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# **Homonymy in English and Arabic: A Contrastive Study**

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## Introduction

In fact, although homonymy is defined differently in English, yet in general, a word is similar in form with another word either in pronunciation (i.e. homophone) or in spelling (homograph), or both, but differs from it in meaning. On the other hand, in Arabic, there is a general agreement that the homonym is an expression with one enunciation (or form) and more than one meaning. Actually, this phenomenon creates lexical and syntactic ambiguity in both languages. Thus, it should be studied and examined. In addition, homonymy has its own features, specifications and forms in each language. Hence, this research aims at:

- 1- investigating homonymy in English and Arabic.
- 2- making a comparison between the two languages to show the similarities and differences between them.

## Homonymy in English

### Definitions of Homonymy

Originally, the word "homonym" comes from the conjunction of the Greek prefix *homo-*, meaning "same", and suffix *-ōnymos*, meaning "name". Thus, it refers to two or more distinct concepts sharing the "same name" or signifier (Wikipedia 2010: 1).

Lyons (1982: 72; Oxford Wordpower 2000:366; Richards and Schmidt 2002:241; and Yule 2006:107) define 'homonyms' as a term used in semantics for lexical items that are identical in spelling and pronunciation but have different meanings. Examples of homonyms are *lie* as in *you have to lie down* and *lie in Don't lie, tell the truth*. The above definition does not involve anything about homophones and homographs; in addition, it creates a problem with polysemy.

Hartmann and Stork (1976:105; Atchison 1993:52; and Fromkin et al. 2003: 71) agree that homonyms are different words with the same pronunciation that may or may not be identical in spelling. Thus, they give them a definition that is

partially similar to that of homophones. On the other hand, Watkins et al. (2001:269) define it just like defining homophones, i.e., “words that sound exactly like other words but have different spellings” in spite of the fact of not naming them ‘homophones’ in addition to ‘homonyms’ as Fromkin et al. (2003:71) do.

Gramley and Pätzold (1992:13) and Wikipedia (2010: 2), on the other hand, define homonymy as “the existence of different lexemes that sound the same (homophones, e.g. *days/daze*) or are spelt the same (homographs, e.g. *lead* (guide)/*lead* (metal)) but have different meanings.” In this way, they divide them into homophones and homographs. This is the definition that is adopted in this research.

On a larger scope, homonymy is defined as a word that is identical in form with another word, either in sound (as a homophone) or in spelling (as a homograph), or both, but differs from it in meaning. For example, *sale* (an act or of selling something) and *sail* (to travel on water); *bark* (the skin of a tree) and *bark* (the sound of a dog); or *pitch* (throw)/*pitch* (tar).

### **Types of Homonyms**

#### 1- Complete (full, absolute)

Those are homonyms that have the same pronunciation and the same spelling i.e. the identity covers spoken and written forms. Classic examples are *bank* (embankment) and *bank* (place where money is kept) (Lyons 1982:72 and Allan 1986:150).

#### 2- Partial homonyms

They are those where the identity covers a single medium, as in homophony and homography. Thus, homophones and homographs are considered partial homonyms (Crystal 2003:220). Watkins et al. (2001:269) differentiate between homonyms and what they call ‘near homonyms’. According to them homonyms are words that are “exactly” alike in pronunciation but differ in spelling and meaning, e.g. *morning* and *mourning*; *there* and *their*, while near homonyms do not sound exactly alike, e.g. *except* and *accept*; *loose* and *lose*.

### 3- Word homonyms

These are homonyms where all the forms of a paradigm and its collocational possibilities are identical. Thus, one does not get any indication of their belonging to one word or the other. Such homonyms are generally found in words belonging to the same part of speech. Examples are *seal* and *seals* (plural of *seal* which is an animal) and *seal* and *seals* (plural of *seal* which is an impression placed on things to legalize them). In addition, the possessive forms of these words, i.e, *seal's* are identical (Singh 1982: 24).

### 4- Homonyms of word forms

These are homonyms in which only few word forms are identical. Generally, the canonical forms in addition to some forms are alike and some others are not identical. For example *lie* that means not to tell the truth becomes *lied* in the past and past participle while *lie*, that means to rest one's body, becomes *lay* in the past (ibid.).

### 5- Lexical Homonyms

When the homonyms belong to the same part of speech, they are called lexical homonyms. The difference is only in their lexical meaning. They can be found under one entry in the dictionary (Singh 1982: 25). For example, *trunk* (part of an elephant) and *trunk* (a storage chest).

### 6- Grammatical Homonyms

When the difference between homonyms is not only confined to the lexical meaning but the grammatical types are also different, they are called grammatical homonyms. They are given separate entries in the dictionary. In these cases, the words have similar canonical form but different paradigms and structural patterns. Verbs occurring as transitive and intransitive or lexical units that occur as nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. (e.g. *cut* (v.), *cut* (n.), *cut* (adj.)) are examples of such homonyms (ibid.).

## Homonymy and Polysemy

In semantic analysis, the theoretical distinction between homonymy and polysemy creates a problem that has captivated the attention of many linguists. Polysemy (*polly-seamus* in Latin) is defined roughly as the existence of one lexeme with many related meanings. The fact that polysemy is a property of single words is what differentiates it from homonymy in principle (Lyons 1982:146). For instance, the words *neck*, *guard*, *music*, and *bachelor* are polysemous since each one of them appears in standard dictionaries of English as a single lexeme with several distinguishable meanings, whereas homonyms generally have separate dictionary entries often marked with superscripts 1, 2, and so forth (Fromkin et al. 2003: 180).

The problem of how to draw the line between homonymy and polysemy can be solved by the recognition that the different senses of the word are related historically, i.e, they can be traced back to the same source, e.g. *pupil* (student) and *pupil* (of the eye) —although Yule (2006:107) mentions that homonyms are not historically related but have accidentally become similar— or if one meaning can be derived from the other, i.e., there is a metaphorical connection between them and they are different uses of the same word, e.g. *face* (noun- front part of head) and *face* (noun- front part of clock). Leech (1976: 230) specifies the difference in the definitions of homonymy and polysemy in the following way:

We can explain polysemy happily enough as the existence of more than one semantic specification for the same lexical item; and we can also define homonymy as the existence of more than one morphological specification sharing the same phonological or graphic form.

## Homonymy and Pun

Pun is a witticism which relies for its effect on playing with the different meanings of a word, or bringing two words together with the similar form but different meanings; it is also called paronomasia (Crystal 2003:467).

Razzak et al. (1981: 123) define pun as the use of the same word (or two words similar in sound) in different senses for humorous purposes. For instance, *you say you are studying trees. What branch of the subject are you specializing in?*

From the definitions above, homonymy is known as puns in literature because it creates much humour especially in literature. Writers like Shakespeare use them frequently in their writings. Famous examples that are used by Shakespeare are *tail/tale, hole/whole, hoar/whore* (Pyles 1971: 4).

### **Homonymy and Allonymy**

Words or phrases that differ in spelling and pronunciation as well as meaning and origin are called 'allonyms' (Riggs 1999:8). An example of allonyms is *alligator* and *true*. Thus, according to the definition they are uniquely different words. This term, allonymy, is considered a fourth one in neologism, the three others being homonymy, homophony, and homography.

Actually, most words in English are allonyms but this does not mean that the term 'allonyms' is unnecessary since one can describe languages using it. In some languages like Chinese, allonyms are rare whereas homophones are found a lot (Ibid.: 9).

### **Homographs**

Palmer (1984:101, Allan 1986:151; Gramley and Pätzold 1991:13; Richards and Schmidt 2002:241) believe that homographs are words that are written in the same way but are pronounced differently and have different meanings. Well-known examples of homographs are *lead* /led/ (metal) and *lead* /li:d/ (guide). Sometimes, the term 'homograph' is used interchangeably with the term 'homonym' as indicated by Richards and Schmidt (2002:241). However, homographs and homophones are considered part of homonymy.

Another definition is that homography is a term used in semantic analysis to indicate lexemes that are written alike but may or may not be pronounced similarly and have different meanings (Pyles 1971:4 and Wikipedia 2010: 2).

Lyons (1982:71) and Crystal (2003:220) illustrate that homographs are words that share the same spelling but differ in meaning. For instance, *wind* (blowing) and *wind* (verb- a clock). This definition ignores the element of pronunciation. Thus, problems of ambiguity may occur between homographs and polysems.

In writing, homography is defined as one kind of writing system or spelling in which there is one-to-one correspondence between graphic signs and speech sounds. Examples of such homographic systems are the phonetic transcription, or the alphabets of some languages that have a phonetic alphabet. As such, the opposite to the term 'homography' is 'heterography'. The spelling system of languages like English or French are examples of heterographic writing systems (Hartmann and Stork 1976:105 and Crystal 2003:220).

### **Homographs and Heteronyms**

The term 'heteronym' is used for words that are identical in spelling but different in pronunciation and meaning. Examples of heteronyms are *dove* /dʌv/ (a bird) and *dove* /dəʊv/ (the past tense of *dive*) *wind* /wɪnd/ (noun- air that moves quickly) and *wind* /waɪnd/ (verb- to twist something); *bow* /baʊ/ (to bend) *bow* /bəʊ/ (a weapon used for shooting arrows), and hundreds of others (Fromkin et al. 2003: 180).

Hence, heteronymy equals homography according to the first definition of homography; or heteronymy is part of homography following the second definition in which all heteronyms are homographs but not the reverse.

### **Homophones**

Many linguists agree that homophones are two or more words that sound alike but are written differently and have different meanings. Examples of homophones are *threw/through*, *sight/site*, and *rite/right/write/wright* (Palmer 1984:101; Lass 1998:29; Richards and Schmidt 2002:241; and Crystal 2003:221). Thus, homophones are deemed to be part of homonymy, the other part being homographs.

## Homonymy and Ambiguity

Homonymic clash (sometimes called homophonic clash or homonymic conflict) is a term used to refer to the ambiguity arising from homonyms because of the similarity in spelling and/or enunciation. A very famous example is the sentence *I'll meet you by the bank*, which may mean 'I'll meet you by the financial institution' or 'I'll meet you by the riverside'. Therefore, the word *bank* that means embankment and the word *bank* that means riverside are the cause behind this ambiguity (Fromkin et al. 2003:180). Another example that is a famous riddle is the following (Hartmann and Stork 1976:105):

1- Q. What is black and white and /red/ all over?

A. A newspaper.

The words *red* (a colour) and *read* (past participle of *read*) are the ones that create the ambiguity in the sentence because of their identical articulation.

Allan (1986: 151) states that homonymy is not a relationship limited to words. The constituent lexeme and morpheme in *wants* are ambiguous between the noun lexeme "want + plural" morpheme on the one hand, and the verb lexeme "want + 3rd person singular subject agreement" morpheme on the other. Consider the textual disambiguation in the following sentences:

2- His wants are few.

3- He wants for nothing.

Note that despite the similarity in meaning between the noun *want* and the verb *want*, they are of dissimilar lexical classes and therefore count as different lexemes —i.e., as meaningfully distinct expressions. Moving up to a higher level expression, the following sentence is ambiguous:

4- Jimmy says he hates boring students.

Once again, context will normally clarify whether it is Jimmy or the students who is/are boring. Note the importance in this example of syntactic relations in

resolving the ambiguity when comparing *He hates boring students* versus *He hates students who are boring*. The homonymy is between the noun phrase *boring students* that consist of participial attributive plus its head noun, and the embedded participial clause *boring students* that is a nonfinite verb and its object. It is the context of the particular utterance that will determine for the hearer which of these is intended (Allan 1986: 151).

Accordingly, it is believed that ambiguity can be solved in speech because normally in context one's intention when using homonymous words is quite unambiguous since additional context can help to disambiguate the sentence (Lass 1998:29 and Riggs 1999:6). Hence, the sentence *I'll meet you by the bank*, can be clarified in the following way:

5- I'll meet you by the bank, in front of the automated teller machine.

6- I'll meet you by the bank. We can go skinny-dipping. (Fromkin et al. 2003:180)

Other ambiguous sentences can be avoided prosodically by using stress. For instance, the noun phrase *the Bolivian silver tray*, can be handled in the following way (Allan 1986:152):

7- a- the Bolivian SILVER tray (the tray for Bolivian silver)

b- the Bolivian silver TRAY (the tray made of Bolivian silver)

c- the BOLIVIAN silver TRAY (the silver tray from Bolivia)

Palmer (1984: 101-2) indicates that some homonyms create ambiguity because they have antonymous meanings. For instance, *cleave* (unite) vs. *cleave* (sever) and *raise* (construct) and *raze* (destroy).

In addition to the problem of ambiguity many spelling problems may occur. Thus, glossary of usage is found in some books to identify and distinguish between many common homonyms (Watkins et al. 2001:296).

## Reasons of Creating Homonymy

Homonyms may occur because of a change in pronunciation and/or spelling. There are different reasons that cause these dissimilarities. Consider the following points:

1- Change in enunciation due to the great English vowel shift, for example the homophones *sea* and *see* where once pronounced as /sæ/ and /se/ respectively (Allan 1986:152).

2- Sometimes, an extension in the meaning of a word can lead to establishing homonymy. The words *flower* and *flour* that are pronounced as /flaʊə(r)/ where originally related in meaning. The word *flour* originally meant 'flower of the meal' i.e. the finest part of the meal and the word *flower* originally meant 'the finest part of the plant' (Palmer 1984:102-3).

3- Euphemisms may cause homonymous words. For instance, the word *bull* may mean 'male, bovine animal' or 'rubbish'—the second sense is a euphemism of *bullshit*.

4- There are differences or similarities in pronunciation that occur because of differences in dialects or varieties of a language that lead to homonyms. For example, in the north of England, the words *look* and *luck* are pronounced as /lʊk/; *Paul*, *paw*, *pore*, *poor* are pronounced as /pɔ:ə/ in Cockney (Gramley and Pätzold 1992:88-9). Also, words like *vest*, *biscuit*, and *corn* may have different meanings in British as against American English. Finally, in jargon, words as *sugar*, *grass*, and *score* are homonymous with Standard English words (Allan 1986:152).

5- Some homophones may be established because the words have weak forms, for instance, the word *that* can be articulated as /ðæt/ and /ðət/ in which the first is a demonstrative pronoun, whereas the second is the weak form of the subordinate conjunction *that* (Ladefoged 2006:108).

In rapid speech, confusion may arise through the difficulty in distinguishing between function words which have the same phonetic shape when they occur in

unstressed context (Wright 1973: 37-8). He (ibid.) lists some of these forms of confusion. For instance:

*Are, a, her, or,* and occasionally *of* are pronounced as /ə/.

8- “The days *are* long. /ðə 'deɪz ə 'lɔŋ /”

9- “She put on *a* hat. /ʃɪ 'pʊt ɔn ə hæʔ/”

10- “She put on *her* hat. /ʃɪ 'pʊt ɔn ə hæʔ/” (ibid.)

Other examples are *Have* and *of* that appear as /əv/:

11- “The boys *have* eaten fish. /ðə 'bɔɪz əv 'i:tɪn 'fɪʃ/”

12- “Which *of* you finished? /wɪtʃ əv ju 'fɪnɪʃt/” (ibid.)

6- Contractions of some words like *it's/its*, *you're/your*, *they're/their*, and *who's/whose* can be also a reason behind the creation of homonyms (Watkins et al. 2001:280).

7- Homonyms may arise from zero derivation, the nouns *catch* and *work* are from the homonymous verbs; and nouns like *black* and *oral* from the homonymous adjectives.

8- In some cases, abbreviations may be the reason behind the appearance of homonyms. Examples are *MP* (member of parliaments) or (military police) and the clipped word *fan* (from *fanatic*) and the word *fan* (cooling apparatus) (Stageberg 1981:123).

It is worth to mention that when some words have taboo homonyms, their original meanings have gradually been dropped from the language and they have kept the extended sense. An example of such words is *gay* that lost the meaning ‘bright, full of fun’ and kept the other sense, i.e., ‘homosexual’ which is thought to be an extension of the previous meaning— probably because of the belief that the homosexual males dress more gaily (=brightly) than straight males (Allan 1986: 153).

## Homonymy in Arabic

### Definitions of Homonymy

Homonymy in Arabic is known as *المتشابه* or *المتجانس اللفظي* or *الاشتراك أو المشترك اللفظي*. Also, homonyms are called *الوجوه والنظائر* in the holy Qur'an (Al-Dhamin الضامن 1990: 66). In philology, Al-Salih الصالح (1968:302, Al-Khuli الخولي 2001:141, and Mansur منصور 2009:1) define homonymy as a word or a sentence that has one articulation (or form) and more than one meaning. For example, the word *سن* has one articulation whether it means age or tooth; and *دقيق* which means flour, precise, and thin. An instance of homonymy from the holy Qur'an is *"فلا رفث ولا"* *رفث* in which *رفث* may mean to have intercourse or to say dirty words.

Homonymy is a controversial subject among Arab linguists. In one hand, some linguists, such as Ibn Dorstoya ابن دُرُسْتَوَيْه, deny the existence of this phenomenon as they claim that only one of its meanings is real (physical) and the rest are metaphorical. For instance, the word *وجد* has several meanings like to find, anger, to love, etc. They declare that "One may think this word has several meanings but actually all these meaning are related to one thing." On the other hand, other linguists, like Al Kheleel bin Ahmed الخليل بن أحمد, Sibawayh سيويه, and Abu Zeid ابو زيد, agree on its existence in the Arabic language.

### Types of Homonyms

Homonyms in Arabic can be divided into the following types:

1- Homonymic words that have two meanings. For example, *قدم* (part of body) or (unit of length). Another example is *لسان* (organ of body) and (language) (Al-Khuli 2001: 143-4).

2- Homonymic words that have multiple meanings. Such words in Arabic are *فصول* that has the meanings (chapters of a book), (seasons of year), (semesters in school), (acts of a play), etc. Another example is the word *عين* (hole in a needle), (eye of man), (fountainhead), (spy), etc. (Al Khuli 2001:143). The word *صدى* has the meanings (echo), (extreme thirst), (to preserve money), etc. (Ibn Jinni ابن جني

2008a: 459). Also, بأس has the meanings (dread), (bravery), (torture), (power), (battle) (Waffi وافي 1957: 292-3 and Atlas 2007). A well-known example that has more than thirty meanings is the word حوب which may mean sin, sister, daughter, need, sadness, haughtiness, heart softness Ye'koob يعقوب (1999: 178).

3- Homonymic words that have a relation in meaning. For instance, in Arabic, the word يد may mean part of body and power; and the word ذراع has the meanings organ in body and unit of measurement. This kind is actually known as polysemy in English (Al Khuli 2001:143 and Umer عمر 1982:63-4).

4- Homonymic words that have no relation in meaning. The word قرن may mean the horns of an animal or a hundred years. The word وجد which has no relation between its meanings that are to detest someone or to know. Another example is قال (to say from يقول) and (to fire somebody from يقيل) (Al Khuli 2001: 143).

5- A unique kind of homonymy in which the pronunciation is the same while the writing is different, i.e., homophony, is found in Arabic. Instances of this type are يحيى (to live) يحيى (name of a person) another example is:

13- رأيت الناس قد ذهبوا

إلى من عنده ذهبٌ

رأيت الناس قد مالوا

إلى من عنده مالٌ

In which ذهبوا means 'went' and ذهبٌ is 'gold'; مالوا means 'incline' and مالٌ is 'money' (Nasir AlDeen 2010: 3).

6- Homonyms created because of shift in application

Sometimes, a word has different senses according to the field or specialization it is used in. In Arabic, a word like عملية (operation) may mean surgical operation, action, agency, execution, or maneuver. The word جدار (wall) has the meanings cell wall, counter scrub, firewall, pier (Waffi 1957:294 and Umer 1982:164-6).

7- Homonyms that have identical present and past participle

The present and past participle that have the rhythm (افتعل) in Arabic for words such as مُخْتَار, مُعْتَاد, مُعْتَد, مُسْتَن and the rhythm (انفعل) in words like مُنْحَل are identical in enunciation and writing (Ibn Jinni 2008b: 17-8).

8- Homonyms that have the same singular and plural forms

Examples of these homonyms are فُلْكَ and دِلَاص (as in درع دِلَاص and أدرع دِلَاص) (Ibn Jinni 2008a: 464)

### Homonymy and Synonymy

Actually, homonymy is different from synonymy although both are relations between words. Generally, homonymy is a word that has more than one meaning, whereas synonymy denotes two or more words that have approximately the same meaning (Al Dersoni 2010: 1). For instance, the homonymic word خال means either uncle (mother's brother) or mole (in the body), to think or doubt something, or clouds (Al-Dhamin 1990: 66). Instances of synonymous words are:

14- قرأ, تلا = to read

15- أقسم, حلف = to swear (Yousif 2009:1)

16- أريحية, جود, سخاء, سماحة, كرم, بذل = generosity

17- يرى, يبصر, يعاين, يشاهد = to see

18- سنة, حول, عام = year

19- مسرور, محبوب, فرح, جذل, مستبشر = happy (Al Dersoni 2010: 1)

### Antonymous Homonyms

In some cases, homonyms have two antonymous meanings. Thus, such words create great problems in communication in Arabic. Consider the following examples of antonymous homonyms in Arabic (Al Khuli 2001: 144-5):

20- جون = black, white

21- صريم = day, night

22- بسل = forbidden, unforbidden

23- سليم = uninjured, stung

24- ابيض = white, black

25- بصير = blind, sighted

26- وراء = front, rear

27- حلق = fly, sink

28- وثب = jump, sit

29- طاعم = to feed somebody, to be fed (Al-Salih 1968: 310)

It is important to discriminate between antonymy and antonymous homonymy which is one kind of antonymy in Arabic. The former occurs with two words that have opposite meanings, e.g. يبيع (sell) and يشتري (buy); and سهل (easy) and صعب (difficult), while the latter occurs with one word that has two reverse meanings (ibid.: 303) and (Al-Dhamin 1990: 72).

### **Reasons of Creating Homonymy**

There are many reasons behind creating homonymous words in Arabic. They are as follows:

#### **1- Economy**

Because of the development in all fields of life, the number of words' senses is more than the number of words themselves. One cannot create new words for every new sense that appears. For this reason, one adds new senses to the existing lexemes, e.g. the word طائرة (plain) exists in Arabic before the invention of the plain. It was used previously to refer to birds. After the creation of the plain, the word طائرة gains its new sense. Similarly, the words سيارة (car), قطار (train), and هاتف (phone) have gained new senses after their creation. Accordingly,

homonymy is an economic method in which one can limit the number of words and enhance the number of senses (Al Khuli 2001: 146-7).

## 2- Ambiguity

Homonymy is used deliberately for the purpose of arising ambiguity. This is related to rhetorical reasons and for having excitement in communication. For example:

30- دع المكارم لا ترحل لبغيتها وأقعد فانت الطاعم الكاسي

Here, the word الطاعم means (to be fed) and not the apparent meaning (to feed). In a similar way, the word الكاسي means (to be coated or dressed) and does not mean (to coat somebody).

Another example is:

31- أصون أديم وجهي عن أناس لقاء الموت عندهم الأديب

ورب الشعر عندهم بغيض ولو وفى به لهم حبيب

The word حبيب here may mean (beloved) or (name of a person) (Al Jaghoob 2009: 1).

## 3- Metaphorical Reasons

Sometimes there are regional, partial, and causative reasons behind using the second meaning of the homonym. In most cases, the meaning of the homonym can be sensual and physical in which the sensual meaning is the original one (Al-Dhamin 1990: 69). Examples of such homonyms are (Al Dersoni 2010: 4):

32- إثم = sin, wine

33- مصر = state of Egypt, Egyptian people

34- فارة = mouse, jointer of the carpenter (مسحاج), mouse of computer (Owenn 2005: 127)

35- ظعينة = howdah (هودج), woman, camel

36- ذقن = chin, beard

37- افن = shortage in the camel milk, mental deficiency

38- مجد = stomach surfeit of animals, extreme generosity

39- وغي = fuss in war, war

40- عقيقه = newly born hair, animal slain when hair is shaved (Waffi 1957: 293)

#### 4- Difference in Derivation

The Arabic word قال is a homonym that means (said from يقول) and (napped from قبيلة). Another example is ضاع (past tense of lose) and (past tense of spread fragrance). As such derivation sometimes causes homonymous words (Yekoob 1999: 181) (Al Khuli 2001: 147).

#### 5- Politeness

In some cases, people use homonymic words to indicate a positive as well as a negative sense. For instance, instead of saying محمد مهدي الأعمى, it is more polite to say محمد مهدي البصير in which the word البصير denotes either being sighted or blind, here is used instead of أعمى (blind) (ibid.).

#### 6- Euphemism

Euphemism is similar to politeness, but is more general in application. Politeness is personal, whilst euphemism is related to the society. The expression دول العالم الثالث was earlier called الدول المتأخرة, after that it was changed to دول قليلة النمو, this phrase became الدول النامية in which نام means advanced and old fashioned. The second sense is meant in the final expression (ibid.).

#### 7- Sarcasm

Unlike the case with politeness, some homonyms are used for the sake of sarcasm. One may use the positive sense of the word to give an ironic sense, for instance the word فصيح is sometimes used to mean the opposite of eloquent (ibid.).

## 8- Differences in Dialects

A word may mean X in the language or in a specific dialect and the same word means Y in another dialect, in this way, the word will have two senses (X and Y) in the standard language. Thus, when dictionaries were created, all the senses of the word were included in the dictionaries. Among the examples that are known of this kind of homonyms are العجوز which may mean old woman or man, needle, ground, rabbit, lion, sea, hero, cow, ox, hunger, war, wine, tent, life, sun, etc. (Abdul Tawab عبد التواب 1999: 326; Yekoob 1999:180; and Al-Dhamin 1990: 68). Also, similarly the word ألم (pain) and ألم = pen in the Egyptian dialect (Umer 1982: 167).

## 9- Optimism

A word may have several meanings due to optimism. The word مفازة that basically means a place of victory, gains another sense that is desert. Justifying the reason behind such use is to create a sense of optimism to the person who wants to cross a desert (Al Khuli 2001: 148).

## 10- Homonyms created due to shift in articulation

When two words that are different in articulation and writing had undergone change in articulation which led to become similar in enunciation, this led to become homonyms. In Arabic, the word الفروة means either scap or affluence in which 'affluence' comes from الثروة the letter ث of ثروة was replaced by ف (Abdul Tawab 1999:332) and (Yekoob 1999:180). The word سائل (liquid from سال), and سائل (asker from سأل) and سائل (beggar from سأل) is a well-known example of such kind of homonymy (Umer 1982:166-7 and Al Baalbaki 2005:615).

## 11- Borrowing words from other languages

Borrowing words (as they are) that are similar to others in the original language can also cause homonymous words. For instance, borrowing the word كلب (kalb) from Germany into Arabic leads to creating a homonym with the word كلب (dog). Another example is سور from Persia which means city wall or hospitality that was used first by the Prophet (Abdul Tawab 1999: 331).

12- Using the peculiar reference of the word in addition to its general meaning and vice versa.

In Islam, especially in religious rituals, there are thousands of words that have gained their meanings throughout this way. Consider the following words (Al-Salih 1968: 305 and Waffi 1975: 292):

### Words that Gained Specific Meanings in addition to their General Meanings

(Waffi 1957: 292)

| word  | General meaning                         | Specific meaning                            |
|-------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| صلاة  | supplication                            | prayer                                      |
| حج    | pilgrimage to a particular (holy) place | hajj to Mecca                               |
| صوم   | seize eating                            | fasting in Islamic religion                 |
| مؤمن  | to believe in something                 | believer in Allah                           |
| كافر  | ungrateful                              | a disbeliever in Allah                      |
| منافق | hypocrite                               | a disbeliever who pretends to be a believer |
| رث    | dastard, mean, etc.                     | worthless thing                             |

Examples of words that have obtained general reference in addition to their specific reference are *ورد*, *رائد*, *نجعة*, *حوة*, *باس* (ibid.: 239).

### Homonymy and Ambiguity

In Arabic, there are two sorts of ambiguity— lexical and syntactic. In one hand, lexical ambiguity occurs because the sentence contains a word which has more than one meaning that causes the ambiguity. The sentences: (Al Khuli 2001: 148-150)

- 41- رأيتُه عن كثب 1) To see somebody or something closely.  
2) To see somebody or something from a long distance.
- 42- ان الأمر لجلل 1) The matter is big.  
2) The matter is trivial. (ibid.)

In the previous sentences, the reason behind ambiguity is that the two sentences encompass homonyms that have antonymous meanings.

On the other hand, syntactic ambiguity – the second type of ambiguity – arises from the grammatical construction of the sentence. For example:

- 43- مساعدة الوالدين 1) help that is given from parents.  
2) help that is given to parents.
- 44- إعانة الدولة 1) aid given from the state.  
2) aid given to the state.

The ambiguity here is owing to the syntactic construction (infinitive + noun) in which the infinitive is derived from a transitive verb (ibid.: 151). It is worth mentioning that ambiguity in such cases does not always occur. If one adds an animate noun to an infinitive, the ambiguity will arise, whereas if the noun that is added to the infinitive is inanimate, (e.g. تنظيف البيت) there will be no ambiguity.

Other examples of syntactic ambiguity are:

- 45- التعاون الجماعي 1) co-operation between one group and another.  
2) co-operation between individuals inside the same group.
- 46- اتجاهات مستقبلية 1) trends towards the future.  
2) trends that will happen in the future.

The reason of this ambiguity in meaning is due to the syntactic relation—substantive (noun + adjective) (ibid.: 154). Rephrasing the ambiguous sentence,

adding extra information. The context can also solve the problem of ambiguity in such examples. For instance, the word ضرب has many senses in different contexts. Consider the following sentences (Owenn 2005:151-2):

47- ضرب زيدُ عمرًا = to punish

48- ضرب الله مثلا = to mention

49- ضرب له قبة = to erect

50- ضرب العملة = to coin

51- ضرب له موعد = to assign

52- ضرب في الأرض = to seek or go about

53- ضرب خمسة في ستة = to multiply

54- ضرب أخماس بأسداس = to be confused

### Homonymy and Pun

Pun or 'paronomasia' (الجناس) is defined as two words that are the same in pronunciation but are different in meaning. In Arabic, it is generally divided into verbal (جناس لفظي) and lexical (جناس معنوي) (Mahjoob محجوب 2008: 4, Matloob مطلوب, and Al-Baseer البصير 1999: 450). The similarities and differences between homonymy and pun are illustrated briefly in the following points:

1- Pun is a literary term that is used frequently by literary writers 'especially poets' for purposes like creating humour, musical effect, attracting attention, aesthetical purposes, etc, whereas homonymy is a linguistic term which is used in linguistics.

2- Homonymy is a word that has various meanings, whilst pun refers to two words that are different in meaning.

3- The first type of pun— verbal pun— has a branch which is called 'complete pun' (جناس تام). It refers to two words that are alike in letters, number, their vowel points, and in arrangement. This sort of pun is identical with homonymy.

For instance, 'يوم تقوم الساعة يقسم المجرمون ما لبثوا غير ساعة'. The first ساعة means doomsday, while the second ساعة refers to an hour of time. Other examples of complete pun are:

55- صليت المغرب في احد مساجد المغرب

56- يقيني بالله يقيني

57- (1: المحسنات البديعية) إرضهم ما دمت في أرضهم

4- The second kind of verbal pun that is known as incomplete pun (جناس ناقص) is defined as two words that are different in one major factor— letters, number, diacritics, and in arrangement— thus this kind of pun is similar to homography. For example جَد (to work hard, from يجد, and grandfather) and جد (diligence); ساعد (to help) and ساعد (forearm); دَلالة (leading) and دِلالة (fee) (Ownn 2005:137); and بر (obedience) as in بر الوالدين عبادة, sincerity as in بر يمينك يامتهم, and accept as in بر الله دعاءه ذلك المظلوم (Nasir AlDeen 2010: 6).

5- One kind of verbal pun is known as pronounced pun (جناس تلفظي) which refers to two words that have the same enunciation and different spelling and meaning. For example:

58- أعذب خلق الله نطقا وفما

أن لم يكن أحق بالحسن فمن

This type of pun is similar to the kind of homonymy that is rarely found in Arabic (Nasir AlDeen ناصر الدين 2010: 2).

6- Pun is classified into: (1) verbal pun which is in tern subdivided into complete, incomplete, absolute, tail, present, successive...etc. (2) lexical pun is subdivided into elliptical pun and referential pun (Nasir AlDeen 2010: 1-2)

Hence pun is classified into many different categories under which many others follow, whereas homonymy is not divided into many types.

## The Semantic Concept of Triangle (دلالة مصطلح المثلث) or Short Vowel Triangle

In Arabic linguistics, 'triangle of language' refers to three words that are identical in spelling, but are different in diacritics in which changing the vowel points will lead to a change in meaning. Hence, these three words are homographs. Words that are related to this triangle are nouns and verbs (Dawood 2001:27). The Arabic language has many homographic words. Some of them are related to this triangle.

In nouns, changing the vowel point may occur on the first, second, or third letter. Rarely, the diacritic change may occur on the fourth letter. Moreover, the change of vowel points may happen in the first and second letters together or the first and the third letters together (ibid.).

In verbs, the diacritics change may mostly take place on the second letter of the verb (عين الفعل) or it may transfer to the first letter, that is (فاء الفعل) in case of geminated verb (فعل مضعف) and empty verb (الفعل الأجوف) (ibid.).

The triangle is divided into two types— one meaning triangle and multiple meaning triangle. The first kind is not our concern in this study. The second kind is divided into the following branches (ibid.):

1-change of vowel point on the first graph which is common in nouns:

59- علي حبه جنة

قسيم النار والجنة

أمام الأانس والجنة

The first جنة means shelter, the second الجنة means heaven, and the third الجنة means the jinn.

2- change of vowel point on the second graph which is common in verbs:

60- قدم القوم = He became in front of them.

قدم الرجل من سفره = He came back or it may also mean somebody went deliberately towards something.

قَدُمَ الشَّيْءُ = It became old or tattered (ibid.).

3- change of vowel point on the third letter. This kind is rare:

61- مُسْعَطَ (object) 1) to make somebody smell something on purpose.

2) to stab somebody on his nose.

3) to exaggerate in teaching somebody.

مُسْعَطُ (subject of the previous meanings)

مُسْعَطُ (plate used for sneezing)(ibid.)

4- change of vowel point on the first and the second graph. These words are not many:

62- الأَبْدُ = along period of time

الإِبْدُ = to have children from slave girls

الأَبْدُ = plural of (أَبُود) being always angry

5- change of vowel point on the first and the third graph. These words are few:

63- عَجْرَمَةٌ = to run fast

عَجْرِمَةٌ = a short chubby woman

عُجْرُمَةٌ = singular of عُجْرُمٌ which is a kind of trees

6- change of vowel point on the fourth letter. This kind is very rare. The only example known is تَفَاوَتْ , تَفَاوَتْ , تَفَاوَتْ (ibid.).

### Types of Homographs

In Arabic, homographs are words that have the same orthographic form though their pronunciation is different due to the use of diacritics. Hence, homographs create a problem in Arabic. This problem is related to many factors (Attia 2006: 2-3). Among them are:

1- Assimilation and deletion frequently produce reflected forms that can belong to two or more different words. For instance:

64- يُعِدُّ = bring back (أعاد)

يَعُدُّ = return (عاد)

يَعِدُّ = promise (وعد)

يَعُدُّ = count (عد)

يُعِدُّ = prepare (اعد)

2- Doubled sound that does not appear in writing, and thus, creates similar forms. For instance:

65- يَعْلَمُ = know (يعلم)

عَلَّمَ = teach (يُعَلِّمُ)

3- Active, passive and imperative forms cause problem in Arabic because their inflectional operation underlie a slight change in articulation without any explicit orthographical effect owing to lack of short vowels (diacritics). For example:

66- أَرْسَلُ = send (أُرْسِلُ) (active)

أُرْسِلُ = was sent (passive)

أُرْسِلْ = send (imperative)

4- Some suffixes and prefixes can be homographic which will create a problem of ambiguity. Notice how the suffix and prefix (ت) create ambiguity in the following example:

67- 1- تكتب - She writes.

2- You (male) write.

1- كَتَبْتُ - I wrote.

2- كَتَبْتَ = You (male) wrote.

3- كَتَبَتْ = You (female) wrote.

4- كَتَبَتْ = She wrote.

Similarly, the dual is always confused with the plural in the accusative case. For instance:

68- أمريكيين = two Americans (dual)

أمريكيين = more than two Americans (plural)

5- Prefixes and suffixes may cause a problem with lexemes because of having the same orthograph:

69- أُسَدَّ = I block

أسَدٌ = lion

6- Clitics (“a word that cannot exist in isolation, but which needs to be attached to another word”) (Spencer 1996: 179) can accidentally produce a form that is homographic with another full word. For instance:

70- علمي = scientific

علمي = my knowledge (علم + ي)

7- Some words that are uninflected are homographic originally. They may or may not have the same enunciation. For instance:

71- دَهَبٌ = gold

دَهَبَ = went (يذهب)

### Homonymy in English and Arabic: Conclusions

1- Originally, in English the word homonymy is divided into homophony and homography, whereas this term is translated as *المشترك اللفظي* in Arabic which refers to a word that has one articulation and more than one meaning.

2- The definition of homonymy in Arabic is similar to the definition of polysemy in English, i.e. they are considered to be one. The difference between them is that homonyms in Arabic may have a relation or no relation in their meanings, while polysems in English have a relation in meaning. Hence, the two types of homonyms, i.e., those that have a relation in meaning and those that do not, are not found in English.

3- Some Arab linguists believe that homonymy does not exist in Arabic because they think that homonymic words have one real meaning while the rest are metaphorical.

4- Homonymy is defined differently in English while in Arabic there is an agreement among linguists on its definition.

5- The types of homonyms in English are complete, partial, word homonyms, homonyms of words form, lexical homonyms, and grammatical homonyms, while the types of homonymy in Arabic are those that have only two meanings, multiple meanings, a relation in meaning no relation in meaning, homonyms created because of shift in application, homonyms created due to shift in articulation, and those that have identical present and past participle.

6- Some of the reasons behind creating homonyms in both languages are identical. They are the development in enunciation, difference in derivation, euphemism, differences in dialects, metaphorical reasons, and extension in the meaning of the word.

7- Some of the reasons of the creation of homonyms in English are weak forms, contractions, abbreviations, and taboo, whilst in Arabic they are economy, ambiguity, politeness, sarcasm, and optimism.

8- The Arabic language is a homographic language unlike English. Many words in Arabic including those that are related to the triangle of language are homographs. In fact, homography is part of homonymy in English whereas it is not deemed as part of homonymy in Arabic.

9- In Arabic, mostly there is a match between the graphs and sounds, whilst English has no match in most cases. Thus, homophones like يحيى (name of a person) and يحيا (to live) are rare in Arabic.

10- In Arabic, homonyms have tens of meanings, whereas in English the number may not exceed five senses.

11- Arabic has many antonymous homonyms but these are rare in English. for instance, cleave (to sever) and (to unite) and raise (to build) and raze (to destroy).

12- Homonymy is used heavily by poets and writers in Arabic, since it has a relation to some of the types of pun and allusion (التورية), metaphor (المجاز) in which it is used for purposes like creating humour, musical effect, attracting attention, aesthetical purposes, playing on words to create beauty etc.

13- Complete pun (جناس تام) is a branch of verbal pun. It denotes two words that are alike in letters, number, their vowel points, and in arrangement. This sort of pun is identical with homonymy.

14- Incomplete pun (جناس ناقص) is the second branch of verbal pun. It is defined as two words that are different in one major factor— letters, number, diacritics, and in arrangement— thus this kind of pun is similar to homography.

15- Pronounced pun (جناس تلفظي) is one kind of verbal pun which refers to two words that have the same enunciation and different spelling and meaning.

16- Pun is classified into: (1) verbal pun which is in term subdivided into complete, incomplete, absolute, tail, present, successive, ... etc. (2) lexical pun is subdivided into elliptical pun and referential pun.

Hence pun is classified into many different categories under which many others follow, whereas homonymy is not divided into many types.

17- In both languages, the phenomenon of homonymy creates ambiguity that is lexical and syntactic.

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