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Introducing categorization of homophonous words in English language
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Abstract

The homophones existing in English language are investigated and classified in this study. It is analysed from different angles whether they are completely overlapped, partially similar or wrongly assumed to be homophones. In some categories the absence or presence of a vowel causes a semiphonous group is formed. Some of the classified groups are named based on whether they come from British dialect or American. There are various kinds of semiphonous pairs, which are caused by the non-native or near-native speakers' mistakes. Furthermore, a remarkable portion of homophonous pairs or groups is categorized based on their parts of speech whether they are consisted of a "noun- noun" combination or an "adjective-verb" frame.

Keywords; homophone, semiphonous pairs, phoneme

1. Introduction

Homophones are words that sound alike, whether they are spelled differently or not. The words pear “fruit,” pare “cut off,” and pair “two of a kind” are homophones that are different in spelling; bear “carry; support” and bear “animal” are homophones that are spelled alike. (Collins, 2009)

An important thing to recognize about homophones straightaway is that they are influenced by our pronunciation. Speakers of different dialects of the same language, speakers with different accents, and native speakers and non-native speakers all pronounce words a bit differently. As a result of these varied pronunciations, not everyone shares the same homophones. For example, for some people, the Hebrew word shofar meaning the ceremonial ram’s horn trumpet blown to introduce religious services and celebrations and in battle and the French word chauffeur meaning a person employed as a driver are homophones. For others, they are not.

Mispronunciation can also make words seem to be homophones that actually, when pronounced carefully, are distinguishable in how they sound. This fact does not help the person who unwittingly has learned to say these words the same and therefore finds them confusing. For example, dictionaries tell us the affect and effect are pronounced differently. Affect begins with a schwa sound /ə'fekt/ while effect begins with a short i sound /ɪ'fekt/. However, if someone was not taught to make this distinction, through no fault of his or her own, he or she may find this set of words confusing (Lyons, 1977).

2. Method

In order to collect the various kinds of homophones and their categories, it is not enough to analyze merely English text or investigate just native speakers’ dialogues and daily conversations. For this purpose, different internet sites, none native and near native speakers’ conversations are considered and carefully analyzed and all probable phonetic structures are compared with the similar ones delicately overlapped. Classification of the homophonous pairs or
groups is based on the type and the size of their overlapping. There may be either from complete-overlapping groups, partial-overlapping groups or non-overlapping groups.

3. Result

There should be a very delicate schedule in the pedagogical programme to teach various types of homophonous pairs to the native, near-native and even non-native English speakers because homophony and its categories may affect on different fields such as aesthetics, speaking and even writing. There are enormous pairs or groups of words, which are very similar to each other, and the English speaker may make a mistake in his speech or writing if he/she does not pay enough attention to their distinction.

4. Overlapped Homophonous words;

Pair words, which completely overlap each other

4.1. Noun-noun homophonous pairs;

Grease - Greece

Grease - noun -> lubricant, fat - E.g. He put some grease on the wheel.
Greece - proper noun -> the country. E.g. Greece is considered the birthplace of western philosophy.

Facts - fax

Facts - noun -> things objectively considered 'true'. E.g. The facts pointed to Mr Smith as the criminal.
Fax - noun -> a document transmitted via telephone. E.g. I sent a fax to the office in Chicago.

4.2. Verb-preposition-noun imperative group

Buy

- by - bye

Buy-verb -> to purchase- E.g. Do they often buy clothes in that shop?
By - preposition -> often used to express the agent in a passive sentence- E.g. The song was written by his brother.
Bye - noun -> farewell- E.g. Bye! I’ll see you tomorrow.

4.3. Adjective-noun homophonous pairs;

Fair - fare

Fair - adjective -> light skinned, of light complexion - E.g. She is fair with long blond hair.
Fare - noun -> cost of ticket (generally travel) - E.g. I paid fifteen dollars for the fare.

Foreword - forward

Foreword - noun -> introduction to a book - E.g. Timothy Leary wrote the foreword to Ken’s book.
Forward - adjective -> advancing - E.g. we moved forward in the line

4.4. Adjective – verb homophonous pairs

Find – fined

Find - verb -> to discover- E.g. I often find coins at the beach.
Fined - adjective -> charged a penalty - E.g. He was fined $50 for illegal parking.

Loan – lone

Loan - verb -> to allow someone to borrow - E.g. Can you loan me some money until tomorrow?
Lone - adjective -> the only one - E.g. She is the lone person who speaks French.

4.5. Preposition-number homophonous pairs;

For - four

For – preposition – E.g. I bought these for you.
Four - number -> 4- E.g. She wants to bring four friends with her to the party.

4.6. Noun-verb homophonous pairs;

Groan – grown

Groan - noun -> low sound expressing displeasure - E.g. Students often groan when I announce a test.
Grown - verb -> past participle of the verb 'to grow' - E.g. My daughter has grown quite a bit this year.

Heal – heel

Heal - verb -> to cure a disease - E.g. Doctors heal thousands of patients a year.
Heel - noun -> the back part of the foot or shoe - E.g. I hurt my heel playing tennis.
4.7. Adverb-verb homophonous pairs;
Hear - here
Hear - verb -> to listen - E.g. Did you hear what he said?
Here - adverb -> at this place – E.g. Is this your book here?
Know - no
Know - verb -> to have knowledge – e.g. they didn't know where she had studied.
No - adverb -> expresses refusal - e.g. No! I do not want to come!

4.8. Possessive adjective-noun homophonous pairs;
Hour - our
Hour - noun -> sixty minutes – e.g. It took one hour to finish the exercise.
Our - possessive adjective -> belonging to us – e.g. That's our house on the corner.

4.9. Noun-adverb homophonous pairs;
Knot - naught
Knot - noun -> fastening in a cord – e.g. He tied a knot to secure the rope.
Naught - noun -> nothing – e.g. His efforts came to naught.
Not - adverb -> in no way – e.g. It's not her fault.

4.10. Noun-expression homophonous pairs;
Hay - hey
Hay - noun -> dried grass often used as food for cattle, horses, etc.- e.g. We spent last week collecting hay from the fields.
Hey - expression -> shout – e.g. Hey! Watch out!

4.11. Noun-noun homophonous pairs;
Aisle - isle
Aisle - noun -> the walkway, as in a theater – e.g. I quickly walked down the aisle and took my seat.
Isle - noun -> island – e.g. He grew up on the isle of Elba.

Base - bass
Base - noun -> the bottom support of something – e.g. I think we need a new base for that lamp.
Bass - noun -> the lowest pitches in music, singer of the lowest pitches – e.g. I sang bass in the church choir.

4.12. Verb-verb homophonous pairs;
Billed – build
Billed - verb -> past tense of the verb 'to bill' – e.g. She billed the clients for $4,000.
Build - verb -> to construct – e.g. They build houses in Portland, Oregon.

Chews - choose
Chews - verb -> third person present singular of the verb 'to chew' – e.g. My daughter chews her food well.
Choose - verb -> to make a decision from amongst more than one – e.g. OK, I choose the red one.

4.13. Noun-noun-verb homophonous group;
Cent - scent - sent
Cent - noun -> 1/100 of a dollar – e.g. One cent isn't worth very much.
Scent - noun -> an aroma – e.g. The scent in the air is fabulous!
Sent - verb -> past tense of the verb 'to send' – e.g. I sent you some pictures last week.

4.14. Verb-number homophonous pairs;
Ate - eight
Ate - verb -> past tense of the verb 'to eat' – e.g. She ate a quick lunch and returned to work.
Eight - number -> the number 8 – e.g. I bought eight tickets to the concert.

4.15. Noun-verb-adjective homophonous group;
Dew - do - due
Dew - noun -> light water condensation usually found in the morning – e.g. The grass was covered with dew.
Do - verb -> to perform – e.g. They usually do their homework immediately after school.
Due - adjective -> payable - e.g. The full payment is due by the end of the month.

5. Semiphonous words;
It refers to the Words that sound alike, only one phoneme differentiates one word from the other, and sometimes they confuse us anyway. The most important characteristic of the above – mentioned group is that they do not phonetically overlap each other. (Collins, 2009)

5.1. Monovowel semiphonous words; Words which are similarly pronounced except one vowel that is their difference is only a (vowel) phoneme
Except: (/æ/ /ə/)
Accept is a verb meaning to receive.
E.g., I will accept all the packages except that one. Except is usually a preposition meaning excluding. Except is also a verb meaning to exclude.
E.g. Please except that item from the list.
Set, Sit: (/e/ /I/)
Set is a transitive verb meaning to put or to place. Its principal parts are set, set, set.
Sit is an intransitive verb meaning to be seated. Its principal parts are sit, sat, sat.
E.g. She set the dough in a warm corner of the kitchen. The cat sat in the warmest part of the room.

5.2. Monoconsonant semiphonous words; Words that have shared morphemes except for a consonant, e.g. seat / meat – feature / teacher – coat / boat

5.3. Monodiphthong semiphonous words; Words that don't sound alike but confuse us anyway:
Lie, Lay:
Lie is an intransitive verb meaning to recline or rest on a surface. Its principal parts are lie, lay, lain.
Lay is a transitive verb meaning to put or place. Its principal parts are lay, laid.
E.g. Chickens lay eggs. I lie down when I am tired.

6. Monophonous words; Similar words one of which has a phoneme more than the other and the remaining is pronounced the same
Capital, Capitol: (/-/ /: o /)
refers to a city; Capital also refers to wealth or resources. The residents of the state capital protested the development plans.
Capitol refers to to a building where lawmakers meet. E.g. The capitol has undergone extensive renovations.
Principle, Principal;
Principal is a noun meaning the head of a school or an organization or a sum of money.
Principle is a noun meaning a basic truth or law.
E.g. The principal taught us many important life principles.

7. Falsophoneous words
Words, which are unwantedly mispronounced, and some near native or nonenative speakers pronounce them incorrectly
Suppose to/ supposed to (Do not omit the d. Suppose to is incorrect.)
Used to/use to (Do not write use to.)
Chest of drawers/ Chester drawers (Not Chester drawers)

8. Dummy Homophonous words;
words which are not clean homophones but non-natives or some near natives may confuse them and pronounce them alike
e.g. bus/bath – boss/ both – while/will – breath/ breathe- vane/ wane

9. Homodilect words;
Words, which are pronounced differently by the speakers of British and American dialects,
e.g. Go: /gə/ BrE & go: /go:/ AmE
Ear:/æ(r)/ / BrE & Ear:/i:/ AmE
10. Homocombinophonous words;
Words, which are formed from the same letters & phonemes, but different sequence that is, the combination of their phonemes is similar
E.g. Kitchen / Chicken - Felt / Left - Accept / Aspect

11. Partial Homophonous words;
The words, which are not, pronounced entirely the same
11.1. Homorhymy words;
Words the end part of which are pronounced alike
E.g. Tear / Bear – Eaten / Written – Bore / Sour
11.2. Messophonous words;
Words that are partially agitated but their combined phonemes are not changed
E.g. Skimoo / Eksimoo - Evidence / Edivence

12. Compound Homophonous words;
The words, which are combined from two or more parts or their abbreviation, are homophonous with the other word
E.g. They’re/ Their - Your, You’re:
E.g. You're going to catch a cold if you don't wear your coat.

13. Di-phonous words;
Words which are the same but sometimes pronounced differently by some speakers
E.g.Usage:/ju:zIdj/ & usage:/ju:sIdj /
E.g.Columnist:/‘kDləmnẹst/ & columnist: /’ kDləmẹst /

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References