

# Punningly Confusing Homophones of the English Language

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## ABSTRACT

Homophones are words that sound exactly the same, but have different meanings and (usually) spelling. However, having homophones in a language may pose a rather significant problem, as the essence of speech is to have differently-sounding words, or else there would be no spoken language. Moreover, the more homophones there are in any language, the more faulty is that language as a scientific and convenient vehicle of speech. Another underlying problem is the difficulty in determining where one word ends and another one begins. In rapid, connected speech, we unconsciously tend to "merge" words, so that every multi-word utterance we produce is actually heard as a continuum of sound, i.e. as if it consisted of a single long word. This is also a source of many frustrating spelling-related problems in English. Nevertheless, one way of escaping from these unfavorable circumstances lies in the fact that homophones require the company of other words in order to be understood properly. When found in a proper context, they do manage to survive in everyday speech. This paper aims to address some of the methods which shall help raise and enhance learner awareness of these particular subtleties of English pronunciation. Specifically, we describe and analyze a number of representative examples in order to master various homophonous sequences of sounds. By knowing the underlying principles that affect words in rapid speech, non-native speakers may be able to successfully recognize and solve many ambiguous sequences, the consequence of which may be potential misunderstanding and inadvertent puns. Evidently, the paper may have implications on the way that homophones are taught, where future applications of this work may involve improved class material designed for communicative language activities centered on the connected speech phenomena.