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Yuriy Fedkovych National UniversityDIACHRONIC ENANTIOSEMY OF THE ADVERBS “HARDLY”,  
“BARELY”, “SCARCELY” AND THEIR NEGATIVE STATUS

**Summary.** This article is a diachronic study of enantiosemy of the adverbs “hardly”, “barely”, “scarcely”. In modern English these adverbs do not appear negative in form, according to communicative grammars the probability of occurrence of the actions defined by the adverbs under study, is 5%. Yet they function as negative items, forming tag-questions by analogy with negative sentences. Since the Early Middle English they have changed their meanings from expressing positive results of performing the action to the idea suggesting an abnormally short duration of the action or its impossibility.

**Key words:** enantiosemy, ambivalence, synonym, polarization of meaning, emphatic.

Enantiosemy is a special type of polysemy. The term was introduced by the Czech philologist V. Shertsl, “By enantiosemy we mean the phenomenon that the same word comprises two opposite meanings [12] I. Sadchikova defines enantiosemy as “an occasional melioration of pejoratives and pejoration of melioratives” [11, p. 1306].

V. Kravtsova declares that “the main prerequisites for the emergence of enantiosemy is asymmetry of linguistic sign, the principle of linguistic economy, the dualism of human thought” [4, p. 6].

The phenomenon which provides enantiosemy in speech and language reveals itself and is an object of research in many branches of human studies and that preconditions its **topicality**.

In Psychology S. Freud writes about the expression of dreams, where opposites gather in an integral unit. He identifies a certain resemblance between a lack of denials in dreams and ambivalence of the Unconscious [3, p. 52].

In Philosophy of Antiquity Plato declared preeminence of ambivalence in thought and language: “Ambivalence is the most important feature for the formation of any concept; it presupposes polarization of the concepts, that makes the volume of a particular phenomenon” [16, p. 8].

Heraclitus saw the combination of opposites as a perfect and indispensable source of harmony. “The idea of the Indivisible Whole is linked to the idea of Splitting the Whole” [7, p. 165].

**Classification.** A traditional classification according to “part of speech specification, position in the sentence, intonation, etymology, offered by G. Yatskovskaya (1976) and later developed by M. Brodsky (1998) differentiates between speech and language enantiosemy” [13, p. 3].

Speech enantiosemy reveals itself mostly as a basic component of stylistic devices of sarcasm or irony in dialogues, informal situations, when irritation or annoyance is expressed.

Within the language enantiosemy there are 1) grammatical (mixing transitive and non-transitive, active and passive meanings), e. g. *children’s poetry* – a) written by smb for children; b) written by children; 2) phraseological (external form contradicts the meaning), e. g. *spare the rod* – means to spoil the child allowing him too much.

Lexical enantiosemy can be synchronic and diachronic; both can be intra-lingual and inter-lingual:

– synchronic intralingual (opposite meanings are present in the words of the same language), e. g. *priceless* – a) *to be priced high*; b) *absurd*;

– synchronic interlingual (presence of opposite meanings in etymologically identical words in different languages), e. g. Russian *угод* (*uod*) and Ukrainian *вгода* (*vroda*);

– diachronic intralingual (opposite meanings develop within the same language), e. g. *болван* meant a pagan idol, than changed into “a silly pig-headed person; diachronic interlingual (the result of borrowing in different languages a neutral word meaning, which develops two opposite meanings), e. g. Latin *host* is “enemy”, in Germ. languages “Gast”, “guest”.

The triggered mechanism of polarization sometimes changes not only the word meaning in the context but also the word function in the sentence, so that the meaning is ambiguous and the word hardly fits one particular classification (as its function is obscure).

The **objective** of our investigation is lexical and functional changes of words undergoing polarization in diachrony on the **material** of the Medieval texts “The Ormulum” (dated 1220), “Sir Ferumbras” (1380), “The Pearls”, “Cleanness”, “Patience” (14 c.), “Pierce the Ploughman’s Crede” (1394), “Romance of Sir Beues of Hampton”, “The Three Kings’ Sons” (1500) and Early Modern English translation of King James Bible (1611). The **object** is adverbs *hardly*, *barely*, *scarcely*.

English adverbs are traditionally classified into 5 groups: adverbs of 1) time (today, yesterday, now, then, early, late, etc.); 2) place (here, there, where, near, above); 3) repetition and frequency (often, never, sometimes, ever, usually); 4) degree: very, quite, too, little, much); 5) manner (quickly, well, badly, easily). Yet there are adverbs which are not only poly-semantic but also poly-functional and their status is sometimes obscure. Such are, for example, “yet”, “barely”, “scarcely”, “hardly”.

Modern English adverbs “barely”, “scarcely”, “hardly” (according to the authors of a Communicative Grammar of English Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvic) are “negative items which are negative in behavior although they do not appear negative in form (as well as their semantics render the idea of existence of some phenomenon rather than its non-existence) and have the meaning “almost not” [5, p. 227]. “Negative in behavior” implies forming disjunctive questions the way negative sentences do, for example:

– *He could hardly ever speak yesterday, could he?* (not *couldn’t he?*).

As adverbs of frequency answering the questions “How many times?”, “How often?”, “scarcely ever”, “hardly ever” realize the meaning of least frequency “almost never”. The probability of occurrence of the action defined by any of the adverb under study is 5%, while “sometimes” stands for 25% probability, “often” – 50%, “always” – 100%.

Being also specified as “negative degree adverbs they correlate in the sentence (expressing scale of amount) with pronouns “little”, “few”, adverbs of frequency “rarely”, “seldom”.

According to BNC there are 8 402 cases of “hardly” in 100 000 000 word usages [1], that is as frequent as  $f=0,00008$ , “scarcely” is used 1 569 times with  $f=0,00002$ , that is considerably low (to compare “not” occurs 456 080 times with frequency of 0,00456, and “never” counts 53 182 cases of usage with  $f=0,00053$ ).

These adverbs are specific emphatic, emotional charge markers in the sentence.

To understand their meanings better let's quote their entries from Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.

**Barely** – adv. – **1) only, just:** *barely 10% of the population, barely perceptible / recognizable. We barely had time to catch the train. He was barely able to stand. He can barely read or write. Schools got barely a mention in the report;* **2) only a very short time before:** *I had barely started speaking when he interrupted me. The policy had barely been introduced before it was abandoned* [9, p. 82].

**Hardly** – adv. – **1) only just; scarcely, barely:** *I hardly know her. We had hardly begun. Hardly had we begun our walk when it began to rain. Tom's hardly 10 yet – it's too soon to think about careers!;* **2) (especially after can or could) only with difficulty:** *I'm so tired I can hardly stay awake. We can hardly afford to run a car. I could hardly believe my eyes, she looked so different;* **3) almost no, almost not:** *There's hardly any milk left. Hardly anybody (Very few people) came to the meeting. He hardly ever (very seldom) goes to bed before midnight. Hardly a week goes by without someone complaining (ie. Nearly every week someone complains) about it;* **4) (used to suggest that something is unlikely or unreasonable):** *Don't telephone yet – they'll hardly (ie. are very unlikely to) have finished lunch. The thieves can hardly have got very far;* **5) (used to suggest that somebody is being foolish in doing or saying sth) no, not:** *“Shall I invite the Hills?” “Hardly. You know they don't get on with Liz and Simon. This is hardly the time to back out. You can hardly expect me to believe that! It's hardly surprising that she failed the exams when she did so little work”* [9, p. 543].

**Scarcely** – adv. – **1) only just; almost not:** *There were scarcely a hundred people present. I scarcely know him. We can scarcely afford the rent;* **2) only a short time before:** *Scarcely had she entered the room when the phone rang;* **3) (used to suggest that something is very unlikely) surely not:** *You can scarcely expect me to believe that* [9, p. 1047].

Evidently, “hardly” realizes more meanings and more common than “barely” or “scarcely”. All the three realize the meaning of **1) only just**. “Barely” and “scarcely” possess another common meaning: **2) only as short time before**.

“Scarcely” and “hardly” have two common meanings as well. Beside the above mentioned common “only just” they are «used to suggest that something is very unlikely».

As synonyms of the synonymic group with the domain “hardly” it's possible to define their semantic likeness quotients (by the method of S. Berezhan) [6, p. 164]:

$$V = \frac{2C}{m+n},$$

where  $C$  – a number of common semantic components or meanings of the two words,  $m$  and  $n$  – a number of semantic components or meanings of these words. Therefore, for “scarcely” and “hardly”

$$V = \frac{2 \times 2}{3 + 5} = 0,5.$$

For “scarcely” and “barely”

$$V = \frac{2 \times 2}{3 + 2} = 0,8.$$

Thus the calculated synonymic quotients of likeness are in the table below.

Table 1

### The quotients of likeness with in the group of synonymic adverbs with the domain “hardly”

| Adverb   | hardly | scarcely | barely |
|----------|--------|----------|--------|
| barely   | 0,29   | 0,8      | –      |
| scarcely | 0,5    | –        |        |
| hardly   | –      |          |        |

There is considerable semantic likeness of *barely* and *scarcely*, *hardly* and *barely* are least a like, what was evident on comparing their entries.

#### Etymological analysis, diachronic change of the meaning

**Barely** derives from Old English *bærlice* “openly”, “clear”, “publicly”. *Bare* + *ly* (2) meant “only just”, “nomore”. In Middle English it al so stood for “soly”, “exclusively” [15].

**Scarcely** as adverb has been used since 14 c.; it derived from Old North French adjective “*scarce*”, fixed since 1 300 with the meaning “restricted in quantity”, “scanty”. In Old French “*eschars*”, in Modern French “*echars*” from Latin “*scarsus*”, “*excarpere*” – “pluckout” [15].

**Hardly** as adverb has been functioning since 1 200 meaning “in a hard manner, with exertion or effort”; it derived from Old English *heardlice* “sternly”, “severely”, “harshly”, “bravely” [15]. For example, in the text of “Ormulum” (1220) the corresponding adverb “*harde*” meant “rigorously”, “strictly” [8, 160]; in “The Pearls”, “Cleanness” (early 14 c.) it occurred in the meaning “hardly”, “boldly” [2; 3]. Since 14 c. it has acquired one more meaning – “assuredly”, “certainly”. Since 1540 his main meaning “only just” has been dominating [15].

In King James' Bible [14] there are 8 cases of “hardly” mostly in function of the adverbial of manner, 1 in the function of negative degree, 2 cases of “scarcely”, “barely” is not used.

“*And it came to pass when Pharaoh would hardly let vs go, that the Lord slew all the first borne in the land of Egypt <...>*” [Exodus 13 : 15] (“*would hardly let vs go*” in the study Bible is rendered as “was stubborn about letting us go”) [14].

“*And they shall pass through its hardly bestead and hungry <...>*” [Isaiah 8 : 21] (“*hardly bestead*” – “hard-pressed and hungry”) [14].

“*And loe, a spirit taketh him, and hee suddenly crieth out, and it teareth him that he fometh againe, and bruising him, hardly departeth from him*” [Luke 9 : 39] (“*departed from him hardly*” – “departed with great difficulty”) [14].

“*When Sarai dealt hardly with her maid, shee fled from her face* [Genesis 16 : 6] (“*dealt hardly*” – “dealt harshly”) [14].

“*And when Iesus saw that hee was very sorrowfull, hee said: how hardlyshal they that have riches, enter into the Kingdome of God?*” [Luke 18 : 24] (“*how hardly shal they that have riches*” – “how hard it is for those who have riches”) [14].

“*For scarcely for a righteous man will one dieth, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die*” [Romans 5 : 7] (“*scarcely*” – “scarcely”) [14].

“*And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinners appear?*” [1 Peter 4 : 18] (“*scarcely*” – “scarcely”) [14].

**Conclusion.** Comparing the development and meaning changing of the adverbs *hardly*, *barely*, *scarcely* from Middle English to Modern English we observe the linguistic phenomenon of diachronic grammatical enantiosemy – gradual polarization of the meaning from expressing positive expectation of the action consequence to expressing abnormally brief or impossible action.

The meaning of the adverb correlates with its syntactic position. Its negative meaning is realized immediately before/near the predicate.

Expressing emphatic emotional charge of the adverbs correlates with the inversion in the sentence.

Polarization of the meaning can be not only diachronic but also spontaneous contextual.

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#### Трутяк І. П. Діахронічна енантіосемія прислівників “hardly”, “barely”, “scarcely” та їх заперечний статус

**Анотація.** Стаття присвячена діахронічному розвитку значення прислівників “hardly”, “barely”, “scarcely”. У сучасній англійській мові ці прислівники не мають зовнішніх ознак, притаманних заперечним словам і, згідно з комунікативними граматиками, вірогідність того, що дія, означена ними, відбулася чи відбудеться, становить 5%, однак вони утворюють роз’єднальні речення за аналогією із заперечними. Від раннього середньоанглійського періоду їхнє значення змінювалося від вираження позитивного завершення дії до передачі надто короткого її перебігу або практичної неможливості її здійснення.

**Ключові слова:** енантіосемія, багатозначність, синонім, поляризація значення, емфатичність.

#### Трутяк І. П. Диакроническая энантосемия наречий “hardly”, “barely”, “scarcely” и их отрицательный статус

**Аннотация.** Статья посвящена диакроническому развитию значений наречий “hardly”, “barely”, “scarcely”. В современном английском языке эти наречия не имеют внешних признаков, присущих отрицательным словам и, согласно коммуникативным грамматикам, вероятность того, что действие, означенное ими, произошло или произойдет, соответствует 5%, однако они образуют разъединительные предложения по аналогии с разъединительными отрицательными. С раннего среднеанглийского периода их значение изменялось от выражения позитивного завершения действия до передачи слишком краткой его продолжительности или практической невозможности его совершения.

**Ключевые слова:** энантосемия, многозначность, синоним, поляризация значения, эмфатичность.