

Paronomasia

Definition of Paronomasia

Paronomasia is a rhetorical device that can be defined as a phrase intentionally used to exploit the confusion between words having similar sounds but different meanings. It is like a word play, and is also known as a “pun.”

Types of Paronomasia

There are two types of paronomasia:

Typographic Paronomasia

Typographic paronomasia is further classified into five [categories](#):

Homophonic – The use of words that sound the same, but have different meanings, such as “**Pour** out corruption’s slag from every **pore**.”

Homographic – Words that are spelled the same, but have different meanings, such as “David doesn’t feel **well** today,” and “My uncle is digging a new **well**.”

Homonymic – These words include both homographs and homophones.

Compound – These contain two or more puns in a sentence.

Recursive – In these, the second part of a pun depends upon the meaning of the first.

Visual Paronomasia

These are actually puns and used in non-phonetic texts. Visual paronomasia includes the “4 Pics 1 Word” word game, where players are supposed to look at four pictures and guess the word that they have in common.

Examples of Paronomasia in Literature

Paronomasia underscores the expertise of writers and their characters. From Jesus Christ to Shakespeare, examples of paronomasia have been crafted to create rhetorical effect.

Example #1: *Richard III* (By William Shakespeare)

Launce: “It is no matter if the **tied** were lost; for it is the unkindest **tied** that ever any man **tied**.”

Richard: “Now is the winter of our discontent ... made glorious summer by this **Son** of York.”

William Shakespeare is probably the most renowned punster in literature. Here the word “tied” is used three times as homophonic paronomasia, giving different meanings in three different places. Similarly, the word “son” is King Edward IV, not the weather of York.

Example #2: *A Hymn to God the Father* (By John Donne)

“When Thou hast done, Thou hast not **done** for I have **more**.
That at my death Thy Son
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore
And having done that, Thou hast **done**;
I fear no **more**.”

In the above excerpt, John Donne has rhymed his name with “done,” and his wife’s name Anne More with “more.” The words are underlined. This is an example of homophonic paronomasia.

Example #3: *Romeo and Juliet* (By William Shakespeare)

Mercutio: “Nay, gentle Romeo, we must have you dance.”

Romeo: “Not I, believe me. You have dancing shoes with nimble

move...”

This extract is again an example of homophonic paronomasia. Shakespeare has exploited the words “sole” and “soul.” Both sound the same, though they have different meanings, creating comic effect.

Example #4: *Great Expectations* (By Charles Dickens)

“**Tickler** was a wax-ended piece of cane, worn smooth by collision with my **tickled** frame.”

Here, Dickens plays on the word “tickle.” This word is maneuvered in such a way that it gives two different meanings and comic effect.

Example #5: *Ulysses* (By James Joyce)

“If you **see** kay
Tell him he may
See you in tea
Tell him from me –”

Joyce has included this brief poem with paronomasia words in it. Here, the word “see” is used with the same spelling but different meanings. It is creating [humor](#) when spelled out.

Example #6: *Hamlet* (By William Shakespeare)

Claudius:”...But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son.”
Hamlet: [[aside](#)] “A little more than kin, and less than **kind** ... Not so, my lord, I am too much in the sun.”

Here, Hamlet is distressed that his mother married his uncle, which is not allowed in Christianity. The word “kind” is used as a short form of kindred. Shakespeare plays with the meaning of this word “kind.”

Function of Paronomasia

Paronomasia gives thoughtful meanings to literary texts, aside from providing humorous and witty comments. Through paronomasia, writers demonstrate the shrewdness of characters, and their own ingenuity by playing with the words. Besides, in literary works, paronomasia functions as a purposeful efforts to provide a source of comic relief, and to show their artistic ability. Being a source of fun, paronomasia is used in [comedy](#) theaters, and jokes give humorous meanings to perplexing stories. Also, it is found in [limerick](#) forms of poetry.