

A CLASSIFICATION OF WORDS

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One of the pleasures of the logologist is investigating the relations between pairs of words. Words can be characterized in four ways: spelling (or appearance), sound (or pronunciation), meaning (or definition), and origin (or derivation). Two words can be either identical or different with respect to each of these properties; thus, there are 16 different ways in which word-pairs can be classified, ranging from identical in all four respects to different in all four respects. The 14 intermediate cases, those in which a pair of words are identical in some respects but differ in others, are the ones of most interest to the logologist.

This work was inspired by Dave Silverman, who, in the May 1974 *Kickshaws*, introduced a slightly simpler 8-way classification, ignoring origin but distinguishing spelling, sound and meaning. He suggested homograph, homophone and synonym to describe word-pairs identical in exactly one of these characteristics, and gave examples (but not definite names) of word-pairs identical in two characteristics.

For brevity, I introduce the following notation. Let Sp stand for spelling, So for sound, Me, for meaning and Or for origin; also, let parentheses enclosing any of these abbreviations denote that the two words are unlike in that respect. For example, word-pairs identical in spelling and sound but different in meaning and origin are denoted by the symbolism SpSo(Me)(Or).

Over the years a considerable number of words have been introduced to distinguish words according to these properties. Unfortunately, the definitions do not always specify the presence or absence of each property; for example, two words are synonyms if they have the same meaning, regardless of whether or not they have the same or different sounds, spellings or origins. Worse, dictionaries often give different definitions for the same word. I summarize below the definitions given several common and not-so-common words by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), The Merriam-Webster Unabridged (W3, W2), and the Funk & Wagnalls Unabridged (FW), as well as by a dictionary devoted to linguistics, Mario Pei and Frank Gaynor's Dictionary of Linguistics (Crown Publishers, 1954) (PG).

conjugate	OrMe OED-W3-FW
doublet	Or OED-W3; (O)? FW; Or(Me) PG
heteronym	Sp(So)(Me) OED-W2-FW-PG
homograph	Sp(Or)(Me) OED-FW; Sp(Or), Sp(Me), Sp(So) W3;

	Sp(Or) (So) (Me) PG
homomorph	= homophone W2-PG
homonym	So(Me) OED; SpSo(Me), = homophone, = homograph W3; So(Me), Sp(So) (Or), So(Sp) (Or) FW; SpSo(Me) (Or) PG
homophone	So(Me) (Or), So(Or) OED; So(Me), So(Or), So(Sp) W3; = homonym FW; So(Sp) (Or) (Me) PG
paronym	Or OED-FW; So(Sp) (Me), = conjugate FW; Or(Me) PG
polyonym	= synonym W2-OED
synonym	Me OED-W3-FW-PG

It is clear from this that homonym is a hopelessly confused term which ought to be avoided in any systematic classification. Although heteronym is somewhat clearer, it is so frequently regarded as the opposite of homonym that it, too, should be eschewed.

Here is my proposed nomenclature for classifying pairs of words:

So(Sp) (Me) (Or) example, FLOCKS and PHLOX. Following Pei and Gaynor, this should be called a homophone. Various generalizations have appeared in Word Ways, such as queer reed/queried (February 1973) and new dandy canary's skin/nude Andy can air his skin (August 1969). On the other hand, the August 1969 issue suggests that homophones can refer to different groups of letters in words having the same sound (as uff-uph).

Sp(So) (Me) (Or) example, TARRY (to wait) and TARRY (covered with tar). Again following Pei and Gaynor, this should be called a homograph; heteronym is a less-acceptable synonym. In his book Playing With Words, Joseph Shipley calls these doubletones.

Me(So) (Sp) (Or) example, PORKER and PIG. All references agree that the word synonym describes a word-pair identical in meaning, regardless of any other characteristic. Since this is too general, I propose the following modification: definitive synonym.

Or(So) (Sp) (Me) example, GUARD and WARD. No dictionary defines this precise combination of characteristics; I suggest borrowing the word doublet.

SoSp(Me) (Or) example, SQUASH (a vegetable, from the Indian asquash) and SQUASH (a game, from the French esquachier). Described by Dave Silverman as words with two origins in the May 1969 Kick-shaws, these can be christened double origin words. Drury's article in the August 1969 Word Ways calls these words homographs, a word already used above.

SoMe(Sp) (Or) example, COLE (Anglo-Saxon for cabbage) and KOHL (German for cabbage). I can find no term for this classification, and propose synonymic homophone.

SoOr(Sp) (Me) example, CANON and CANNON, both from the Greek kanna, meaning "reed"; canon gets its meaning from reed in the sense of a rod, while cannon gets its meaning from reed in the sense of a hollow tube. Although this classification has been termed a quasi-homograph in the August 1969 Word Ways, I believe that homophonic doublet is a clearer description.

SpMe(So)(Or) example, QUAY (pronounced "kee", from the French) and QUAY (pronounced "cay", from the Spanish). I can find no term for this classification, and propose synonymic homographs.

SpOr(So)(Me) example, PRESENT (verb) and PRESENT (noun). I find no term for this classification, and propose homographic doublets.

MeOr(So)(Sp) example, KENTUM (Latin) and SATEM (Sanskrit), both meaning "one hundred". I find no term for this classification, and propose synonymic doublets.

SoSpMe(Or) example, YANKEE (claimed by Thomas Anbury in his 1789 work, *Travels*, to come from the Cherokee eankke, or "coward") and YANKEE (claimed by H. L. Mencken in his 1937 book, *The American Language*, to come from the Dutch Janke, the diminutive of "Jan"). These are words that have conflicting derivations; the classic example is the word OK, discussed by Ralph Beaman in the May 1975 *Word Ways*. I propose the name derivation variants.

SoSpOr(Me) example, CONDUCT (to lead) and CONDUCT (behavior). Although this classification has been termed a pseudo-homograph in the August 1969 *Word Ways*, I believe that meaning variant is a clearer description.

SoMeOr(Sp) example, CHECK and CHEQUE. These are merely spelling variants.

SpMeOr(So) example, CARIBBEAN (accented on the third syllable) and CARIBBEAN (accented on the second syllable). These are merely pronunciation variants.

Thus endeth my essay. I am indebted to Dmitri Borgmann for various suggestions and additions.