Homophones
How are they Viewed by the Preparatory Studies Center Lecturers at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Sultanate of Oman-Ibri

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Abstract

Students normally find it difficult to distinguish between words and certain constructions that appear or sound similar but with different meanings. Moreover, they face specific challenges in using these words properly, which leads to major errors in comprehension and language use. This article promotes students' ability and capability of identifying the different meanings and uses of homophones, and their level of accuracy, and the difficulties they encounter in understanding words in context. To get a deep and comprehensive understanding of homophones, the researchers distributed a questionnaire to (20) male and female lecturers at the Preparatory Studies Center -University of Technology and Applied Sciences -Ibri- the Sultanate of Oman. The findings indicate that while students have a basic understanding of these homophones, they still struggle to interpret the exact meaning based on context, particularly with words that share similar pronunciation or identical spelling, but have different meanings. Common errors were most frequently related to homophones, suggesting that students' listening and writing skills influence their ability in distinguishing between these words accurately. This study recommends improving teaching methods that emphasize contextual understanding, improving listening and writing skills, and fostering a more supportive learning environment to help students better get word meanings. Discussion, explanation, and recommendations will be highlighted in detail throughout this article.

Key Words: craft, culture, language, machine translation, strategies, theorists, various

Introduction

Normally, context very much affects the meaning of utterances, especially when they share things in common—spelling and sound. When a listener- normally a student- hears an ambiguous word with more than one meaning, all those meanings get activated in his/her mind to get the proper definition. Though much research has been done on homophones, still it is not fully revealed, and still remains a matter of controversy. As lecturers and researchers at the

University of Technology and Applied Sciences, we have highlighted this matter in our classes so many times to explain to students that all meanings are possible, but the most correct one is the one that is strongly related to the context. This paper highlights the uses of certain words that- to some extent- are misleading and/or have more than one meaning—Homophones. Moreover, concentration will be on some examples and exercises that both clarify what the proper or exact usage is.

Statement of the Problem

This paper highlights a misleading linguistic item that normally has the same spelling and sound system, but with diverse meanings--Homophones. The role of the teacher becomes essential in clarifying vague outcomes of the different meanings to reach the most correct one.

Objectives of the Study

This study pursues the following:

1. Identifying and clarifying the most suitable meaning of homophones according to the context.

2. Providing learners with possible, but to the point, exercises that focus on this linguistic genre—homophones.

Literature Review

> Homophones are words that sound similar but that have different spellings and meanings. The English language is full of homophones, and while some word processing programs can catch misuse, technology is not foolproof. Writers are ultimately responsible for their choices, so awareness and practice can go a long way in alleviating errors (Wick,2022, Para. 1).

Choosing the right homophone is mainly the responsibility of the writer, or speaker. He/she is the only one who exactly knows what that means. It is true that the context assists the learner to get what a specific homophone means, still, the writer is the main source of the nature of the message conveyed. No matter how much the reader knows about homophones, in a way or another, some confusion might appear and spoil the exact meaning of the sentence.

> Homophones are words that share the same pronunciation but differ in meaning and often spelling. For example, consider the words "pair" and "pear." While they sound identical, "pair" refers to two items of the same kind, such as a pair of shoes, whereas "pear" is a type of fruit. This phonetic similarity can lead to confusion in both spoken and written language, making it essential to grasp their meanings to communicate effectively. (Wehrle, 2025, Para. 2).

Clarity and correctness of the homophone do lead to full and exact meaning of the message conveyed to the audience. Therefore, mastering homophones effectively and accurately saves time and effort and gives the final and effective meaning of the message.

> Understanding homophones is vital for clear communication. Misusing homophones can lead to misunderstandings that may alter the intended message. For instance, saying "I need to buy a new pair of shoes" instead of "I need to buy a new pear of shoes" can confuse listeners. By mastering homophones, speakers can convey their thoughts more accurately and effectively. (Wehrle, 2025, Para. 6).

In writing, mastering and understanding homophones are so important to get the exact meaning without ambiguity. "Whether you're a language learner or a seasoned writer, understanding homophones is crucial to avoiding errors in your writing. Dive in to learn how to navigate these linguistic quirks with confidence". (Kramer, 2025, Para. 5).

The following short paragraph shows the negative side of using wrong homophones; the message cannot be delivered correctly, unless the reader has the ability to dive deeply to see what the exact meaning of the Homophones at hand is. (_The wrong homophones have been put on purpose_).

> Homophones are confusing words that can be tough to **_sea_**. When it comes **_too_** writing, individual choices **_our_** important. But how can **_won_** spot errors? **_Their_** is **_know_** shortcut **_two_** it. Awareness, knowledge, and editing are the best ways to **_bee_** proactive in the process to help assure each word is **_write_**. (Wick,2022, Para. 3).

Not only are homophones misleading in writing, but in grammar, as well. The issue here is problematic. No full comprehension of a sentence without correct grammar. If a certain utterance is vague, the whole structure becomes an issue that affects the whole meaning.

> In grammar, homonyms are words that have the same spelling and pronunciation but differ in meaning. Examples include: Bat (an animal) vs. bat (used in sports) Bank (financial institution) vs. bank (side of a river) Spring (a season) vs. spring (to jump). (Kramer, 2025, Para. 11).

Students always need assistance from their teachers, whether teachers of English, or other subjects, especially when writing a piece of literature—term papers, projects, reports, etc. To excel at tests needs full comprehension of using the correct homophones. Therefore, having a perfect mastering of homophones is no luxury, but necessity.

> Understanding the difference between homophones (like "write" and "right") meets Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. Additionally, they are necessary to grow students' writing skills, and improve important

markers of ELA progress, such as state test scores and written responses. (Docimo, K, (n.d), Para.2).

One of the possible ways to teach students to understand the use of homophones could be done by class activities, especially in speaking. The teacher may assign a student, or more, to draw the events of a certain story on the board or via Power Point technology. The story should be told step by step as it appears on the board or screen. This highlights the proper use of homophones used in narration—then/than. The teacher may interfere, if need be, to assist story teller(s). This way provides the whole class with both fun, and creativity.

> Storyboarding is a perfect way for students to demonstrate their knowledge of the differences between "then/than" and "there/they're/their", while exercising their creative talents. The clear, concise structure of storyboards allows teachers to immediately determine whether students have mastered the objectives. To increase practice and further ingrain learning, teachers can assign students to create multiple storyboards, and use more examples, allowing students to fully internalize the objectives, while still giving them the opportunity to have fun and be creative. (Docimo, K, (nd), Para.7).

Misusing homophones leads to confusion and misleading, and might create problems. Take for example the two words: *compliment* and *complement*. The substitution of one for the other changes the whole message and creates dissatisfaction. "Homophones are crucial for precision in language. Misusing a homophone can lead to misunderstandings and confusion. For instance, mixing up "compliment" (a praise) with "complement" (something that completes) can entirely change the meaning of a sentence". (Admin, (nd), Para.4). Moreover, teaching homophones helps children master a good number of correct words with correct spelling and pronunciation. "Understanding homophones can help children in building vocabulary. So, it is important that your little one learns the spellings and meanings of the homophones in order to use them correctly". (Saini,2023, Para. 4).

The following is an exercise that resembles an authentic example of making the use of homophones as easy as possible. It could be given to students at any age, different subjects, etc.

> Sometimes homophones are easy to spot and other times they can be tricky. Take this short quiz and see how you do:
>
> I need to _____ the letter before sending it. (**Write**/Right)
>
> Jack was _____ hours late to school. (To/Too/**Two**)
>
> The store just celebrated _____ ten-year anniversary. (**Their**/They're/There)
>
> They tried to _____ the painting. (Steel/**Steal**)

I couldn't _____ what he said. (**Hear**/Here)

Practicing homophones in context through sentences can really help you learn their pronunciations, spellings, and meanings so that you can be ready on test day. (College Raptor Staff, 2025, Para. 11).

Native speakers normally get their language naturally, while it is the opposite with (ESL/EFL) speakers who need more effort and hard work. "Native English speakers often grasp the concept of homophones with minimal effort, but students learning English as a second language may need extra practice". (Hinders, 2022, Para. 8).

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design using a questionnaire to gather data on Homophones. The participants are teachers of English with a long experience. The use of questionnaire is appropriate for collecting standardized, comparable data across a sample of participants, allowing for statistical analysis of their responses.

Participants

The participants -20 male and female lecturers- teach at the Preparatory Studies Center / University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibri -The Sultanate of Oman. They are highly qualified with strong background, and come from different countries.

Sampling Strategy

Due to logistical matters and summer vacation, the sample size was limited to only (20) participants. A convenience sampling method was employed, as the lecturers were readily available to the researchers at the time of the study.

Research Instrument

Data was collected using a questionnaire created by the researchers with (15) questions. The survey asks (**Yes/No**), (**Agree/Disagree**), and (**Multiple- Choice**) questions to get respondents' opinions on the subject of "Homophones", which included empathy, fairness, and communication skills. A pilot study with four lecturers was used to validate the device in order to ensure clarity and reliability, and any necessary changes to the wording were made in response to their input.

Data Collection Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed to participants at their free time before they started their summer holiday. They were briefed about the purpose of the study, informed of their right to apologize

anytime, and assured of their anonymity. Participants provided written consent, and questionnaires were completed within (10) minutes during a scheduled session.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed ethical research guidelines. All participants gave their informed consent, and they were promised that their answers would be kept private.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Table1

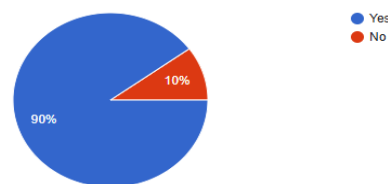| I. Are you confident in identifying the correct homophones based on context?	Yes	No
	18	2
	90%	10%

Table 1 illustrates that 90% of participants agreed that they are confident in identifying the correct homophones based on context. This ability is frequently attributed to the context-dependent nature of language processing, which uses surrounding words and sentence structure to help disambiguate the intended meaning of a homophone.

Table 2

5. Wrong use of a homophone can result in misunderstanding the text with very much confusion.	Yes	No
	20	0
	100%	0%

The findings indicate that the participants (100%) believe that the wrong use of a homophone can result in misunderstanding the text with very much confusion.

Table 3

6. Mastering homophones is not due to memorization, but through understanding all tiny and minute parts with a sense of appreciation of its richness.	Agree	Disagree
	18	2
	90%	10%

Table 3 shows that the largest group of participants (90%) agreed that mastering homophones is not due to memorization, but through understanding all tiny and minute parts with a sense of appreciation of its richness.

Table 4

8. Understanding homophones can help children in building vocabulary. So, it is important that your child learn the spelling and meaning of homophones in order to use them correctly	Agree	Disagree
	18	2
	90%	10%

Table 4 shows that the largest group of participants (90%) agree that understanding homophones can help children in building vocabulary. So, it is important that your child learn the spelling and meaning of homophones in order to use them correctly.

Conclusion

For scholars, teachers, and students alike, mastering phonetic input i.e., Homophones is essential and considered a crucial and core part in any language, especially English- our focus here. It not only enhances and increases learners' understanding, but the ability to exchange ideas and communication in a clear and effective way. It is worth mentioning that mastering homophones is not a matter of memorization, but fully absorbing and understanding all nuances for the language with a sense of appreciating richness. With hard work, patience, persistence, and curiosity, learners can navigate homophones and enjoy the diversity and depth it brings to language.

Recommendations

- With hard work, patience and persistence, and curiosity, learners can understand homophones and enjoy the diversity and depth they bring to language, any language.

- Mastering homophones is not due to memorization, but through understanding all tiny and minute items with a sense of appreciating richness.

-Be assured that Native English speakers often grasp the concept of homophones with less effort. On the other side, students learning English as a second language may need extra practice and explanation.

- Wrong use of a homophone can result in misunderstanding the text causing much confusion.

- No matter who you are: a fresh language learner, or a seasoned writer, understanding homophones is crucial for a better piece of writing.

Acknowledgement

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Questionnaire

This questionnaire consists of three parts: (**Yes/ No**), (**Agree/ Disagree**), and (**Multiple-Choice**) questions, and is mainly geared to teachers at the Preparatory Studies Centre-University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Oman. The questionnaire is about "Homophones".

Part One: Yes / No Questions.

I. Are you confident in identifying the correct homophones based on context?

     (Yes)   (No)

 2.Some Homophones are more challenging to differentiate.

     (Yes)   (No)

3. Are you using any tools or techniques of your own to deal with homophone mistakes in your writing?

     (Yes)   (No)

4. Homophones are easier for Native English speakers compared to non-native ones.

     (Yes)   (No)

5. Wrong use of a homophone can result in misunderstanding the text with very much confusion.

     (Yes)   (No)

Part Two: Agree/ Disagree Questions.

6. Mastering homophones is not due to memorization, but through understanding all tiny and minute parts with a sense of appreciation of its richness.

(Agree)   (Disagree)

7. No matter who you are: a fresh language learner, or a seasoned writer, understanding homophones is crucial for a better piece of writing.

(Agree)   (Disagree)

8. Understanding homophones can help children in building vocabulary. So, it is important that your child learn the spelling and meaning of homophones in order to use them correctly

(Agree)   (Disagree)

9. Understanding Homophones is crucial to avoiding errors in verbal communication.

(Agree)   (Disagree)

10. In grammar, homophones are words that have the same structure, spelling and pronunciation, but differ in meaning.

(Agree)   (Disagree)

Part Three: Multiple –Choice Questions

11. Get up my ……..

A. sun

B. son

12. The …… has a short tail.

A. hair

B. hare

13. Please……. for me.

A. pray

B. prey

14. The…….is used for rowing the boat.

A. Ore

B. Oar

15. There is a big………in the bucket.

A. whole

B. hole