

Homophone

Definition of Homophone

A homophone can be defined as a word that, when pronounced, seems similar to another word, but has a different spelling and meaning. For example, the words “bear” and “bare” are similar in pronunciation, but are different in spelling as well as in meaning. Sometimes the words may have the same spelling, such as “rose,” the past tense of rise, and “rose,” the flower. Mostly, however, they are spelled differently, such as:

carrot
caret
carat

In literature, homophones are used extensively in poetry and [prose](#) to make rhythmic effects, and to put emphasis on something. They are also used to create a multiplicity of meanings in a written piece.

Types of Homophone

There are five different types of homophone:

[Homograph](#) – Some homophones are similar in spelling, but different in meanings. They are called *homographs*. For instance, “hail” meaning an ice storm, and “hail” meaning something that occurs in large numbers, such as “a hail of bullets.”

Homonym – Some words have the same pronunciation but different meanings. These are called *homonyms*. For instance, “cite,” “sight,” and “site.”

Heterograph – Homophones that have different spellings but are pronounced in the same way are called *heterographs*. For instance, “write” and “right.”

Oronym – Homophones that have multiple words or phrases, having similar sounds, are called *oronyms*. For instance, “ice cream” and “I scream.”

Pseudo-homophone – Homophones that are identical phonetically are called *pseudo-homophones*. In this type of homophone, one of the pair of words is not a real word, such as “groan” and “grone.”

Examples of Homophone in Literature

Example #1: *Where Truth's Wind Blew* (By Venicebard)

“**Sole** owner am I of this sorry **soul** ...
pour out corruption's slag from every **pore** —
whole slates scrape clean! they leave no gaping **hole**.
Role that I've played, loose grip! while back I **roll**,
or dodge each wave, or with firm grip on **oar**
bore through this sea, snout down, just like the **boar** ...”

This poem is filled with examples of homophone, which are marked in bold. They create a humorous effect in the poem through their same pronunciations but altogether different meanings.

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.”

John Done has used the name of his wife Anne and his own name Donne as homophones. In addition, he makes use of the word “son” instead of “sun,” to refer to Christ. They are also homophones.

Example #3: *The Importance of Being Earnest* (By Oscar Wilde)

“On the contrary, Aunt Augusta, I’ve now realized for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being **Earnest** ...”

“I always told you, Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn’t I? Well, it is **Ernest** after all. I mean it naturally is **Ernest**. “

In these excerpts, Oscar Wilde used the word *earnest* as a homophone. Here, Jack Earnest is talking to his Aunt Augusta and mocks his family. Jack finds out that his father’s name makes him really earnest.

Example #4: *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 **soles**; I have a **soul** of lead. So stakes me to the ground I cannot move ...”

Some of Shakespeare’s famous literary pieces are rich with homophone examples. One of which is the above excerpt where he uses the words “sole” and “soul” as homophones. Romeo talks about soles of his shoes, and the soul of his heart, which is heavy with sorrow.

Example #5: *Richard III* (By William Shakespeare)

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

Here, Shakespeare uses two words similar in pronunciation, “sun” and “son,” which are homophones. The Duke of York has a son named Edward, who is also taken as a sun whose rising power would create trouble for Richard.

Function of Homophone

The purpose of homophones in literature is to create humorous effect by

are employed intentionally in witty remarks. In addition, these give meaning to a literary piece of work, and writers reveal the ingenuity of their characters through the use of homophones.

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