Homonyms of Art Terms
on the MoMA Official Website

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Abstract

In the study of language, every word has its own meaning, and occasionally the same word has different meanings that can lead to ambiguity and potential misinterpretation. This is especially true in art terms, where certain terminology may only be understood by artists and people with knowledge of art. The research aims to explain art terms sourced from the MoMA official website that fall into the category of homonyms either homographs or homophones, and to explain the differences in meaning of these terms in the context of art and in the general context. The research method uses a qualitative method, with content analysis design. Qualitative Content Analysis in research aims to understand the meaning, theme, or pattern in text data in depth and contextually. It emphasizes understanding the context and nuances of meaning, identifying and categorizing art terms that are included in homonyms and explain their contextual meaning in art and in general meaning. The results of this study indicate that in the art terms sourced from the MoMA official website, there are homonyms, homographs, and homophones. From the 10 data explained, 9 terms were found to be homonyms, 1 term was homograph and no homophones were found. The explanation of the 10 art terms containing homonyms is important because it can help reduce ambiguity in the interpretation of words that have more than one meaning. Therefore, this study contributes to facilitating the understanding of art terms, especially for people who are less familiar with the specific context of art, while avoiding misunderstandings due to differences in meaning.

Keywords: *Art Terms; Homonyms; MoMA Official Website*

Introduction

Homonyms is strongly related to semantics, a field of linguistics that studies the meaning of words. Homonymy is a term with identical spelling and pronunciation but distinct meanings. According to Ullman, homonyms are words with the same spelling or sound but distinct, unconnected meanings. Ambiguity produced by homonyms can be clarified by context (Ullman, 1962). According to Chaer (1995), the meaning relationship in homonyms addresses the issue of diverse meanings for the same thing (Rofiah, 2024). Homonyms are unrelated senses of the same phonological word. Some authors distinguish between homographs, which are senses of the same written word, and homophones, which are senses of the same spoken word. They can be distinguished depending on their syntax and spelling (Saeed, 2011).

Homonyms are also found in art terms. In our daily life, we are often faced with various forms of art, both in visual arts such as painting and sculpture, performing arts such as music and dance, and literary arts such as poetry and prose. Decisions involving these arts can range from choosing a work of art to decorate a home, to admiring a collection in a gallery or museum.   In art, the use of terms often has a very specific meaning that is different from the meaning of the words in daily life. Art terms play an important role in communication between artists, curators, and the general public (Isrow, 2017). However, many of these terms have more than one meaning, both in the context of art and in daily life. This phenomenon creates its own challenges in terms of understanding, especially when the terms are used by the general public who do not have a background in art knowledge.

The phenomena of homonyms in art is not only a linguistic difficulty, but also a significant communication and interpretation issue. Understanding and managing homonyms properly can help enhance communication in the art world and enrich the aesthetic experience for all parties involved. The occurrence of homonyms in art can provide a significant issue for artists, curators, reviewers, and art enthusiasts. Suryana (2015) defines an artist as someone who works on and creates works of art, such as painting, sculpture, acting, dancing, literature, film, and music (Setianik & Siswati, 2020).

According to McTear (in Roche, 2017), miscommunication is the failure to convey all of the information required to accurately interpret a communication partner's message. Homonymy induced miscommunication can impede art appreciation and comprehension. Miscommunication occurs because there is a double meaning in the term of art compared to the general meaning. One word with two meanings can cause ambiguity, which is one of the causes of miscommunication. Ambiguity in communication is the lack of clarity that occurs due to words, combinations of words, or sentences that cause ambiguity in the communication (Suwarna, 2022).

Identification of homonyms in art terms, the source of the art terms is taken from the MoMA Official Website. Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), one of the most famous modern art institutions in the world located in Midtown Manhattan, New York City, United States (*MoMA*, 2024). This study focused on the explain of art terms sourced from the official MoMA website, to identify whether the terms are included in the type of homonyms, either homographs or homophones. In addition, this study explains the contextual meaning of the art terms, by including examples of use so that readers can distinguish whether the word is used as an art term or as a word in general use, by considering the context. With this approach, the study is expected to be able to unravel the ambiguity that may arise due to homonymy in art terms, as well as provide a clearer understanding of how context influences the interpretation of the meaning of these terms.

The previous research from (Ighfir et al., 2018) which analyze "Deviation of Meanings with Homonymy as an Effort to Build Humor in Meme: A Semantic Study" examines how homonymy is utilized to produce humor in memes, as well as patterns of meaning deviation. This descriptive qualitative study collects data through note-taking and analyzes it using referential matching. The study found that homonymy includes core terms, derivatives, foreign words, and slang. Euphemisms, naming, and halting all contribute to meaning departure. Additionally, homophony and homographs are used. There are three types of deviations: explanation text, explanatory images, and images and text together. Images and proper collocations are essential for confusing and surprising readers with secondary meanings.

Then the previous research is from (Risyida et al., 2022) "An Analysis of Homonym Words in English Tongue Twister". This study seeks to identify and define the numerous forms of homonyms present in English tongue twisters. The researchers investigated this phenomenon using qualitative descriptive approaches. Their findings reveal that homonyms frequently appear in tongue twisters because English includes numerous words that sound similar, causing pronunciation challenges for both speakers and listeners.

Although some of the previous studies apply the same homonyms approach, this research fills some of the gaps of existing research. The difference between the research and the two previous studies is in terms of the object of discussion. Sukardi et al. discusses homonymy in memes, and Rysida et al. discusses homonymy in English tongue twisters. While this study discussed homonyms in art terms on the MoMA official website. As well as identifying differences in the context of meaning in art terms and general meaning, by providing example sentences which are then analyzed in context.

Method

This research uses a qualitative method in which qualitative research is a method of in-depth observation to analyze a matter, using various approaches to understand the phenomena that occur(Adlini et al., 2022). The research method uses a qualitative method, with content analysis design. Qualitative Content Analysis in research aims to understand the meaning, theme, or pattern in text data in depth and contextually (Krippendorf, 2004). Qualitative content analysis in this study emphasizes understanding the context and nuances of meaning, identifying and categorizing art terms that are included in homonyms, such as homographs and homophones, and analyzing their contextual meaning in art and in general meaning.

The researcher collected data with qualitative document techniques according to Creswell (2018) where the researcher collect data from written texts published, in this context in the form of art terms that found in MoMA official website. The following are the steps that the researcher took to collect data according to Creswell (2018):

a. At the stage of identifying relevant documents, the researcher opened the internet, specifically Google, to search for art terms.
b. Then at the preparation for data collection stage, the researcher focused on finding the data from MoMA official website, then search and analyze art terms that contain the same word but different meanings.
c. After that, at the document organization stage, make a list of art terms that can be analyzed for meaning.
d. Then in the systematic data collection stage, the researcher opened the dictionary to adjust the meaning in the process of searching for art terms that can contain double meanings.
e. Finally, in the data validation stage, the researcher connected the data found with homonyms theory to ensure that the data collected was appropriate.

The researcher analyzed the data with the stages of analysis according to (Milles et al., 2014) which states that there are three stages in the analysis process, namely data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification. The following are the stages carried out by the researcher:

a. In the data reduction stage, the researcher identifies art terms based on their meaning and context and compare the definition of art terms from MoMA and the dictionary to find differences and multiple meanings and then discard irrelevant data.
b. Then in the data display stage, the researcher presented the data in the form of a table that shows the identification of terms that include homonyms, either homographs or homophones, then narrate the analyzed data to show

how the diversity of interpretations affects the understanding of art terms.

c. Finally, in the conclusion drawing and verification stage, the researcher concludes about the various meanings and their impact on the understanding of art terms.

Results and Discussion

In the study, 10 Art term data containing homonyms were taken. The meaning of the words was taken from the MoMA official website (https://www.moma.org/) and the Cambridge Dictionary. There are examples of sentences to distinguish contextually whether the word in the sentence is included in the meaning of art or general meaning where the general meaning is. The representative sentences are taken from the *Cambridge Dictionary* (2024).

Table 1.   Homonyms of Art Terms

No	Words	Differences in Meaning		Identification of Homonyms
		In Art Terms	**In Dictionary**	
1	Cast	"(verb) To form a material, such as molten metal or plastic, into a particular shape by pouring or pressing into a mold; (noun) something formed in a mold; a mold or impression taken of an object or of printing type."	"The actors in a film, play, or show.''	Homonym
2	Lead	"A soft, malleable, dense metallic element with many different applications and uses, especially in the marking substance in pencils or as a material for sculpture."	"To control a group of people, a country, or situation."	Homograph
3	Perspective	"Technique used to depict volumes and spatial relationships on a flat surface, as in a painted scene that appears to extend into the distance."	"A particular way of considering something."	Homonym
4	Proof	"A print that is not part of the regular numbered edition,	"A fact or piece of information that shows	Homonym

		including examples printed in advance of the edition, such as trial proofs, that are used to assess progress on the image; working proofs that the artist has modified with hand additions; as well as artist's proofs and printer's proofs, which are indistinguishable from the edition and reserved for artist and printer."	that something exists or is true."	
5	Relief	"Figures or forms carved or molded so as to project from a flat surface, as in sculpture, or the apparent projection of such shapes in a painting or drawing. A work of art featuring such a projection; a method of printing in which the image is carried on raised surfaces, such as letterpress."	"A feeling of happiness that something unpleasant has not happened or has ended."	Homonym
6	Tone	"In painting, a color plus gray; the lightness or darkness of a color."	"a quality in the voice that expresses the speaker's feelings or thoughts, often towards the person being spoken to."	Homonym
7	Figurative	"Art retaining strong references to or depictions of the real world and particularly to the human figure."	"(of words and phrases) used not with their basic meaning but with a more imaginative meaning, in order to create a special effect."	Homonym
8	Form	"The shape or structure of an object, figure or structure."	"A paper or set of papers printed with spaces in which answers to questions can be written or information can be	Homonym

			recorded in an organized way."	
9	Multiple	"A term referring to small-scale, three-dimensional works of art conceived and produced in relatively large editions, and often issued by the same individuals or organizations that publish prints."	"Very many of the same type, or of different types."	Homonym
10	Score	"A written notation of a musical or dance composition, which allows the work to be performed at a later date or by another performer. Composers interested in incorporating non-traditional sounds into their music and choreographers experimenting with different kinds of movement invented new notational symbols for their scores, which could be read by non-specialists or artists from other disciplines. Scores are as varied as the artists who make them and can feature, for example, magazine and newspaper clippings, drawings, or color-coded stage directions."	"To win or get a point, goal, etc. In a competition, sport, or game."	Homonym

Each of representative data provided in the table 1, will then be analyzed to confirm the meaning differences.

Datum 1 "Cast"

The pronunciation is /kɑːst/ (same for both meanings), and is also a homonym. In art, it means pouring material into a mold; in a general context, it can mean an actor in a film or play. The data shows the different meanings of the word "cast". This proves that the word "cast" has multiple meanings. This can make people who do not understand art misunderstand and miscommunicate when they hear and see the word. That is why we have to look at the context.

For example, in the sentence "He was often cast as the villain." In the sentence, looking at the context, the word "cast" refers to the dictionary meaning, reinforced by "as the villain". So, the word "cast" in the sentence is not an art term.

Datum 2 "Lead"

Having different pronunciations between the meaning in art and the general meaning. The pronunciation is /liːd/ for the general meaning and /lɛd/ for the art meaning. These two different meanings have different pronunciations, so this term is a homograph. The data shows the different meanings of the word "lead". This proves that the word "lead" has two meanings. This can make people who do not understand art misunderstand and miscommunicate when they hear and see the word. That is why we have to look at the context.

For example, in the sentence "I've asked Gemma to lead the discussion." Analyze the sentence in the context of the activity. The word "lead" refers to the dictionary meaning, because it is reinforced by the word "discussion" and there is also a person whose name is "Gemma". So, it refers to Gemma being asked to lead. So, in this sentence, the word "lead" is not an art term.

Datum 3 "Perspective"

The pronunciation is /pəˈspɛktɪv/ (same for both meanings), and is also a homonym. In art, it means the technique of depicting depth; in a general context, it means point of view. The data shows the different meanings of the word "perspective".   This proves that the word "perspective" has two meanings. This can make people who do not understand art misunderstand and miscommunicate when they hear and see the word. That is why we have to look at the context.

For example, in the sentence "I come now to what is perhaps a more serious problem from a philosophical perspective." Analyze the sentence and the word "perspective" refers to the dictionary. It is reinforced by the word "philosophical". So, in this sentence, the word "perspective" is not an art term.

Datum 4 "Proof"

The pronunciation is /pruːf/ (same for both meanings), and is also a homonym. In art, it means preliminary prints or test prints to assess results before full production; in a general context, it can mean an evidence or confirmation of something. The data shows the different meanings of the word "proof". This proves that the word "proof" has multiple meanings. This can make people who do not understand art misunderstand and miscommunicate when they hear and see the word. That is why we have to look at the context.

For example, in the sentence "The proof of the next result is straightforward and omitted." In the sentence, looking at the context, the word "proof" refers to the dictionary meaning, reinforced by "next result". So, the word "proof" in the sentence is not an art term.

Datum 5 "Relief"

The pronunciation is /rɪˈliːf/ (same for both meanings), and is also a homonym. In art, it means a sculpture technique that produces objects that protrude from the surface; in a general context, it can mean Feeling of relief or form of help. The data shows the different meanings of the word "relief". This proves that the word "relief" has multiple meanings. This can make people who do not understand art misunderstand and miscommunicate when they hear and see the word. That is why we have to look at the context.

For example, in the sentence We both heaved a sigh of relief when she left. In the sentence, looking at the context, the word "relief" refers to the dictionary meaning, reinforced by "heaved a sigh of". So, the word "relief" in the sentence is not an art term.

Datum 6 "Tone"

The pronunciation is /toʊn/ (same for both meanings), and is also a homonym. In art, it means the brightness or darkness of a color. In general context, it can mean tone or character in speaking. The data shows the different meanings of the word "tone". This proves that the word "tone" has multiple meanings. This can make people who do not understand art misunderstand and miscommunicate when they hear and see the word. That is why we have to look at the context.

For example, in the sentence "When he spoke his tone was accusatory." In the sentence, looking at the context, the word "tone" refers to the dictionary meaning, reinforced by "he spoke". So, the word "tone" in the sentence is not an art term.

Datum 7 "Figurative"

The pronunciation is /fɪˈgjʊərətɪv/ (same for both meanings), and is also a homonym. In art, it means works that reflect recognizable, non-abstract forms such as humans, animals, or nature. In a general context, it can mean figuratively or symbolically, not literally. The data shows the different meanings of the word "figurative". This proves that the word "figurative" has multiple meanings. This can make people who do not understand art misunderstand and miscommunicate when they hear and see the word. That is why we have to look at the context.

For example, in the sentence "Casting aside figurative painting, the visual artists tended to embrace installation art and irony." In the sentence, looking at the context, the word "figurative" refers to the art meaning, reinforced by "painting". So, the word "figurative" in the sentence is an art term.

Datum 8 "Form"

The pronunciation is /fɔːrm/ (same for both meanings), and is also a homonym. In art, it means works three-dimensional forms in artwork. In a general context, it can mean format or paper form. The data shows the different meanings of the word "form". This proves that the word "form" has multiple meanings. This can make people who do not understand art misunderstand and miscommunicate when they hear and see the word. That is why we have to look at the context.

For example, in the sentence "Please fill in the form with black ink." In the sentence, looking at the context, the word "form" refers to the dictionary meaning, reinforced by "fill". So, the word "form" in the sentence is not an art term.

Datum 9 "Multiple"

The pronunciation is /ˈmʌltɪpəl/ (same for both meanings), and is also a homonym. In art, it means a small-scale three-dimensional work of art created and made in huge quantities, and frequently published by the same person or group that issued the print. In a general context, it can mean more than one or in large quantities. The data shows the different meanings of the word "multiple". This proves that the word "multiple" has double meanings. This can make people who do not understand art misunderstand and miscommunicate when they hear and see the word. That is why we have to look at the context.

For example, in the sentence "She sustained multiple injuries in the accident." In the sentence, looking at the context, the word "multiple" refers to the dictionary meaning, reinforced by "injuries". So, the word "multiple" in the sentence is not an art term.

Datum 10 "Score"

The pronunciation is /skɔːr/ (same for both meanings), and is also a homonym. In art, it means lines or cutting marks on the material or sheet musice; in a general context, it can mean the result or value obtained in a test or game. The data shows the different meanings of the word "score". This proves that the word "score" has multiple meanings. This can make people who do not understand art misunderstand and miscommunicate when they hear and see the word. That is why we have to look at the context.

For example, in the sentence "Rodgers wrote the score for/of/to "Oklahoma!". In the sentence, looking at the context, the word "score" refers to the art meaning, reinforced by "for/of/to "Oklahoma!". So, the word "score" in the sentence is an art term.

Conclusion

This study shows that art terms also contain homonyms, both homographs and homophones. In this study, from the ten data described, nine homonyms, one homograph and no homophones were found. Research on homonyms in art terms sourced from the MoMA official website, especially those that are homonyms, can cause ambiguity of meaning for visitors who do not have an art background. By using Ullmann's Homonymy Theory, it was found that context plays an important role in determining the meaning of the term. The identified homonym art terms have quite significant differences in meaning between the art context and the general context, which has the potential to cause misunderstanding because it contains ambiguity.

This finding emphasizes the importance of providing a more detailed context in the description of artworks on digital platforms, such as the MoMA official website, to reduce ambiguity and clarify the meaning of technical terms for people who are less familiar with art. This study provides a practical contribution in the fields of linguistics and art in improving the quality of digital communication, so that people who do not have knowledge of art can understand artworks better and reduce the potential for confusion due to homonym art terms.

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