TAUTONYMIC SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

SUSAN THORPE
Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire, England
thorps@hotmail.com

Most tautonymic words, as well as consisting of a repeated letter/group of letters, are also phonetically tautonymic, the 2 identical letter groups having identical pronunciations. eg pawpaw (pɔːː pɔːː).

On the other hand, there exist tautonymic words with a difference in pronunciation between the 2 identical letter groups. The degree of audible difference varies. It may be obvious as in ISIS, a river in Oxford, and in the TSETSE fly; or the difference may be more subtle.

The phonetic symbols are taken from the phonetics list in the Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd. Ed.

Phonetic symbols: ɔː (as in born) ə (as in pat) ɛə (as in pat) ɑː (as in barn) ɪ (as in pit)
ɛ (as in pet) ɛI (as in ate) ɔː (as in burn) ŋ (as in sing) au (as in now)

4-LETTER TAUTONYMS
adad (ad əd) and its reversal dada (dæ də or də daː)
anan (ən ən) and its reversal nana (næ nə)
eye (ai i) and its reversal gaga (gæ ɡə) lsis (aɪs ɪs)
mama (me ˈmaː) papa (pə ˈpaː;...father) (paː ˈpeː...Pope)
tata (ˈtæ təː) tete (tə t ˈt ˈteɪ t) wawa (weɪ ˈweɪ)
(ano woman’s head of hair)

6-LETTER TAUTONYMS
berber (bɔː ˈbər) furfur (fɔː fəˈr...scurf) murmur (mɔː ˈmer)
gangan (ɡæn ɡæn) an Australian cockatoo palpal (pæl ˈpæl)
tartar (taː ˈteɪr) testes (tɛs tiːz) tsetse (tɛs tɜː)

8-LETTER TAUTONYMS
colocolo (ˈkɑːləʊ kəˈləʊ) wild cat of South America

hotshots (ˈhɑːtʃ)ʃ hotshot here, ʃ (ʃ) straddles the 2 tautonymic halves of the word.

So far, we have looked at words which are tautonyms but not phonetic tautonyms. By way of contrast, there exist a few words which are not tautonyms but which are phonetic tautonyms. The pick of the bunch is probably the word COCOA.

co coa (ˈkəʊkə)
In these seven words, the letters I and Y are, in each case, both represented by the phonetic symbol ɪ.

In six of the seven, the first letter and its doubled letter both equate to the same phonetic symbol.

di ddy (di ˈdiː) li ly (li ˈliː) ni nny (ni ˈniː) ni nny (ni ˈniː)
pi ppy (pi ˈpiː) si ssy (si ˈsiː) ti tty (ti ˈtiː)

In ki cky (ki ˈkiː), the second k is not duplicated. Rather, it is preceded by a different letter, ɔ.