Oxymoron in English and Arabic Modern Poetry: A Contrastive linguistic Study

[1] Fida' Al-Mawla, [2] Besmaa Majid Falih

Abstract: *The present study is a contrastive linguistic study of using of oxymoron as a linguistic device in English and Arabic languages and particularly in poetry. It is mainly concerned with investigating the term 'oxymoron' in both languages by examining its definitions, types, uses or reasons, structures, meanings and the terms included within this term in both languages. Likewise, the study investigates and shows the similarities and differences between English and Arab modern poets in using oxymoron as a figure of speech in their poems. For these purposes, it is hypothesized that: **(1)** oxymoron, in all its types, is used in both English and Arabic modern poetry **(2)** English and Arab poets frequently employ oxymorons in their poems to convey particular meanings, and **(3)** oxymoron in English and Arabic is similar and/or different in certain cases, like terminology and which type preferred.*

To achieve the purposes and to prove the hypotheses, a qualitative analysis of two poems in both languages is made to verify the results. The model used to analyze the chosen data is a designed eclectic one derived mainly from Leech's model (1969) "A linguistic Guide to English Poetry" and Shen's model (1987) "On the Structure and Understanding of Poetic Oxymoron", in addition to other sources taken from Arab and English authors, like Ofuani (1990), Flayih (2009), Sloane (2001) and Abu-Jaber (2013).

The study ends with the results verifying what has already been proposed by the researcher in terms of matching the results with the hypotheses established and the objectives desired in the study.

Keywords*: Oxymoron in English and Arabic, Modern Poetry, Linguistic Study*

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1. Introduction

As a phenomenon, oxymoron (the main focus of the present study) is one of the figurative features or devices which basically has two features. Firstly, it is the juxtaposition of two apparently opposed or contrasted meanings (not necessarily two words) which are incompatible. Secondly, the juxtaposition is usually surprising yet does in a way make sense, thereby creating an emphatic or epigrammatic effect (Flayih 2009).

One of the unexplored beauties of the English language is oxymoron. It has been defined as a figure of speech by which the juxtaposed elements appear to be contradictory. "Bitter sweet," "compassionate conservation" and "definite maybe" are famous examples of it. Very often, oxymorons are used without thinking. Some are very common that they come to be part of everyday language. In more plainly way, the oxymoronic nature of the expressions, like "pretty ugly," "medium-large" and "acting naturally" is probably not uppermost in our minds. Rather, it is there all right, concealed in plain sight (Brett 2017).

Moreover, oxymoron has found or named under another forms or names. In such a case, the poets of the 17th century had looked at 'paradox' as the verbally compressed form of oxymoron. Within the same respect, it is also found in the prose epigram. Moreover, it is known in the literature of Christianity as 'paradoxical religion'. In a more general sense, the term is applied to a person or situation characterized by striking contradictions (Ruiz 2009).

In Arabic, oxymoron is called "Al-Irdaf Al-Khalfi" and defined as a linguistic poetic device that is composed of an apparent contradiction between two lexical items in order to elicit the effect of admiration. Its origin returns back to Western rhetorics and literally means "an unintentional meaning of words". In addition, that 'unintentional meaning' has a deep or compatible meaning which needs to be expressed implicitly by using such an apparent

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[1] *College of Arts, Dept. of Translation, Wasit University-Iraq*
[2] *Education Directorate of Wasit Governorate-Iraq*

contradiction (ibid). An example of Arabic oxymoron is ""al-sadiqan al-ladudan" (deadly friends) (Wahiba and Al-Muhandis 1984).

Besides, cases, like oxymoron, are distinguished as "irregularities" in the language by Arabs, represented by Sibawayh who claims that, in these cases, rhetorical language is used and the language rules are exceeded both in the choice of the terms and their combination. Sibawayh justifies this by saying that, such marked cases or irregularities are used in the language with the purposes of brevity and/or summarization. An example given by Sibawayh is "akalat al-ard" (the earth eats). Here, "the earth" cannot collocate with the verb "eat" because the earth cannot eat, but the intended or the rhetorical meaning in this example is "talking too much" (25).

In this connection, Abdul-Raof (2006, 243-4) categorizes oxymoron as an ancient Arabic rhetorical device that has been used under the discipline named embellishments or "Elm Al-Badia". He explains that embellishments in Arabic has two major categories. These are lexical embellishments and semantic embellishments. Doutlessly, oxymoron is a type of semantic embellishments. He adds that, oxymoron is achieved "when the communicator places two antonyms next to each other". The phrase "the enemy brothers" (al-aada' al-ashiqa') in the sentence "the enemy brothers sat down on the negotiating table" is an example of oxymoron in Arabic.

2. Definitions of Oxymoron

In English, Horberry (2010, 129) defines oxymoron as "A rhetorical figure in which contradictory terms are conjoined so as to give point to the statement or expression". Simply, oxymoron is often used loosely to mean 'contradiction in terms'. He adds that oxymoron is a surprisingly useful device permitting the writers to draw readers' attention to some hidden ambiguity in their subject in an elegant and economical way. The effect of such device is to subtly imply the unattainable rendering the idea funny, absurd and above all thought provoking.

In Arabic, Arab scholars, experts and linguists have discussed the term 'oxymoron' under several titles and concepts. The most common general term used by the traditional dictionaries and literary critics referring to oxymoron is (contradiction). Linguistically, 'contradiction' refers to the fact that something is very different from something else or being the complete opposite of something else so that one of them will remove the other, like "black" is against "white", "death" is against "life", etc. (Jamal Al-Din Abu Al-Fadl 2004). Within the same respect, the term "juxtaposition of opposites" is used instead of the term oxymoron by Arabs and it means two things, one of them exists and the other does not (Thaelab 1996).

However, there is a general view held by some scholars in both languages such as Saleh (2008), Jauss (2011) and Baldrick (2001) who all claim that, oxymoron is structurally similar to paradox since both of them are consisted of two or three contradictory terms. Even though, oxymoron is seen as a 'condensed paradox'. Similarly, Abrams, in his book entitled *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, assures what is said above asserting that, "oxymoron akin to verbal paradox in the sense that the former is a compact form of the latter" (1999, 127).

3.Kinds of Oxymoron

Mainly, three types of oxymoron are distinguished by Shen (1987, 109–10) in his article entitled *Structure and Understanding of Poetic Oxymora*. These are:

i. Direct oxymoron structure. This type consists of two terms which are antonyms, namely. The features of these antonymous terms are identical, with the exception of a change in the "+/−" sign of their lowest, distinctive feature. Examples of this type are "living death," "a feminine man," etc. (Plett 2010, 220).

ii. Indirect oxymoron structure. This type consists not of two terms which are direct antonyms, like 'direct oxymoron' but indirect ones, such as "whistling silence," "sunny coldness," and "watery dryness". In these examples, whistle is not the direct opposite of silence, as sunny is not the direct opposite of coldness and watery is not the direct opposite of dryness. in indirect oxymoron, there is another kind of sense relation called 'hyponymy'. Hyponymy is the kind of semantic relation that is obtained between specific and general lexical items. In other words, the former is included in the latter. "Whistle", for examples, is a hyponym (or type) of "sound," "sun" is a hyponym of "hot", since "sun" is a member in the set of hot entities, "water" is the hyponym of "wet", since "water" is a member in the set of wet entities. Thus, in this sense, the indirect oxymoron could be defined as, "an oxymoron in which one of its terms represents the hyponym of the antonym of the other term" (Shen 2007, 174).

iii. The metaphor structure. This type is roughly common to all metaphors and consists structurally of two terms which do not vary in the sign "+/−" of their distinctive feature, or in any additional feature, but in their "upper/less" distinctive

features. For instance, silence and going in the phrase "the silence goes" are differentiated at the upper level of their features list, i.e., the term "going," has the feature "+movement" which is not shared by the term "silence." (Plett, 2010).

In Arabic, two main types of oxymoron are distinguished; but they have different names (Abu Jaber 2013, 163). Abu Jaber defines these two main types depending on oxymoron's connection with rhetorics and its various aesthetic types such as: antithesis, metaphor, simile, symbol and mixture of senses. These types are: **(1)** The Antithetical Oxymoron and **(2)** The Integrative Oxymoron. In turn, the latter is also subdivided into: **(a)**Integrative Simile Oxymoron, **(b)**Integrative Metaphorical Oxymoron, **(c)**Symbolical Integrative Oxymoron and **(d)**Integrative Synchronic Senses Oxymoron (ibid: 464). Each of these types will be illustrated below:

1.Antithetical or direct oxymoron. This type, as it is in English, consists of two terms which are direct antonyms, namely, like" after difficulty, Allah will soon grant relief". In this example, 'difficulty and relief' are direct antonyms and are called ' direct oxymoron' (Abu Jaber 2013).

2.The integrative or indirect oxymoron. This type is called 'integrative' because it integrates two stylistic techniques. One of these is oxymoron and the other is parallel to metaphor, simile, symbol and synchronic senses (Abu Jaber, 163). Therefore, this type is further divided into:

a. Metaphorical oxymoron. This type combines between metaphor and contrast and is called, by traditional Arab rhetoricians, "conflicted metaphors" (Fadel and Norzada 2015). Fadel and Norzada go further by analyzing many poems of the Arab poet named Blend Al-Haidari dividing this type into two more branches. These are 'colored metaphorical oxymoron', like "whitened night" and 'descriptive metaphorical oxymoron', like "time grew tired".

b. Integrative simile oxymoron. In this type, "the contrast is between the compared element and the compared with element" (Abu Jaber 2013, 464). Examples of this type are "the silence is a song" or "the silence is a poem". In those examples, silence is compared with its opposites which are the song and the poem. In other words, the song originally makes sounds and the poem is dependent on words, not on silence.

c. Symbolical integrative oxymoron. In this type of oxymoron, the contrast is "between the symbolical references of each of the two contrasted elements" (Abu Jaber 2013, 464). Generally, 'the symbol' is an artistic style adopted by a poet to be both creative and indirect in presenting his views about the world and life in general. It reflects the present psychologic states and the particularity of a poet affected by the outside world around him. It is also the distance that a poet trenches himself with to avoid being antagonistic by people or the words of those people (Muhammad 2007).

d. Integrative synchronic senses oxymoron. This type is a literary style used to describe the incompatible relationship between the sensory perceptions of the five human senses. Such style enables the poet to create new interpretations allowing the readers to mediate in order to discover the real or deep meaning by relating the elements of the artistic work with the inspired indication. "I can see the silence", "dancing tune" and "crying tune" are examples taken from Danqal's poems. As it is known, silence is realized with the sense of hearing. In "I can see the silence", and some other similar ones, the poet allows himself to deviate the reality by seeing "the silence" (Ayuki, et al. 2009, 2).

4. The Grammatical Structure of Oxymoron

Grammatically, oxymoron is of diverse structure. Ruiz (2009), lederer (2010) and Evans (2012) state that oxymoron can be found within a word level dividing it into the following categories:

(a) Oxymoron in single word composes of independent morphemes. In this case, two meaning bearing elements that are put together into a single word, could be an independent word in itself, for example, "firewater", "bittersweet" and "bridegroom".

(b) Logological/eye oxymoron composed of surface letter combinations, for example, the word "nook" combines the opposing words 'no' and 'OK'.

Besides, oxymoron can also be found within a phrase level consisting of words which belong either to a same syntactic class or of a different one (Flayih, 2009:31). At this level, Sloane (2001), Zhang (2005), Osborne (2008) and Brdar, Raffaelli, & Fuchs (2012) state that, oxymoron, as a phrase, can be limited to the following syntactic constructions:

(a) N+N, like "love-hate" construction.

(b) N of N (Genitive), like "the sounds of silence."

(c) Adjective (or Participle) +Noun, like "living death."

(d) Adjective (or Participle) + Adjective: "dreadful, pleasing thought."

(e) Verb + Adverb, like "make haste slowly[proverb]," "to cry silently," "to die a way brightly."

(f) Adjective + Be + Adjective, like "Fair is foul and foul is fair."

Adding to these agreed categories, Sakaeva & Krnilova (2017) mentions other forms of oxymoron categorized also within the phrase level, as the following:

(g) V+ Article + N, like "ruined by civilization", "to spit in the soul", "to sink in the glass."

 (h) N+ Preposition + N, like "victory in defeat."

 (i) Free forms. This group include long phrases based on antonyms.

Otherwise, oxymorons are found at a sentence level too. In this respect, oxymoron is limited to two or three predicates (Ruiz 2009) and has the following constructions (Flayih 2009) :

(a) Subject vs. Predicate, like "silence sings all round me."

(b) Subject vs. Predicative, like "A friend to everybody is a friend to nobody."

(c) Subject vs. Object: "The greatest hate springs from greatest love."

(d) Subject vs. Object Complement, like "then I will to the water go, and see him out of sight"(ibid).
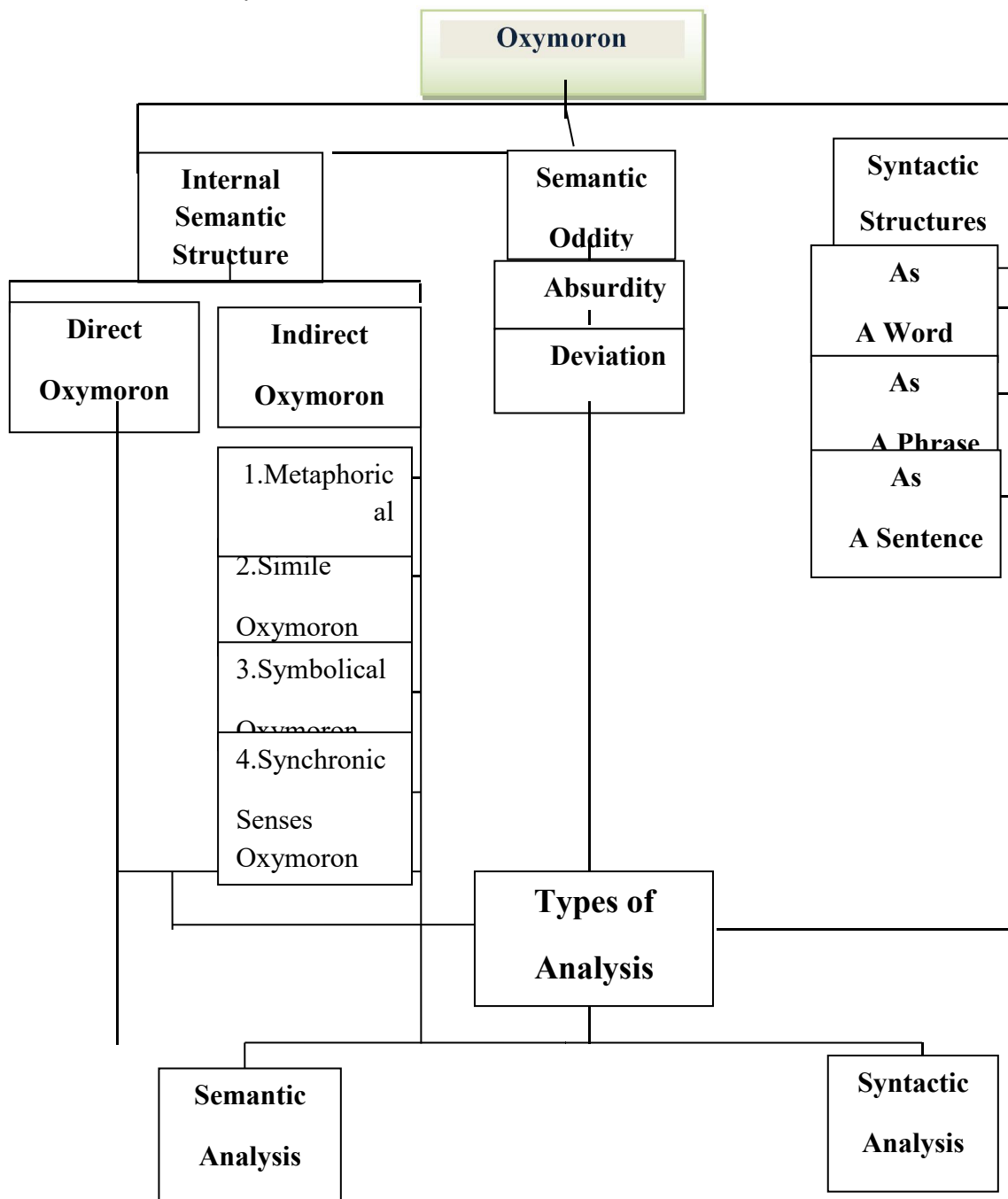
5. Functions of Oxymoron
The following the functions or purposes are said to be associated with oxymoron:

1. Drawing Attention. It is the most common purpose of all literary devices, including oxymoron. To draw attention is to lend weight to the place of the idea that the writers are describing on the page. In other words, an author or writer tends to describe something must be important in an unexpected way, for example, " I must be cruel only to be kind " (Flayih 2009).

2. Contrast. Oxymoron can produce an ironic contrast which shows how something has been misunderstood or mislabeled (34).

3. Objectification. In such a case, oxymorons may have the more compatible set of meanings that are the product of the juxtaposed contradictory states. Such effect is gained by making use of well-known kinds of knowledge for that. For instance, "she's killing me with her kindness." Here, both terms, killing and kindness, have an apparent contradiction. While 'kindness' is a good thing to do to a person; 'killing' is a bad thing. However, a more compatible set of senses are impendent in that kindness which can become a bad thing if there is too much of it even if it is a good thing (Colston 2015).

4. Sarcastic effect. For example, when the speaker has no money and says "let me just get out my checkbook and give you anything you want (84).

5. Humor. This function is achieved by confronting the reader or listener with a sense of absurdity in order to recognize the entire sentence and to get the idea of funniness. This line of thinking is a purely subjective and presupposes that the reader or listener is already familiar with the intended humor. For example, to say that "honest politician" is an oxymoron implies that the politicians are inherently dishonest (Flayih 2009).

6. Brevity. It is crystallized when two opposite features are co–occurring in one particular thing. for example, " victorious defeat" (33).

For the purpose of illustration, a poem from English and another one from Arabic are to be analyzed by the researcher. The first one is "The Hollow Men" by T.S. Eliot and the other is "Inshudat Al-Matar" (The Song of Rain) by Badar Shakar Al-Sayyab.

The Model of Analysis

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                        │      Oxymoron       │
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Internal Semantic Structure	Semantic Oddity	Syntactic Structures
	Absurdity	As A Word
	Deviation	As A Phrase
		As A Sentence

Direct Oxymoron	Indirect Oxymoron

Indirect Oxymoron:
1. Metaphorical
2. Simile Oxymoron
3. Symbolical Oxymoron
4. Synchronic Senses Oxymoron

Types of Analysis

Semantic Analysis	Syntactic Analysis

6. Data Analysis

(a) Analysis of Oxymoron in Eliot's "The Hollow Men"

Originally, the poem was innovated to constitute the epilogue to "The Waste Land". However, it was modified, revised, and published separately in 1925. At its present state, the poem consists of five sections containing the poet's mediations "on the subject of human nature in this world, and on the relationship of this world to another, the world of death, or eternity" (Ali 2014, 97).

The first oxymoronic phrase in this poem is **"The hollow men"**. Grammatically, it is a phrasal oxymoron that consists of adjective + noun. Semantically, it is a metaphorical oxymoron which composes of two opposite words. These are "hollow" and "men". This expression has an ironical effect since a real person cannot, literally, be described as hollow.

Human beings have nerves, blood, muscles, bones and flesh inside his body. However, the poet talks implicitly about men who have spiritual emptiness, lacking faith describing them as "hollow". The hollow and stuffed men lack the essential needed to be real persons, like heart and faith.

The second oxymoronic expression is "**The stuffed men**". Grammatically, it consists of adjective + noun. Semantically, it is a metaphorical oxymoron composing of "stuffed" and "men". A real person cannot be virtually described as "stuffed". Only scarecrows are normally stuffed. The poet here ironically talks about people whose minds are filled with triviality. That is, their heads are merely filled with straw rather than anything worthwhile or meaningful.

The third example is **"shade without color".** Grammatically, this phrasal oxymoron has a free form. Semantically, it is a direct oxymoron consisting of "shade" and "without color". The poet uses this oxymoronic expression to make a pun on the word "shade" which may mean ghost. That is, the hollow men are just like ghosts in that they are not effective.

The forth example is **"Paralysed force".** Grammatically, it is a phrasal oxymoron consisting of adjective and noun. Semantically, it is a metaphorical oxymoron composing of "paralysed" and "force".The poet is sarcastically speaking about the rebels.

The last example is **"gesture without motion"**. Grammatically, this oxymoron has a free form. Semantically, it is a direct oxymoron consisting of " gesture" and "without motion". The poet the hollow men who are just like dead bodies completely lifeless and soul lacking.

(b) Analysis of Oxymoron in Al-Sayyab's "The Song of Rain"

Song of Rain (UnshUdat al-Matar) was first published in the periodical "Al-adab" in 1954. Then, in 1960, it was reprinted in Diwan entitled by its name "Unshadat al-Matar". The poem reflects the poet's wishes and hopes of freedom for the Iraqi people. These wishes are linked with the brief life of Al-Sayyab which is a torture of incurable disease and gradual death in his political exile and poverty caused by losing his teaching job because he is a communism's supporter (Abu El-Shaer Yardy 1995, 23-24).

The first oxymoronic expression is **"eaynaki heen tubasman" (When your eyes smile).** Grammatically**,** it is a sentence consisting of subject vs. predicate. Semantically**,** it is a metaphorical oxymoron composing of "eyes" and "smile". The poet tries to pay the readers' attention by comparing the eyes of his loved eyes to a smile since both bring happiness to a person looking at them.

The second example is **"w tarqus al-adwaa" (and lights dance).** Grammatically, it is a sentence composing of subject vs. predicate. Semantically, it is a metaphorical oxymoron consisting of "lights" and "dance". In brevity, the poet describes the happiness which is everywhere and in everything even in the abstract things like "lights".

The third example is **kal-aqmar fi nahr" (like moons in a river).** Grammatically, it is a phrase composing of noun + preposition + noun. Semantically, it is a simile oxymoron consisting of "moons" and "in a river". The poet pays the readers' attention to the vibration of moon's light caused by water's waves "in a river".

The forth example is **"difa al-shitaa" (the warmth of winter).** Grammatically, it is a phrase consisting of noun of noun. Semantically, it is a symbolical oxymoron composing of "winter" and "warmth". It illuminates a conflict between "warmth" which is associated with summer and other seasons and "winter" which is normally cold, rainy, snowy and gloomy. However, the poet relates warmth to winter symbolically referring to the intimate feelings evoked in winter between the people in his country (Iraq).

The fifth example is **"airtieashit al-kharif"(the quiver of Autumn).** Grammatically, it is a phrase consisting of noun of noun. Semantically, it is a metaphorical oxymoron composing of "autumn" and "quiver". The poet creates new meaning by viewing Autumn as a person who is capable of trembling though it is not a physical body.

The sixth example is **"w al-mawt w al-milad w al-zalam w al-diyaa" (death, birth, light and darkness).** Grammatically, it has a free form. Semantically, it is a direct oxymoron composing of "light vs. darkness" and "death vs. birth". Contrasted images are given to indicate the state of instability Iraq passes through at that time and these contradictions are reflections of the conflict in the poet himself or in his country.

The seventh example is **"nashwa wahashiya" (a savage ecstasy).** Grammatically, it is a phrase composing of adjective + noun. Semantically**,** it is a metaphorical oxymoron consisting of "ecstasy" and "savage". The poet creates new meaning by comparing "elation" to a wild animal indicating his inability to control it.

The eighth example is **"tathayib al-masaa"(the evening yawned).** Grammatically, it is a sentence consisting of subject vs. predicate. Semantically, it is a metaphorical oxymoron composing of "evening" and "yawned". The poet, with the attention of creating new meaning, personifies "the evening" as a person who can yawn. He, in this sentence, refers to the people who feel sleepy when it is raining in the evening.

The last example is **al-qura tayin" (the villages moan).** Grammatically, it is a sentence consisted of subject vs. predicate. Semantically, it is a metaphorical oxymoron consisting of "villages" and "moan". The poet creates new meaning by personifying "villages" as people or inhabitants living in villages and suffering a lot because of the rain.

Conclusions
        The study comes out with the following results:
1. English and Arabic poetry are rich with the use of oxymorons for various reasons, like paying attention and sarcasm A poet relies on this device to convey an ambiguous meaning which is in some cases deliberately used as an aim in itself in poetry.

2. English and Arabic languages have the same types of oxymoron which are direct and indirect, but in different terminology.

3. Understanding of the oxymoron's real meaning depends on linguistic as well as extra-linguistic factors. In other words, all the components of the extra-linguistic context (the immediate temporary and physical setting of the poem, the poem's social, cultural, psychological and historical setting, the identities, knowledge, emotion, abilities, beliefs and assumptions of the poet and reader) can contribute to the construction and interpretation of oxymoron.

4. The analysis shows that the indirect oxymoron is highly used and more poetic than the direct one.

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