Iulian Boldea, Cornel Sigmirean (Editors)
*MULTICULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS. Literature and Discourse as Forms of Dialogue*
Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, 2016
ISBN: 978-606-8624-16-7
***Section: Language and Discourse***


# HOMONYMY, FORMS OF RECEIVING IT BY FOREIGNS SPEAKERS

**Cristina-Eugenia Burtea-Cioroianu**

**Assist. Prof., PhD, University of Craiova**

*Abstract: Along with the knowledge of a foreign language, besides mastering the way words can be put together - namely the grammar rules - it is essential to easily handle the vocabulary. The vocabulary of a language is like an inexhaustible well, continually evolving and changing. Thus, homonymy and all its forms may be a source of ambiguity, of confusion at the level of correct reception of the message by the recipient, foreign students. The disambiguation of the homonymous terms for speakers of Romanian as a foreign language is possible by placing them in a context and explaining them with the help of synonymies and even antonymies.*

*Keywords: homonymy, ambiguity, context, reception, foreign speakers*

## 1. Introduction

A part of semantics, along with polysemy, synonymy, antonymy, paronymy, etc., homonymy is one of the most complex, nuanced and debated categories, which determined different qualifications from the specialist of this field, being an interesting and important aspect of general linguistics. A definition of the concept is difficult enough to synthesize in a few words due to the complexity of the phenomenon and its existence in different sections of the language. Thus, it is "***homonym*** the word which has the same form and pronunciation as another word or words from which it differs as sense and origin"[1]. Relating to the definition given to ***homonymy***, the researchers interested in this linguistic phenomenon proposed diverse clarifications:

Mioara Avram in the article: *Morphological means of lexical differentiation in Romanian*[2] establishes the following types and sub-types:

- According to origin – homonyms with different etymons from the same language or from different languages; homonyms originating in a unique word.
- From a synchronic point of view: so-called homonyms from the same part of speech; false homonyms, that is identical forms from the paradigms of different parts of speech.
- The so-called homonyms: total or partial.

Another interesting proposal for classifying the homonyms belongs to Sorin Stati[3]:

- Lexical homonyms: words identical as form, with identical flexion, belonging to the same part of speech;

[1] ***Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 1996, p. 719.
[2] Mioara Avram, *Mijloace morfologice de diferențiere lexicală în limba română*, în *Studii și cercetări lingvistice*, Tomul IX, nr. 3, București, 1958, p. 315-333.
[3] Sorin Stati, *Omonimia în sistemul morfologic*, în *Probleme de lingvistică generală*, vol. II, Editura Academiei, București, 1960, p. 126.

BDD-V4361 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 21:58:50 UTC)

- Morphological homonyms, that is two or more forms from the paradigm of a word, phonetically identical;
- Partial lexical homonyms, belonging to the same part of speech, but only certain forms of their paradigm being identical;
- Lexical-grammatical homonyms, that is flexional forms of some different words from the point of view of the lexical-grammatical category.

From these brief classifications one can deduce a different approach on the debated phenomenon, the interpretation of ***homonymy*** in a general sense being able to eventually lead to the eradication of the boundaries between lexical homonymy and homography, between homonymy and polysemy. "The words with multiple meanings – writes the academician Iorgu Iordan – are called homonyms"[4] or according to Theodor Hristea "Homonyms are two or more identical words from a formal point of view and completely different as meaning"[5]. Homonymy does not represent a semantic relationship between words, but it is interesting from a practical, applicatory point of view, at a point where it may become a source of confusion, with or without the intention of obtaining stylistic effects. In a large sense, homonymy may be understood as a great category that includes the match of linguistic form, that is sequences identical as form, with different meanings, at different levels of the language: lexical, morphological and syntactic. It is this very confusion which surfaces while practicing Romanian with foreign students that forces somehow the approach on homonymy from all three perspectives for a better understanding and decoding of the message and the linguistic context.

## 2. Homonymy in contextual situations

***Homonymy*** is the manifestation of a process contrary to *synonymy* in the sense that the same phonetic frame points to two different objects, not at the same object: *bancă* ("financial institution") – *bancă* („long chair"); *ban* („the hundredth part of the national currency") – *ban* ("lordly title in the Middle Ages"); *calcan* ("species of marine fish") – *calcan* ("wall without doors and windows") etc. It is a normal way of existence for words, one of its most important sources being the popular etymology. Thus, it may generate *confusions*, especially among speakers of Romanian as a foreign language, which is why it was considered an obstacle in the process of communicating ideas. The disambiguation of the homonymic terms for speakers of Romanian as a foreign language is possible by placing them in context and explaining them using synonymies and even antonymies. In the practice of speaking, due to the evolution of the language one has come to the elimination of a homonym or to its modification. For example, the word *pisoi* ("kitten") removed from the language the term *pisoi* ("tool used for pounding in a mill machine"); *porumb* (plant) eliminated in Muntenia the word *porumb* (bird) and determined the apparition of the word *porumbel* ("pidgeon") etc. In French, several words are pronounced the same, due to the reduction of the phonetic frame of words and to the homonymic situation generated by this reduction: *vert* („green"), *verre* („glass"), *vers* („verse"), *vers* („towards"), *ver* („worm"), *vair* („the fur of a certian animal").

***The morphological homonymy*** refers to the identical forms, but which appear in different areas of the same paradigm, having different values and functions, also being called homoforms. For a foreign Romanian speaker, only the context through a detailed synonymic explanation may reveal the real and natural sense of the homonymic words. For example: *cer*

[4] Iorgu Iordan, *Limba romana contemporana*, București, 1956, p. 39.
[5] Theodor Hristea, *Sinteze de limba romana*, Editura Albatros, București, 1984, p. 21.

**BDD-V4361 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press**
**Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 21:58:50 UTC)**

(neutral noun), *cer* (verb in the 3rd person singular and plural); *fluier* (neutral noun), *fluier* (verb in the 1st person singular); *tremur* (neutral noun), *tremur* (verb in the 1st person singular); *vine* (plural of "vână"), *vine* (the 3rd person singular of the verb "to come") etc. Morphological homonyms are also the forms of the 3rd person singular of certain verbs (to run: *el aleargă – ei aleargă*, to leave: *el pleacă – ei pleacă*), the genitive and dative forms of the noun (*al copilului – dau copilului*), the nominative, genitive, dative and accusative forms of masculine nouns with indefinite article (*un vecin, al unui vecin, unui vecin, pe un vecin*). In the same situation are found the morphemic elements which have the role to differentiate different parts of speech: *-a* in the preposition *înaintea* helps to differentiate it from the adverb *înainte*, this morphemic element is homonymous with the definite article in the feminine singular *–a, casa*; in the same way, the morphemic element *-ul* is homonymous with the article in the masculine singular and helps to differentiate the adverb *împrejur* from the preposition *împrejurul.* It is very difficult for the foreign students to make the difference, even on a written level not only in speech, between these types of homonyms or between those of the type *a-i* (preposition and pronoun in *pentru a-i vedea*) and *ai* (article - *ai mei*), *ai* (regional noun – *un ai*) or *ai!* (interjection); *ca* (adverb - *ca la munte*), *ca* (conjunction - *ca să*) *ca* (preposition - *ca student*); *ce-i* (pronoun and pronoun - *ce-i dai?*), *ce-i* (pronoun and verb - *ce-i acolo?*), *cei* (article – *cei mici*); *că-i* (conjunction and pronoun – *că-i dai*), *că-i* (conjunction and verb *pentru că-i bine așa*), *căi* (noun – *două căi*), etc.

**The syntactical homonymy** refers to the syntactic structures identical as organization and composition, which can be interpreted differently according to meaning. For example, a sequence such as *alegerea profesorului* may be understood as "the choice that the teacher made" or "someone's election as a teacher". In the same way, the utterance *Ţi-am citit poeziile* may mean "I read the poem that you wrote" or "I read the poems and you listened"; the structure *El s-a îndepărtat enervat* may be casually interpreted "he went away because he was nervous" or copulatively "he went away and he was nervous". Such sequences with a double interpretation are disambiguated in a larger context: *Ţi-am citit poeziile, să știi că ai talent*. In this case, there is a unique interpretation: "I read the poems that you wrote". One may also speak of a hybrid category (the partial homonyms) which includes coincidences of form between a title-word and a flexional form of another word. In this case, the identity is limited to certain forms from the paradigm of the two terms and does not generate confusion, for syntactic combination are stable. In this category we may include examples such as *car* (cart) – neutral noun and the first person singular, present indicative, of the verb *a căra* (to carry), *par* (pillar) – masculine noun and the first person singular, present indicative, of the verb *a părea* (to seem).

**The lexical-grammatical** homonyms are words with identical forms, but which are different parts of speech that do not change their form when passing from one part of speech to another: *noi* – adjective (*He has new clothes*); *noi* – personal pronoun (*We go to school*). According to the data resulted after researching the types of homonyms in *Dicționarul limbii române literare contemporane* (DLRC) (The Dictionary of Contemporary Literary Romanian) the last type of homonymy occupies the first place. The explanation for this is fairly simple: Romanian is among the languages in which the phenomenon of conversion of the parts of speech is very frequent. Almost any adjective can be used as noun or adverb. The verbal parts of the supine and many participles have been turned into nouns. The participles also switch easily to the category of adjectives. Taking into account the high frequency of the phenomenon of conversion of the parts of speech, certain researchers are entitled to consider

**BDD-V4361 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press**
**Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 21:58:50 UTC)**

that in the case of the resulting noun or adjective forms, like other types of conversions, it is not homonymy, but rather a syntactically conditioned polysemy.

The switch of the lexical-grammatical category of words (nouns turned into adjectives, adjectives turned into nouns, etc.). The expression of the grammatical category through different inflexions or the limitation of the flexion (for example, the case of the verb, when certain diatheses determine the apparition of homonyms only when the respective words also change their lexical meaning). Thus, if the lexical meaning remains unchanged, although the word may pass to another category than the one it belongs to or, sometimes, it may acquire different morphological forms, it does not lose its identity, does not generate two or more homonyms in language[6].

Therefore, **homonymy** *is – along with synonymy, polysemy and antonymy – one of the four ways of manifestation of the organization of the vocabulary*[7].

Romanian has various means for avoiding the confusion that may appear when using homonyms, which is of course beneficial for the ignorants or the foreign speakers. One of them could be the replacement, in time, of one of the homonyms. The Latin word *pecorarius* issued in Romanian the word *pacurar* meaning "shepherd". The term was homonymically competed by the word *pacurar* coming from *pacura* + the suffix *–ar*, the petroliferous regions. Where there was a chance for confusion, the old Latin term was replaced with a new one: *cioban* (shepherd) coming from Turkish, which imposed itself in the language more than the synonyms: *pacurar, pastor, oier*, the last on derived from *oaie* (sheep) + the suffix *-er*. Then, the addition of a determinant to a homonymic word cleared the confusion. The noun *miere* (honey) in some dialects is pronounced *mere*. To clear the confusion, it is pronounced *miere de albine* (bee honey). A good differentiation can be made when we use the plural forms of homonyms in the singular: *cap* (head), with different plural forms: *capi, capete, capuri*; or *cot*, with different plural forms: *coti, coate, coturi*. Romanian is rich in homonymic and polysemous words and also has various means to create utterances that can avoid confusion or ambiguity.

## 3. Conclusions

The number of homonyms, their types and their distribution according to different areas of the vocabulary is different from one language to another. In Romanian, as one could observe, homonymy affects especially the peripheral areas of the vocabulary, which mostly explains the tolerance to this phenomenon. When homonyms start to represent a perturbable phenomenon of the communicational process, the language takes measures by replacing one of them with another word. For example, the noun *fur* was replaced with hoț (thief) due to the coincidence with the first person form of the verb *a fura* (to steal). It is obvious that homonymy, without constituting a decisive factor in the development of the vocabulary, still represents a regulatory element which cannot be neglected when studying the evolution of the lexical and grammatical system of Romanian. Difficulties are most often met when translating words, in our case to a transition language, such as English, and not always one can find the best lexical and grammatical equivalents that follow perfectly the Romanian meaning, which can lead to a major loss in perceiving the contextual reality for the foreign student.

[6] Paula Diaconescu, *Omonimia si polisemia*, PLG, I, p. 142.
[7] Dumitru Gherghina, Maria Gherghina, *et. alii*, *Vocabularul limbii române în școală*, Editura "Didactica Nova", Craiova, 1996, p. 16-18.

**BDD-V4361 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press**
**Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 21:58:50 UTC)**

For the foreign students who study Romanian, "the typical case of an ambiguity (fulfilled on a lexical level through polysemy, homonymy, etc.) that allows the substitution of a predictable interpretation with another one, surprising"[8] is a less productive one.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

***_Dicţionarul explicativ al limbii române_, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, Bucureşti, 1996;
Avram, Mioara, _Mijloace morfologice de diferențiere lexicală în limba română_, în _Studii și cercetări lingvistice_, Tomul IX, nr. 3, București, 1958;
Badea, Simina, _Achieving standardization preserving multilingualism: what can translation do?_, The 20th International Conference "The Knowledge-Based Organization", 12-14 june 2014, "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy Publishing House, Sibiu, 2014;
Béjoint, Henry, Thoiron, Philippe, _Le sens en terminologie_, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, Lyon, 2000;
Bidu-Vrânceanu, Angela, _Structura vocabularului limbii române contemporane. Probleme teoretice şi aplicaţii practice_, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, Bucureşti, 1986;
Bidu-Vrânceanu, Angela, _Limba română contemporană: lexicul_, Editura Humanitas Educaţional, Bucureşti, 2005;
Budeanu, Maria, _Sinonime, Antonime, Omonime, Paronime şi Cuvinte Polisemantice cu o culegere de exerciţii_, Editura „Spiru Haret", Iaşi, 1996;
Constantinescu, Silviu, _Dicţionar de cuvinte polisemantice_, Editura „Rocambole Plus", Bucureşti, 2001;
Ene, Claudia, Săvulescu, Silvia, _et. alii_, _Lexic comun, lexic specializat_, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, Bucureşti, 2000;
Gherghina, Dumitru, Gherghina, Maria, _et. alii_, _Vocabularul limbii române în școală_, Editura "Didactica Nova", Craiova, 1996;
Hristea, Theodor, _Sinteze de limba romana_, Editura Albatros, București, 1984;
Iliescu, Ada, _Gramatica practică a limbii române pentru străini_, Editura Universitaria, Craiova, 2003;
Iordan, Iorgu, _Limba romana contemporana_, București, 1956;
Stati, Sorin, _Omonimia în sistemul morfologic_, în _Probleme de lingvistică generală_, vol. II, Editura Academiei, București, 1960;
Toma, Alice, _Interdisciplinaritate şi terminologie matematică: termeni migratori_, în „Limba română. Structură şi funcţionare" coord. Gabriela Pană Dindelegan, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, Bucureşti, 2005;
Zafiu, Rodica, _Diversitate stilistică în româna actuală_, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, Bucureşti, 2001.

[8] Rodica Zafiu, _Diversitate stilistică în româna actuală_, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, Bucureşti, 2001, p. 258.

**BDD-V4361 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press**
**Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 21:58:50 UTC)**