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## **LEXICAL RELATIONS**

## Hyponymy

When the meaning of one form is included in the meaning of another, the relationship is described as hyponymy. Examples are the pairs: animal/horse, insect/ant, flower/rose. The concept of “inclusion” involved in this relationship is the idea that if an object is a rose, then it is necessarily a flower, so the meaning of flower is included in the meaning of rose. Or, rose is a hyponym of flower. When we investigate connections based on hyponymy, we are essentially looking at the meaning of words in some type of hierarchical relationship. Try to think quickly of a basic meaning for each of these words: banyan, parakeet, terrier, turnip. You can check Figure 9.1 to see if your meaning included hyponymy. Looking at the diagram, we can say that “horse is a hyponym of animal” or “ant is a hyponym of insect.” In these two examples, animal and insect are called the superordinate (1/4 higher level) terms. We can also say that two or more words that share the same superordinate term are co-hyponyms. So, dog and horse are co-hyponyms and the superordinate term is animal. Or schnauzer and yorkie are co-hyponyms, with terrier as one superordinate and dog as another at a more general level. The relation of hyponymy captures the concept of “is a kind of,” as when we give the meaning of a word by saying, “a schnauzer is a kind of dog.” Sometimes the only thing we know about the meaning of a word is that it is a hyponym of another term. That is, we may know nothing more about the meaning of the word yorkie other than that it is a kind of dog (also known as a Yorkshire terrier) or that banyan is a kind of tree. Of course, it is not only words for “things” that are hyponyms. Words such as punch, shoot and stab, as verbs describing “actions,” can all be treated as co-hyponyms of the superordinate term injure and the verbs bake, boil, fry, and grill as co-

hyponyms of the superordinate cook. For a lot of people, microwave has become another one .

## **Homophones and homonyms**

When two or more different (written) forms have the same pronunciation, they are described as homophones. Common English examples are bare/bear, meat/meet, flour/flower, pail/pale, right/write, sew/so, to/too/two. We use the term homonyms when one form (written or spoken) has two or more unrelated meanings, as in these examples: bat (flying creature) – bat (used in sports) mole (on skin) – mole (small animal) pen (writing instrument) – pen (enclosed space) race (contest of speed) – race (ethnic group) sole (single) – sole (part of foot or shoe) The temptation is to think that the two types of bat must be related in meaning. They are not. Homonyms are words that have separate histories and meanings, but have accidentally come to have exactly the same form.

## **Word play**

These last three lexical relations are the basis of a lot of word play, usually for humorous effect. In the nursery rhyme Mary had a little lamb, we think of a small animal, but in the comic version Mary had a little lamb, some rice and vegetables, we think of a small amount of meat. The polysemy of lamb allows the two interpretations. It is recognizing the polysemy of leg and foot in the riddle What has four legs, but only one foot? that leads to a solution (a bed). We can make sense of another riddle Why are trees often mistaken for dogs? by recognizing the homonymy in the answer: Because of their bark. Shakespeare used homophones (sun/son) for word play in the first lines of the play Richard III: Now is the winter of our discontent Made glorious summer by this sun of York. And if you are asked the following question: Why is 6 afraid of 7?, you can

understand why the answer is funny (Because 789) by identifying the homophone.

## **What Is Metonymy?**

Metonymy comes from the Greek word “metōnymía,” which translates to “change of name.” Metonymy is a figure of speech in which an object or idea is referred to by the name of something closely associated with it, as opposed to by its own name. Metonymy involves a word or phrase substituting or standing in for another word or phrase.

## **Examples of Metonymy in Everyday Language and Literature**

People use figurative language every day whether they realize it or not. Common examples of metonymy include in language include:

- Referring to the President of the United States or their administration as “the White House” or “the Oval Office”
- Referring to the American technology industry as “Silicon Valley”
- Referring to the American advertising industry as “Madison Avenue”
- Referring to the American film industry or celebrity culture as “Hollywood”
- Referring to the New York Stock Exchange as “Wall Street”
- Referring to a member of the British royal family as “the Crown”

Many famous quotes from literature contain metonymy examples, too. In William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, Antony commands attention at Julius Caesar’s funeral by saying: “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend

me your ears.” Here, Antony is using the word “ears” to refer to people’s attention.

### **3 Reasons Why Writers Use Metonymy**

Though many people might use metonymy subconsciously in their everyday speech, writers use it in fiction, essays, and poetry for a number of reasons.

1. **1. Metonymy allows writers to express themselves creatively.** Substituting a different word or phrase, as long as the connection still makes sense, gives writers the freedom to get more creative with language.
2. **2. Metonymy gives writers the ability to make single words or phrases more powerful.** You can add meaning and complexity to even the most ordinary word by having it stand in to mean something else. For example, take the phrase “the pen is mightier than the sword,” which contains two examples of metonymy. “Pen” and “sword” are everyday words, but when substituted for “written words” and “military force,” their meaning become much more symbolic. The phrase implies that the written word is more powerful than military force.
3. **3. Metonymy helps writers be more concise.** Short phrases can sometimes be punchier and more profound. Journalists and speechwriters often use metonymy to replace complicated ideas with shorter, simpler alternatives to help audiences better understand complicated concepts.

### **What Is the Difference Between Metonymy and Metaphor?**

Metonymy and metaphor are similar, but they’re not the same thing.

- Metonymy associates the qualities of one word or phrase with another word or phrase.
- Metaphor, however, substitutes a word or phrase with another word or phrase to draw a comparison to their similarities.

Learn more about [metaphor in writing in our complete guide here](#).

### **What Is the Difference Between Metonymy and Synecdoche?**

Synecdoche is a specific type of metonymy that occurs when a whole object or idea is referred to by the name of one of its smaller parts. For example, referring to a car as “my wheels” is synecdoche, because the wheels are just one part that represents the entire car.