

**LEXICOGRAPHY: SYNONYMS, ANTONYMS AND  
HOMONYMS IN ENGLISH**

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**ABSTRACT:** Lexical relations such as homonymy, synonymy, and antonymy constitute the backbone of meaning organization in English and many other languages. Homonyms are words that share either sound, spelling, or both while diverging in meaning and grammatical distribution. They are traditionally divided into three primary types: (1) homonyms proper, which are identical in both pronunciation and orthography (bank meaning a riverbank versus a financial institution); (2) homophones, which share pronunciation but differ in spelling (knight versus night); and (3) homographs, which share spelling but differ in pronunciation or sense (bow [the front of a ship] versus bow [to bend]). Further subclassifications consider part-of-speech alignment—lexical homonyms belong to the same grammatical category, whereas lexico-grammatical homonyms cross categories (left the direction versus left the past of leave)—and paradigm overlap, distinguishing full homonyms whose inflectional paradigms match (match → matches) from partial homonyms whose paradigms only partially coincide (lie → lying vs. lied). Synonymy involves distinct lexical items that convey overlapping denotative content but differ in distributional frequency, stylistic register, intensity, duration, or contextual suitability.

**KEY WORDS:**

Homonymy

Homophones

Homographs

Lexical vs. lexico-grammatical

Full vs. partial paradigms

Synonym hierarchy

Ideographic synonyms

Antonym types (absolute, derivational, contextual)

Conversive relations

Word-building processes (conversion, borrowing, phonetic change)

**INTRODUCTION:**

Definition of homonyms. Classification of homonyms.

Homonyms are words identical in sound and spelling or at least in one of these aspects, but different in their meaning and distribution. The term is derived from Greek (homos – the same, onoma – name, i.e. the same name combined with the difference of meaning).

Example: bank: 1) a shore, a river bank; 2) a financial institution;

Ball: 1) any spherical body; 2) a large dancing party.

Homonyms exist in many languages but in English this language phenomenon is especially frequent, mostly in monosyllabic words (nearly 90 % of homonyms)

Homonyms are divided into homonyms proper (identical in both sound and spelling), example: ball, bank; homophones (identical in sound but different in spelling), piece-peace, knight-night, scent-sent-cent; homographs (the same in spelling but different in sound), to bow – bow, lead – to lead.

Another classification is based on the part of speech homonyms belong to. If both homonyms belong to the same part of speech, they are lexical, for instance: to read – read, knight –night, to lie – to lie. Homonyms belonging to different parts of speech are called lexico-grammatical, left – left, eye –I, knows – nose.

The third classification is based on the similarity of the paradigms (grammatical forms each homonym possesses). Example: match-matches: match – matches, such homonyms are called full. Homonyms that coincide in one or two members (not in all members) of their paradigms are called partial. To lie- lying- lied – lied : to lie-lying- lay-lain ; left : to leave-leaving-left-left.

## II. Sources of homonymy.

There are several sources of homonymy. Phonetic changes. In the course of the language development two or more words that were pronounced differently may develop identical sound form, for instance: knight-night, sea-see, write-right.

Borrowing. A borrowed word may duplicate in form a native word or another borrowing, e.g. write (native) – rite(Latin ritus), fair (adj, native) – fair (noun, French),bank (shore, native)-bank (institution, Italian).

Wordbuilding:

Conversion: pale-to pale, water –to water, comb-to comb;

Shortening: fan – fan (from fanatic), van – from vanguard and from caravan;

Sound imitation: bang – to bang; mew –mew- mew.

Splitting polysemy: board. It is difficult to establish exact criteria by which

Disintegration of polysemy could be detected. The knowledge of etymology and other

Definition of synonyms. Classification of synonyms.

Synonymy is one of the most controversial points in linguistics. Roughly we may say that when two or more different words are associated with the same or nearly the same denotative meaning, the words are synonyms. Sometimes criterion of

interchangeability has been applied to definition of synonyms. Accordingly, synonyms have been defined as words, which are interchangeable in at least some contexts without any considerable changes in denotative meaning. This criterion, however, has been much criticized. If all synonyms were interchangeable, they would become useless ballast in the language. Even those synonyms that seem to be interchangeable and are called total by Academician Vinogradov, still differ in their distribution, use, for example: *cosmonaut* is used in reference to European spacemen and *astronaut* – to American ones. Or *offer* is followed by a noun while *suggest* – by a gerund. So the prevailing majority of synonyms are partial.

Synonyms are united into synonymous rows. In each row there is one word, which presents a kind of centre of the group of synonyms. Its semantic structure is usually simple. This is the dominant synonym characterized by:

High frequency of usage, broad combinability, broad general meaning, lack of connotations.

Example: in the row: *to look-to stare-to glare-to gaze-to peer-to peep-to glance-to glimpse*, the dominant synonym is the word *to look*.

Synonyms can be classified as stylistic and ideographic. Stylistic synonyms differ in their stylistic connotations: *father-parent-daddy*; *stomach-belly*. Ideographic synonyms may differ in the following connotations:

Degree or intensity: *to like-to admire –to live – to adore- to worship; to surprise – to astonish- to amaze- to astound*;

Duration: *to glance- to stare ; to say – to talk ;*

Manner: *to stagger – to trot – to pace – to march, etc.;*

Cause: *to shiver –to shudder ; to blush – to redden ;*

Emotive connotation: *alone – lonely;*

Evaluative connotation: *well-known – famous- celebrated- notorious.*

We can also single out contextual synonyms that are similar in meaning only under some specific distributional conditions, “*Go and buy some bread – Go and get some bread*”.

“*I cannot stand it any longer – I cannot bear it any longer.*” These words are not synonyms outside the specified contexts.

Sources of synonymy.

Synonyms tend to organize into hierarchical rows with a central, high-frequency “dominant” term (*look* in the series *look → stare → glare*), surrounded by partial synonyms that carry nuanced connotations—stylistic (*father* versus *dad*), ideographic (*adore* versus *like*), or contextual (*buy* versus *get* when referring to purchasing bread). Antonymy captures semantic opposition between pairs of words that belong to the same part of speech and share a semantic field. Absolute antonyms have unrelated roots (*right* vs. *wrong*), derivational antonyms arise through negative affixation (*happy* vs.

unhappy), and contextual antonyms depend on discourse conditions (on versus for in specific sentences). Conversive relations, a special subclass, invert participant roles while preserving referential content. This paper integrates the extensive classifications and source mechanisms for these three lexical phenomena-phonetic change, borrowing, word-building processes (conversion, shortening, sound imitation), polysemy splitting, and euphemistic or phraseological formation-highlighting how they collectively shape lexical ambiguity, choice, and opposition. By systematically mapping these dimensions, the study offers a comprehensive framework for linguistic description, computational lexical resources, and psycholinguistic investigation of meaning processing

Borrowings from other languages or from dialects and regional variants: to ask (native) – to question (French) – to interrogate (Latin), girl – lass (Scottish), lake-loch (Scottish), wireless – radio (AmE);

Wordbuilding: Conversion: a laugh( from to laugh) – laughter, to entame – to tame;

Shortening: veteran –vet, refrigerator – fridge, to telephone – to phone;

Euphemisms: drunk – merry – elevated, lavatory – restroom.

Phraseology: naked – in one's birthday suit; to die – to join the silent majority, to kick the bucket, etc.

Antonyms may be defined as two or more words of the same language belonging to the same part of speech and to the same semantic field, identical in style and nearly identical in distribution, associated and often used together so that their denotative meanings render contradictory or contrary notions.

Contradictory notions are mutually opposed and deny each other, for example: alive – not dead, illiterate – not literate. Contrary notions are also mutually opposed but they are gradable, for example: old and young are the most distant poles on the scale: young – middle-aged- elderly-old or hot-warm-cool-cold.

Classification of antonyms is based on the way they are built. Root words form absolute antonyms (having different roots), example: right-wrong, derivational antonyms are created by negative affixes added to the same root: happy-unhappy, helpful-helpless.

In derivational antonyms morphological motivation is clear, there is no necessity in contexts containing both members to prove the existence of derivational antonyms. The word unsuccessful presupposes the existence of the word successful. But the patterns, though typical are not universal. Morphologically similar formations may show different semantic relationships.

Disappoint is not the antonym to appoint, to unman (to deprive of human qualities) is not the antonym of man (to furnish with personnel).

Another type of antonyms is contextual antonyms, also the words, which are contrasted in actual speech and are not opposed outside certain contexts, for instance: “Some people have much to live on but little to live for”. On and for are antonyms in this context.

Almost every word can have one or more synonyms. Comparatively few have antonyms.

This type of opposition is characteristic of:

Qualitative adjectives: old – new, pretty-ugly;

Words derived from qualitative adjectives: gladly-sadly, gladness-sadness;

Words denoting feelings or states: triumph-disaster, hope-despair, love-hatred;

Words denoting direction: to and from, hither and thither;

Words denoting position in space and time: far-near, over-under, late-early, day-night.

Polysemantic words may have different antonyms when used in different meanings.

Short –long (a long story, a short story), short- tall (a short man, a tall man), short- civil (to be short with somebody, to be civil with somebody).

Polysemantic words may have antonyms in some of their meanings and no antonyms in the others, criticism (blame) – praise, criticism (literary critical essay) – (no antonym).

Discussion:

The ambiguity introduced by homonyms highlights the role of context in language

comprehension. Saeed (2016) notes that homonyms often pose challenges in interpretation, particularly in fields

like translation and natural language processing, where precise meaning is critical.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Homonyms, synonyms and antonyms show how language can be both clear and flexible. Homonyms are words that sound or look the same but have different meanings; they can belong to the same part of speech or to different ones, and their word-forms may match completely or only partly. Synonyms are different words that share a similar meaning, but they differ in style, intensity or the situations where they are used. Antonyms are opposite-meaning words; some are truly opposite (e.g., right vs. wrong), some are formed by adding a negative prefix (e.g., happy vs. unhappy), and others become opposite only in specific contexts (e.g., on vs. for). Understanding these patterns helps us build better dictionaries, improve language-technology tools, and see how people think about and use words.

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