

Pleonasm

Definition of Pleonasm

Pleonasm is derived from a Greek word that means “*excess*.” It is a rhetorical device that can be defined as the use of two or more words (a phrase) to express an idea. These words are redundant, such as in these examples of pleonasm” “burning fire,” and “black darkness.” Sometimes, pleonasm is called “[tautology](#),” which is the [repetition](#) of words.

Difference Between Oxymoron and Pleonasm

[Oxymoron](#) is a combination of two contradictory terms. It is the opposite of pleonasm. This can appear in different types of texts due to an error, or used advertently to give paradoxical meanings. For example, “I like a smuggler. He is the only **honest thief**.”

However, pleonasm is a combination of two or more words which are more than those required for clear expression. For example, “I saw it with **my own** eyes.”

Types of Pleonasm

There are two types of pleonasm as given below:

Syntactic Pleonasm

This occurs when the grammatical language makes specific functional words optional such as:

“I know you will come.”

“I know that you will come.”

In the given pleonasm examples, the conjunction “that” is optional while joining a verb phrase with a sentence. Although both sentences are correct grammatically, the conjunction “that” is pleonastic.

Semantic Pleonasm

Semantic pleonasm is related more to the [style](#) of the language than the grammar, such as given below:

“I am eating a **tuna fish**“

Here tuna is itself the name of a fish, and there is no need to add the word “fish.” Therefore, the word fish is pleonastic in the sentence.

Examples of Pleonasm in Literature

Example #1: *Julius Caesar* (By William Shakespeare)

“This was the **most unkindest** cut of all...”

In this excerpt, Shakespeare has deliberately used the term “most unkindest” as pleonastic. He could have used unkindest only; however, most is added in order to emphasize and give an even clearer meaning.

Example #2: *Molloy* (By Samuel Beckett)

“Let me tell you this, when social workers offer you, **free, gratis** and **for nothing**, something to hinder you from swooning, which with them is an obsession, it is useless to recoil ...”

In this example, the terms “free,” “gratis,” and “for nothing” have very similar meanings. The words are repeated to create linguistic and literary effects. In this way, the words **free** and **nothing** are highlighted. This is a semantic pleonasm.

Example #3: *Eaters of the Dead* (By Michael Crichton)

“All this I saw with **my own** eyes, and it was the most fearsome sight I ever witnessed...”

The term “my own” is pleonastic, since the word “my” would have been enough to show possession. However, “own” is added to emphasize and clarify the meaning of the phrase.

Example #4: *City of the Beasts* (By Isabel Allende)

“These terrible things I have seen with **my own eyes**, and I have heard with **my own ears**, and touched with **my own hands**...”

Here again, the sense of possession is expressed with the use of pleonasm. The word “own” is redundant in each bold phrase. This is a syntactic pleonasm.

Example #5: *Paradise Lost* (By John Milton)

“From that day mortal, and this happie State
Shalt loose, expell’d **from hence** into a World
Of woe and sorrow...”

Milton is famous for using pleonastic language. Here, the word “hence” is employed in a redundant manner. In this [context](#), the meaning of hence could be “because of the previous premise.” It also means “henceforth.” This is an example of semantic pleonasm.

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

“He was a **man**, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again...”

The dictum of Hamlet for his father, here the word “man,” adds semantic meanings to the male personality. This is also a semantic pleonasm that is related to the style of language, enhancing the meaning of the word “man.”

Function of Pleonasm

Pleonastic words are employed to achieve linguistic, poetic, and literary effects. Since they are used as a rhetorical repetition, they are helpful for reinforcing a contention, an idea, or a question rendering an expression easier and clearer to understand. Also, they serve as a part of idiomatic language in professional and scholarly writing.