negative connotation, some might have deliberately used its positive opposite *ept* to make amends for this injustice. One such example is found in the 1938 letter by an American writer and world federalist Elwyn Brooks White: "I am much obliged… to you for your warm, courteous, and ept treatment of a rather weak, skinny subject."

One might say that only an *ungainly* English speaker would use the adjective ***gainly***[8]. Originating from an Old Norse word *gegn*, there was a word *gain* in Middle English (around 1300) which meant 'straight'. That obsolete word was later found in the form of *gainly* which meant 'suitable or fitting'. It soon started being used in a figurative sense describing both people

[6] hereinafter: OED.
[7] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/inept, retrieved on June 14, 2018.
[8] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/gainly, retrieved on June 25, 2018.

('kindly') and objects ('useful'). Within the framework of contemporary dictionaries, that word would be labeled as archaic and used only in certain contexts.

According to the OED, the word ***gruntled***[9] appeared in the 1930s as a consequence of backformation from *disgruntled*, which dates from the mid-17th century (1682). One may think that the positive member of this antonymous pair, *gruntled*, defined as 'feeling pleased or satisfied', has never been used. But, one of the best examples of the word remains the one from P. G. Wodehouse's 1938 novel *The Code of the Woosters*, where one of the characters, Jeeves, was described as "not actually disgruntled, [but] far from being gruntled."

People can sometimes be described as *hapless*, unlucky or unfortunate, a word that was used in the 16th century. While its positive opposite ***hapful*** does not exist, there was once the word ***hap***[10]. It originates from the Late Middle English and it meant, in the early sense, 'good fortune'. The word itself stuck to the English language for several centuries, but eventually got lost and became archaic.

As noted by the OED, the adjective *unkempt* was found back in the 16th century, used by the poet Edmund Spenser. However, its positive counterpart, ***kempt***[11], existed 5 centuries earlier (i.e. in the 11th century). The word itself comes from the past participle of an Old English word *cemban*, which meant 'to comb'. Following this analogy, the word *kempt* would actually mean 'combed', which is not far away from the contemporary definition of 'maintained, clean, well-cared for'. It is interesting, though, that the Middle English form *kemb* can still be found in some areas, mostly those where some kind of dialect is used.

The word *impeccable* first appeared in the middle of the 16th century and it was mostly used in a theological or religious context. That should not come as a surprise since the 16th

[9] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/gruntled, retrieved on June 14, 2018.
[10] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hapless, retrieved on June 14, 2018.
[11] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/kempt, retrieved on June 25, 2018.

century, and the rise of Protestantism caused significant changes in Christianity. Understandably so, the word itself comes from Latin, the language of the Church, where it meant 'not to sin'. Its positive opposite ***peccable***[12] appeared in the early 17th century and it comes from the aforementioned Latin expression. Today it would be used in a very formal context, describing someone who is capable of sinning.

If one describes a group of children as *unruly*, it would mean it is almost impossible to establish discipline and control. Yet a group of children will rarely or never be ***ruly.*** The word *ruly*[13], used around 1400, originates from Late Middle English word *rule*, which meant that someone was disciplined and law-abiding. As noted by the OED, this word would today be rather archaic.

While the adjective *ruthless* is quite common in English, the sentence "He has got no (or little) *ruth*." is rarely, or never, heard. The mass noun ***ruth***[14] is today defined as a 'feeling of pity, distress or grief'. It comes from Middle English verb *rue*, which may have been influenced by an Old Norse word *hrygth*. It is reported to have appeared somewhere in the 12th century, while the negative adjective *ruthless* appeared almost two centuries later (i.e. in the 14th century). Although the OED recognizes the positive counterpart ***ruthful***, it is labeled as archaic and rarely heard today (if at all).

Unless you are a strait between the Isle of Wight and Hampshire, there is almost no chance of you being ***solent***. However, if one is being rude and maybe a bit arrogant, he would be described as *insolent*[15]. This example is particularly interesting as the removal of the prefix *in-* results not in a 'positive' adjective, but a proper noun – Solent. That word, *solent*, has never been

[12] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/peccable, retrieved on June 25, 2018.
[13] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ruly, retrieved on June 14, 2018.
[14] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ruth, retrieved on June 25, 2018.
[15] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/insolent, retrieved on June 25, 2018.

recorded in English, at least not as an adjective. It came to the Late Middle English from a Latin word *solent* (from *solere*) which meant 'being accustomed'.

The Scandinavian word meaning injury served as a basis for an adjective *unscathed*, meaning 'without injuries or damage'. Its corresponding positive, the word ***scathe(d)***[16], came from Old Norse words *skathi* (noun) and *skatha* (verb) and was used in Middle English.

Another word mentioned at the beginning is the adjective *disheveled*[17]. It is a rather curious word: it does not have the positive counterpart ***sheveled***, while the related verb also exists only in its 'negative' form – *dishevel*. The reason why this may be so is the word's origin – it comes from an Old French word *deschevelé.* It was first used in the sense of having your hair untidy, while it was later used to refer to the hair itself.

Although English speakers may occasionally use the verb *wield*, which means 'to use or hold something', the adjective ***wieldy***[18] is not as common as its negative counterpart *unwieldy*. It most likely came from the verb itself, while it was later created via the backformation process from *unwieldy*. The OED places the word *wieldy* in the period of Late Middle English (sometime around 1386) when it was used in the *Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer. However, that was not the first time Chaucer used the word – he also used it earlier in his epic poem *Troilus and Criseyde*, where one of the characters seemed "so fresh so young so wieldy".

3.2. Discrepancies and paradoxes

The forms of the examples gathered suggest that the 'negative' unpaired adjectives were created by simply adding a prefix or a suffix. That might be the case with some adjectives, but others tell a different story. In the case of adjectives *discombobulated* and *disheveled*, there have

[16] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/scathe, retrieved on June 14, 2018.
[17] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/dishevelled, retrieved on June 25, 2018.
[18] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/wieldy, retrieved on June 25, 2018.

never been English words without the prefix *dis*-. The *Oxford English Dictionary* does not even list the adjective *combobulated*, while the adjective *sheveled* was brought from French in the original form of a verb, i.e. *dishevel* (cf. *deschevelé*), so there never was a prefix-free word in the first place. Each of the two other examples with the prefix *dis*-, *disabled* and *disgruntled*, have their positive counterparts which appeared during the 20th century as a backformation result. What is interesting is that only one of those positive counterparts, *abled*, was recorded three centuries earlier, while *gruntled* never existed and was specifically 'backformed' in the 1930s.

Most of the examples show that, normally, a removal of a prefix does not change the word's category. Therefore, an adjective would stay an adjective. However, there are two adjectives, *hapless* and *ruthless*, that deviate from the usual pattern. Firstly, these two negative adjectives were created by adding a suffix (*-less*), and secondly, when that suffix is removed, the words are no longer (negative) adjectives, but rather archaic mass nouns – *hap* and *ruth*. Unlike other listed adjectives whose positive counterparts are created by simply removing the prefix, these two examples call for a two-step procedure. One must first remove the suffix *-less* in order to get a root morpheme, and then add a different suffix (*-full*) to possibly create a positive counterpart. Another curious example of an adjective becoming a noun is the example of the word *insolent*. Here the removal of a prefix *in*- results in yet another noun – a proper noun Solent. Although the OED mentions the word *solent* when explaining the origin of the adjective *insolent*, the dictionary offers the word written only with the capital letter 's' (i.e. Solent), thus implying the word exists only as a noun denoting a geographical term.

The results suggest that the prefix *un*- is easily interpreted as "not" when applied to adjectives (cf. *uncouth*, *ungainly*, *unkempt*, *unruly*, *unwieldy*). Adding this prefix makes a 'positive' adjective into a 'negative'. However, adjective *unscathed* is an exception to the rule

among seemingly same adjectives. When the prefix *un-* is attached to the word *scathe(d)*, the word changes its meaning from negative to positive. Then in this case there is no need to search for the missing positive counterpart because it is not the positive that is missing; it is the negative.

4 Discussion

Antonymy refers to the sense relation that establishes oppositeness in meaning between two words. However, sometimes a particular word does not have a corresponding antonym although there is a slot provided for the respective counterpart. Wang (2017) calls this a lexical gap. In order to fill this gap, speakers will try their best to come up with a word to (re)establish balance. One might do so by simply following the analogy of a language. For example, it is clear that if we add suffixes *-less* and *-full* to the same root, we would get two words opposite in meaning (e.g. *careful* vs. *careless*). That could be considered one way of filling a lexical gap (Wang, 2017). However, the examples of the words *hapless* and *ruthless* show that this analogy does not always (need to) work. When these words are deprived of their suffix *-less*, we get two base morphemes or roots – archaic nouns *hap* and *ruth*. In linguistic terms, these words would be free morphemes (Brala-Vukanović, 2013) that can stand alone because they have a meaning. For this reason a bound morpheme could and should thus be attached to these nouns to fill in the slot of a positive adjectival counterpart. The results of this study show that this is not always the case. A lot of words ending in *-less* actually do not have a corresponding positive antonym ending in *-full*. In an attempt to correct this unbearable discrimination, Willard R. Espy, American philologist and poet, published a poem which contains what he called 'forgotten positives'. He included words ending in *-full* that normally end in *-less*: *ageful, lifeful, timeful, toothful, voiceful, etc.* The full poem can be found in the Appendix C, on page 35. The current study mentions only two such examples, *hapless* and *ruthless*, but there are in fact many unpaired words ending in both *-less* and *-full* (e.g. *awful*, *bashful*, *deceitful*, *feckless*, *gormless*, *toothless*…).

The results seem to confute the idea of a more modern definition of antonymy – one that implies gradable antonyms. According to Lehrer and Lehrer (1982), such antonyms would be placed at two opposite sides of the spectrum with a middle interval (midinterval) as a midpoint of their oppositeness. If a word is gradable, it means it can be preceded by qualifiers such as *very*, *more*, *somewhat*. This would also mean that one can ask *How X is it/he/*she? Although this is applicable to antonymous adjectives placed along a dimensional scale, such as length or width, it cannot be applied to abstract adjectives concerning one's personality, manner, abilities or overall poise. Not only do these adjectives lack a proper opposite, but they also have not provided a space for their middle member (midinterval). The adjectives gathered during this research occupy only one end of the spectrum, usually the negative one. This is one of the criteria of markedness (Lehrer, 1985) – one member of an antonymous pair usually appears in more contexts than the other. Such is the case with the adjectives in this study. Despite the fact that some of these adjectives have positive counterparts, it is the negative that is most commonly used, while the usage of the positive is restricted to specific contexts, e.g. humorous situations or *licentia poetica*.

In the introductory part, it was suggested that the positive member of an antonymous pair may be created by affix removal, i.e. backformation. The name of the process itself implies that the change usually occurs at the 'back' of the word, which means that the affix removed is usually a suffix (Brala-Vukanović, 2008). Backformation with prefix removal is considered to be quite rare. However, this study shows four examples of 'positive' adjectives created through backformation involving prefix removal. The positive counterparts *abled*, *couth*, *gruntled* and *wieldy* are all backformations results; words created by removing the prefixes *dis-* and *un-*. Although these were created by simply following the analogy of a language, the analogy which

gave rise to many other (now usual) words, it is interesting that those positive counterparts of commonly used ‘negative’ adjectives have not found their proper place in English. The morphology of English would normally allow for such words to be created, but for some curious reason these words are either considered archaic, non-grammatical and/or unnecessary.

The section ‘Positive opposites throughout history’ gives an insight into the position of positive adjectival counterparts throughout history. The study shows that the majority of adjectives listed actually had their positive counterparts at some point in time. However, in cases where the positive form previously existed, it is most commonly the negative that has survived. This might be because we find negative words more useful and thus more enduring. As stated by Jacob “Jack” Hoeksema (1994), this is a matter of a word’s gravitation toward one of its poles, either negative or positive. The adjectives gathered for the purposes of this research tend to gravitate toward their negative pole, making the word prone to negative-usage contexts. By analogy, one could also infer that the word does not necessarily need its positive counterpart if it is predominately used in a negative form, i.e. negative contexts.

5 Conclusion

In the current context, when so many people speak and write in English and the emphasis is put on comprehension and not grammatical accuracy, it may not be of vital importance to question and analyze the morphological properties and proper use of every word. The speakers rely on words which align closely with their everyday needs, thus maybe leaving out less frequent words such as *discombobulated*, *unscathed* or *insolent*. However, when such words appear, they are generally used in a negative context due to their nature. Although their positive counterparts *did* exist at some point in time, it is usually the negative that has survived and is used to this day. This may reflect what psychologists denote as the brain's *negativity bias*. The human brain is simply built in a way that it reacts more strongly to unpleasant news or situations, thus making us prone to creating a higher number of 'negative' words. The implications of these findings are also important for language learners who want to improve their English language skills and knowledge. Taking into account the definition of language as a system, a language would then call for a state of equilibrium. If there is a 'negative' adjective created by adding a suffix, there also must be its positive counterpart. This study suggests that this is not always the case. Such intriguing and still unresolved features of the English language could certainly influence one's state of mind. Nonetheless, it is important to keep abreast of inconsistencies in a language, especially English, which many consider to be one of the easiest languages to learn.

There have not been many studies conducted investigating the notion of antonymy and the relationship between the positive and negative adjectival counterparts. It was thus hard to find the suitable and relevant literature to serve as a theoretical background to this still insufficiently explored field. The majority of studies dealing with antonyms focus mostly on the issues surrounding (non)gradable antonyms. Though these studies offer insightful comments on

the respective topic, they rarely include the issue of an antonymous pair whose one part, positive or negative counterpart, is missing. Those who opt for exploring this issue a bit further, usually approach the topic from a layman point of view, posting their opinions and subjective assessments on forums and/or blogs.

Besides, this research lacks a human factor in a sense that it did not take into consideration the modern speakers' view of such words and their attitude toward possible revival. The words collected during this research were used mostly in a written discourse (books), by educated scholars and writers, or for the purposes of informing the general public (newspapers, the media, the Internet). This study did not show how English speakers use unpaired negative adjectives and whether they use them as often as in written communication.

As it was mentioned in the introductory part, there are many different types of missing words whose disappearance and its reasons may be a basis for another research. Though it may be easy to notice negative-formed adjectives, there are also certain nouns, verbs and adverbs that appear only in their affix form as well. For example, the word *disdain*, that can be both a verb and a mass noun, only exists with its prefix *dis-*. Likewise, there is no record of the word *impromptu* (an adjective and an adverb) being used without the prefix *im-*, unless it is used deliberately for a humorous effect. English is full of examples of words which are (not) used every day, and yet their morphology or etymology is almost never questioned.

Contrary to popular belief, the corporate world is not an inexhaustible source of newly coined and innovative words; it is the military. The military, especially the U.S. military, uses many different terms and items that an average civilian is not familiar with. Due to the soldiers' need for a clear and to-the-point communication, the military relies on a somewhat different linguistic world. The verb *embark*, meaning 'to board a ship or an aircraft', has thus been taken

and extended to other means of transport, such as a bus, a plane or a train. Hence the verbs *embus, emplane, entrain*. If soldiers are required to do the exact opposite, they simply *debus, deplane* or *detrain*. Considering the fact that these words in their positive sense were created by analogy with the word *embark*, it would be logical to assume they would have the same negative form. However, since any language, including English, sometimes allows exceptions to the rule, words can act differently despite their shared morphological features. Therefore, if one needs to get off a ship, he does not *debark*; he *disembarks*. It would be logical then to expect the soldiers to *disembus, disemplane, disentrain*. Interestingly enough, such words have been found neither in the military jargon nor in everyday English. Although these words are by no means a necessity in the life of an average English speaker, it would be interesting to explore the logic and the linguistic patterns beneath their creation.

Another interesting notion worthy of exploring is the lexical (accidental) gap. This study focused on the lexical gap in regard to adjectives, but there is one gap even more interesting and intriguing – the one concerning the nouns derived from verbs. There is *arrival* from 'arrive' and *refusal* from 'refuse', but there has never been a *describal* from 'describe' nor *derival* from 'derive'. One uses *description* and *derivation* instead. In addition, certain verbs, i.e. *recite* and *propose*, have two related nouns – *recital* and *recitation*, and *proposal* and *proposition*. Of course, an experienced linguist would immediately make a connection to the word's origin, explaining how certain verbs, usually those which came from Latin, can form a noun by adding a suffix *-al* or *-(t)ion*. In principle, the morphological rules of the English language would allow for other nouns (*describal, derival*), but such words simply do not exist. The question remains whether these nouns ever existed or have been recorded. The future research should take into

account the notion of their possible existence, their use in contemporary language and the speakers' attitude toward such words.

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Appendix A

How I Met My Wife by Jack Winter, from the *New Yorker*, July 25, 1994, p. 82

SHOUTS AND MURMURS about man who describes meeting his wife at a party. In his description, he drops many prefixes. It had been a rough day, so when I walked into the party I was very chalant, despite my efforts to appear gruntled and consolate. I was furling my wieldy umbrella for the coat check when I saw her standing alone in a corner. She was a descript person, a woman in a state of total array. Her hair was kempt, her clothing shevelled, and she moved in a gainly way. I wanted desperately to meet her, but I knew I'd have to make bones about it, since I was travelling cognito. Beknownst to me, the hostess, whom I could see both hide and hair of, was very proper, so it would be skin off my nose if anything bad happened. And even though I had only swerving loyalty to her, my manners couldn't be peccable. Only toward and heard-of behavior would do. Fortunately, the embarrassment that my maculate appearance might cause was evitable. There were two ways about it, but the chances that someone as flappable as I would be ept enough to become persona grata or sung hero were slim. I was, after all, something to sneeze at, someone you could easily hold a candle to, someone who usually aroused bridled passion. So I decided not to rush it. But then, all at once, for some apparent reason, she looked in my direction and smiled in a way that I could make heads or tails of. So, after a terminable delay, I acted with mitigated gall and made my way through the ruly crowd with strong givings. Nevertheless, since this was all new hat to me and I had no time to prepare a promptu speech, I was petuous. She responded well, and I was mayed that she considered me a savory char-acter who was up to some good. She told me who she was. "What a perfect nomer," I said, advertently. The conversation became more and more choate, and we spoke at length to much avail. But I was defatigable, so I had to leave at a godly hour. I asked if she wanted to come with

me. To my delight, she was committal. We left the party together and have been together ever since. I have given her my love, and she has requited it.

Appendix B

Gloss by David McCord, in *The Oxford Book of American Light Verse (1979)*

I know a little man both ept and ert.

An intro-? extro-? No, he's just a vert.

Sheveled and couth and kempt, pecunious, ane,

His image trudes upon the ceptive brain.

When life turns sipid and the mind is traught,

The spirit soars as I would sist it ought.

Chalantly then, like any gainly goof,

My digent self is sertive, choate, loof.

Appendix C

The poem by Willard R. Espy, in *The Game of Words (1971)*

I dreamt of a corrigible nocuous youth,

Gainly, gruntled and kempt;

A mayed and sidious fellow forsooth;

Ordinate, effable, shevelled, ept, couth;

A delible fellow I dreamt.

A tailful dog, one leaf-ful spring

Set out for toothful foraging,

And as he dug in rootful sod,

Paid voiceful tribute to his God.

At which, a feckful, loveful lass,

Whose strapful bodice charmed each pass-

Erby, cried out, "O timeful sound!

O ageful, lifeful, peerful hound!"