



Groping an indulgent on English Homographs among Lecturers of Semantics in Tanzania's Universities

Chipanda Simon

Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial University of Tanzania

Article History

Received: 08.08.2023

Revised: 16.08.2023

Accepted: 21.08.2023

Published: 23.08.2023

Keywords

English

Homographs

Homonyms

Homophones

How to cite:

Simon, C. (2023). Groping an indulgent on English Homographs among Lecturers of Semantics in Tanzania's Universities. *Journal of Linguistics, Literary and Communication Studies*, 2(2), 1-10.

Copyright © 2023



Abstract

This paper sets out to examine the understanding of English homographs by Lecturers of Semantics in Tanzania's Universities. Homographs are words with the same spelling but different pronunciations and semantics scope. The paper demonstrates that most of the semantics lecturers of Tanzania confuse English homographs with non-English homographs. For instance, 75% of lecturers of semantics acknowledge that the lexeme bank and present are English homographs. Such perception is incomplete which has motivated the present study to examine groping an indulgence on homographs to instructors. The study qualitatively applied the interpretive paradigm to five Tanzania Universities. Documentary reviews and questionnaires were the instruments of data collection. The analysis was done by using Referential Theory which articulates the context of the situation in which the lexeme is articulated and in which the meaning reflects that which is being articulated. It was found that most of the Lecturers of semantics in Tanzania's Universities confuse English homographs with non-homographic words and that what they instruct in their lectures is incomplete; thus, words that are not English homographs are acknowledged as English homographs. Moreover, some lecturers of semantics confuse stress on the syllable with homographic words; others do not know the qualification of a certain word to be homograph. It was concluded that Lecturers of semantics in Tanzania's Universities should admit continuous reading and training on any matter of facts pertinent to their area of specialization. This would make them competent in the content they lecture in classes.

Introduction

The issue of sense relations, particularly in English homographic words, has attracted linguists' attention (cf. Hemchua & Schmitt, 2006; Ibrahim, 2018; Alghamdi, 2021; Riemer, 2010). English homographs have been confusing some scholars, educational instructors or lecturers. Such confusion has made to be instructed differently in different Universities and Tanzania in particular. Some semantic writers associate homographs with homophones or homonyms; for instance, Suparno (1994, p. 24) notes that homophones and homographs are words with similar pronunciation and spelling, but the meanings are different.



With this understanding, the literal meaning of the two lexemes differs (Adha and Widyaningtyas, 2017), who presented that Homographs have the "same writing" and Homophones literally "same sound". In this regard, saying the "same writing" differs from the "same sound" in the context of morph phonological analysis. A different idea is substantiated by Safataj and Amiryousefi (2016, p. 2093) as they argue that Homographs (homo=same; graph=spelling) are also a kind of homonyms that are spelt the same but different in meaning. They may or may not be pronounced in the same way. They draw examples as in the English word *Bank*, of which the current analysis deputed. Thus, confusion can be for interpreters and not for lexemes themselves. A clear and deep investigation is needed for clarity to instructors of English semantics as the current study promises to operate.

Through piloting, it is observed that homographic lexemes are not known or familiar among English language instructors. For instance, 6 of 8 semantics lecturers from five (5) universities, equal to Seventy-seven per cent (75%), acknowledge that the lexeme present ((present (N) and present (V)) is homographic words, something which doubtful. This understanding shows that there is a problem. As such, it is motivated by the incomplete of which its solution is to understand it better (Booth et al., 2003). From this base, studies on the ability to understand homographs desires through two study objectives: first, examining the ability of Lecturers of Semantics in Tanzania's Universities in identifying homographic lexemes, and analysis elucidation for Tanzanian Instructors to understand homographs.

However, English homographs have attracted interesting studies in linguistics semantics. This is likely due to the nature of its ambiguity or the ability of either instructors or learners to grasp its semantics and pragmatic contents. Hemchua and Schmitt (2006) suggest that "when inappropriate lexical choices are made (lexical errors), this can lead directly to a misunderstanding of the message, or at least increase the burden of interpreting the text.". This means that when students are instructed wrongly by instructors, they increase the burden of misinterpretations among their instructors. This may be quenched by nothing but semantics lecturers' readiness to rehabilitate their understandings. The same challenges appear in Ibrahim's (2018) research finding 'Investigated on the Problems that Result of Using Homophones and Homographs among Students of the College of Languages.

Along with other things, he found that lexemes like *fine*, *lead*, and *second* mention, just but a few, are homographs in the English language (2018, p. 25-30). This triggers the current study because lexemes other than lead do not behave as English homographs. This shows that either the students or instructors may have contributed to the confusion of understanding homographs. Thus, such a topic needs reanalysis.

Alghamdi (2021), in his study titled 'The Challenges of Homographs among English Foreign Language Learners of the College of Foreign Languages. He stressed that homographs are transplanted into the brain to enrich the mental lexicon and raise comprehension. He quoted examples from Geis and Winogard (1974), who calculated test-retest reliabilities for single associations to homographs. The results showed that associations with the same meanings occurred 83% of the time. Thus, the results of these two studies are, however, less than decisive. The current study investigates the knowledge of college or University instructors as the pass-rock to misleading learners in pertinent to homographic lexemes.

Safataj and Amiryousefi (2016) described the terms homograph, homophone and homonym, but they associated homonym to cover the rest; they concluded that a homonym as each of the two or more words having the same spelling and/or pronunciation or different spelling and/or pronunciation but different meaning and origins. To them the lexeme as in *Bank* (the side of the river/place to keep money) was given as example of homograph. It must be noted that homographic lexemes have reference meaning, this means that the meaning of the first articulated differs from the



second meaning, which is articulated unlike the former. This attracts the study's referential tool of analysis.

In other words, the study uses *Referential Theory*, where meaning is encoded as the relationship between words and objects. The theory was propounded by Greek philosophers, as in Bloomfield, Ogden, and Richard (1924), quoted in McElvenny (2013), and Ramadan & Ababneh (2013, p. 309-309). These language philosophers articulate that there is a relationship between words and objects. In other words, to them, the paramount approach of indicating the meaning of a word is to refer to the object represented by that word. The theory calls upon the context of the situation. The theory does not limit itself to concrete words as in the *table* but even to abstract words such as ambition and happiness, to mention just a few. Thus, the context in which the lexeme is articulated is the context in which the meaning differs from one way of articulation. This can relate to the idea of Palmer (1981) as he used reference in the sense of the non-linguistic world of objects and experiences. Thus, the word reference is used for the whole network of the contexts of situations in which we live. In other words, Bloomfield and Palmer focus on the context of situations. For this study, I use the context of the situation to mean different pronunciations of lexemes that trigger different meanings. This is the key manoeuvre in homographic lexemes of the current study.

Methodology

The study applied one of the interpretivism paradigms known as 'phenomenology', which assumes understanding reality through peoples' experiences and interaction with the facts from the natural settings. The paradigm believes that 'the current understandings have to be *bracketed* to the best of our ability to allow phenomena to speak for themselves, unadulterated by preconceptions (Gray, 2014, p. 24). From this base, the current study used this paradigm for English Homographs to remain as they are apart from the way lecturers or instructors speak for them.

The study used a mixed research approach; thus, quantitative and qualitative approaches were used. The former refers to the use of numbers and other statistical calculations as well as graphs for data presentation; the latter refers to the use of words, phrases, clauses and sentences, which in this study were used for complementing statistical data presentations. The study used a case study design in which five (5) Tanzanian Universities in which semantics is taught were picked for data collection, namely Saint Augustine University of Tanzania, Tumaini University of Dar es Salaam College, Tumaini University, Stella Maris Mtwara University College and Mbeya University of Science and Technology of which one instructor from each University was picked purposively reasoning that he or she instructs English Semantics course.

The study used two data collection instruments: documentary review and questionnaires. The former was used in which homographic secondary sources were critically studied to determine the authenticity of the data available homographic data which sometimes are cited or acknowledged by semantic lecturers in their lectures. The latter was used in the sense that the researcher designed a task (questionnaires) particularly to determine the ability of English semantic lecturers to distinguish the homographic and non-homographic lexemes (semantic and syntactic functions of English homographs) within the structural sentences constructed. It must be noted that the non-English homographic words were used to see whether semantic lecturers may identify and distinguish between homographic and non-homographic words.

In this task, 24 sentences were constructed and given to instructors to identify English homographic and non-homographic sentences and explain why a certain word is a homograph or not. The study analysed data using a quantitative and qualitative approach; thus, Microsoft Excel was used for statistical per cent calculations. It presented them in graphs as in simple bar or line and grouped bar or line graphs. Sometimes, where applicable, a single quotation was picked for evidence from a



purposely selected University semantics lecturer. This was complimented by brief explanations of words, phrases, clauses or sentences to improve the point.

Discussion of the findings

This section discusses the findings from the field and other sources. The study had two objectives: to examine the Lecturers' ability of Semantics to identify homographic lexemes and to analyse elucidation for Tanzanian semantic lecturers to understand homographs. In arriving at answers to these objectives, questionnaires and documentary studies were instruments for gathering answers. Here, semantic lecturers were given twelve (12) lexemes structured into 24 sentences and were directed to tick if the structure contained homographs or not together with a reason for being homographic or non-homographic English word(s). This aims to determine the ability of these lecturers of semantics in Tanzania's Universities and the content they lecture in their semantic lecture classes.

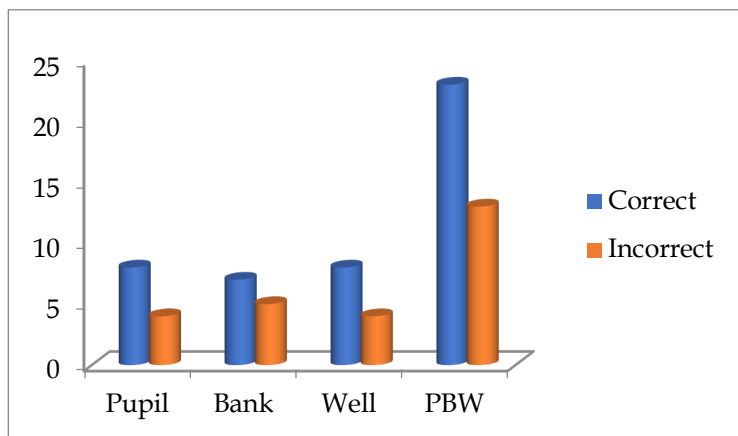
Sentences with Homonyms

These were English lexemes that English University instructors tested to see if they confuse homographs with non-homographic lexemes. Words like 'Bank', 'well' and 'pupil' were selected for the study, though they are not homographs. A wonder comes that most instruct them as homographic English words in classes. Consider the following tested structures to lecturers of semantics in 1 below:

1. (a) He went to the river**bank**
- (b) My money is from NBC **bank**
- (c) Her eyes **pupil** is red
- (d) The **pupil** is in standard three
- (e) He did **well**
- (f) The **well** was full of water

Lecturers were instructed to read the above structures and tick whether the bolded words are homographic. The following (Cf, figure1) is the result of twelve (12) Lecturers of Semantics in Tanzania's Universities in pertinent to their understanding of English homographs:

Figure 1: Homographic identification



From Figure 1 above, 8(67%) accepted that the lexemes 'Pupil' and 'well' are English lexemes, and 4(33%) disagreed. On top of that, 7(58%) of the instructors selected that the lexeme 'Bank' is an English homograph, and 5(42%) disagreed. Generally, 23(64%) selected Bank, pupil and well henceforth (BPW) as homographic words, and 13(36%) selected them as non-homographic words. Under this level of unknowing, the confusion of homographs with homonyms is observed in Ibrahim (2008, pp.



25-29), where he accepts words like *well, sow, fine, evening, second, does and lead and well* as English homographs, something which is wrong. Only 'lead' is accepted as an English homograph word. The same line of thinking is found in Safataji and Amiryousefi (2016), who assumed that the lexeme *Bank* is homograph as stated elsewhere in this paper; however, the word *Bank* is not homograph in linguistics semantics. Rather, it is a homonym. Therefore, English instructors need more effort to read to avoid confusion when lecturing in classes.

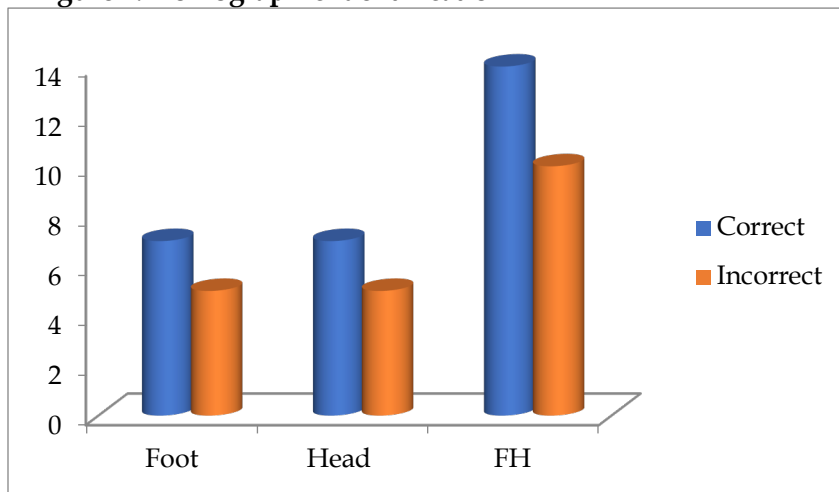
Sentences with Polysemy

Polysemy is one where a word has several very closely related senses. In other words, a native speaker of the language has clear intuitions that the different senses somehow relate to each other (James et al., 2007, p. 130). This was another class of semantic English lexemes tested in the study. The samples of the selected lexemes were 'foot' and 'head' as it is indicated in data 2 below:

2. (a) His **foot** is weak nowadays
- (b) She went to the **foot** of the mountain
- (c) His **head** is big nowadays
- (d) His **headmaster** is coming soon

From 2 data above, the following figure shows the result of 12 university English instructors.

Figure 2: Homographic identification



The figure above revealed that 7(58%) of the Lecturers of Semantics in Tanzania's Universities selected 'foot' and 'head' as English homographs, and 5(42%) disagreed. Therefore, 14(58%) of 24 accepted that the lexemes 'Foot' and 'well' henceforth (FH) are English lexemes, and 10(42%) disagreed. On top of that, 5(42%) selected that the lexeme 'head' is homograph and 7(58%) disagreed.

The three English words (Cf. 2) are not homographic because they have the same spelling and are pronounced equally, each with a different meaning. Thus, 'Bank', 'pupil,' and 'well' are homonyms – words with the same spellings and pronunciation but different meanings, while 'head' and 'foot' are polysemes. Polysemy also contrasts with homonymy (Greek 'same name'), where a single phonological form possesses unrelated meanings (Riemer, 2010, p. 161). Therefore, semantic lecturers confuse homographic with non-homographic English words, this trigger passing inaccurate content to the students. The study specifically noted response below from one of the University semantic lecturer. The questionnaire demanded to write Y for true and N for untrue of homographic. See the below table's responses by Lecturer one among the English instructors acronymised as lecturer one hence forth (Lect 1):



Table 1: Response from Lect 1

well	bank	wind	close	present	lead	foot	head	Pupil	Yes	export	see
Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

The table in 1 above: N=No (the lexeme is not homographic) and Y=Yes (the lexeme is homographic one). Under the level of observation, it indicates that Lect1's ability to understand of English homographs is very low. Among the 12 English lexemes, 10 of them are homographs except 2. Thus, 83% of the tabled words are homographs, according to him, and 17% are not homographs. This informs us that what is happening in some Tanzanian Universities pertinent to academics needs an eye-opener for truth. This will help trainees and trainers house realities of homographic English words and linguistics (English) topics rather than cheating themselves.

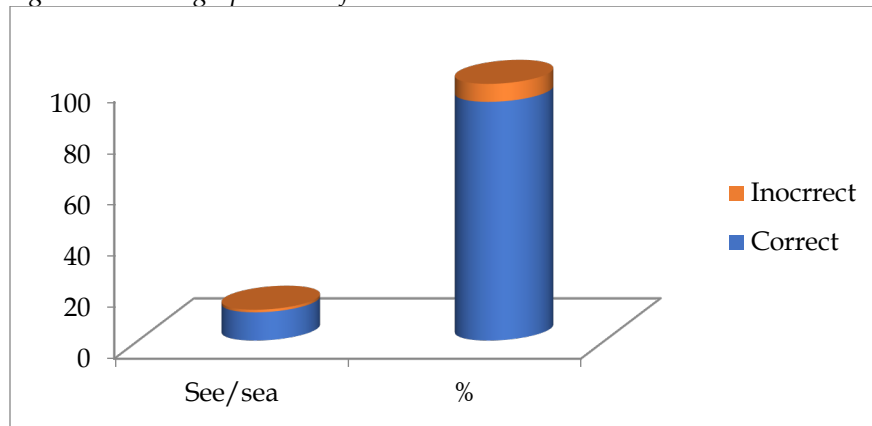
Sentences with Homophones

These words have different spelling and meaning but have the same pronunciation. The pair words 'see' and 'sea' were tested in the English sentences as indicated in data 3 below:

3. (a) She navigated well in the **sea**
- (b) Juma and Neema always **see** clearly

Regarding the sentence above, most instructors detected that 'see' and 'sea' are not homographic words. See in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3: 'Homographs identification'



It was observed that 11 (93%) of the instructors agreed that words 'sea' and 'see' are not English homographic words and that 7% agreed that are homographic lexemes.

Sentences with Intonated words

The lexeme *Yes* was among the words that were tested to University instructors to judge if it is homograph or not. See the structures in which these words were structures

4. (a) Gise said **'yes**, it is a true fact
- (b) Manka said **yes!** It is a fantastic goal

The structure in 4 contains a non-homographic sense, but among twelve semantic lecturers, some picked it as homograph in English, pondering weak reason; see more in Figure 5 below:



Figure 3: 'Homographs identification'

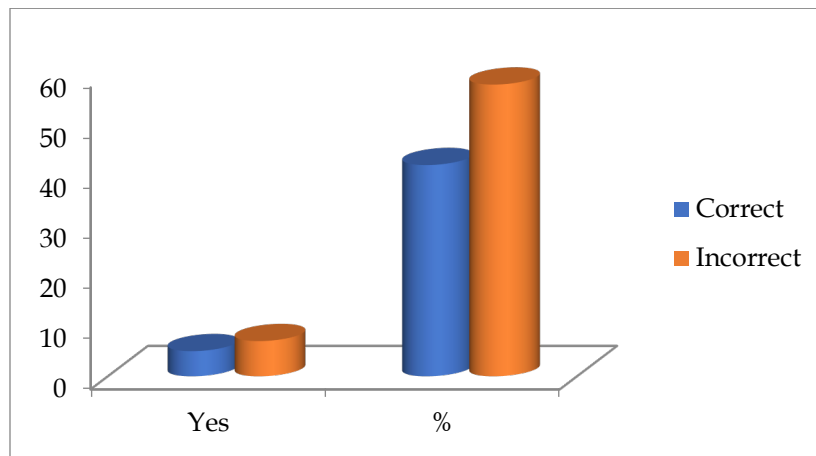


Figure 3 above indicates that 7(58%) semantic lecturers picked a non-homographic structure. While this is true, 5(42%) agreed that such a structure is an English homograph. In other words, 42% of semantic lecturers lecture incomplete knowledge to thousands of university and high-learning students.

Sentences with Homographic words

These were among the English words tested by instructors to see if they could correctly identify them as homographs. These are **wind**, **close** and **lead**. These are English homographic words; they were selected purposively to see if University instructors instruct them as homographs or not. Look at the structures that were tested in 5 below:

5. (a) The Northern **wind** brows quickly
- (b) Mr. John's clocks **wind** up well
- (c) They **close** the door
- (d) He is **close** to her girlfriend
- (e) They **lead** the meeting well
- (f) She got a good **lead** of minerals

The results show that some Lecturers of Semantics in Tanzania's Universities picked the bolded words and the way they are used in the structures as not homographs and vice versa. Consider the following in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Homographs identification

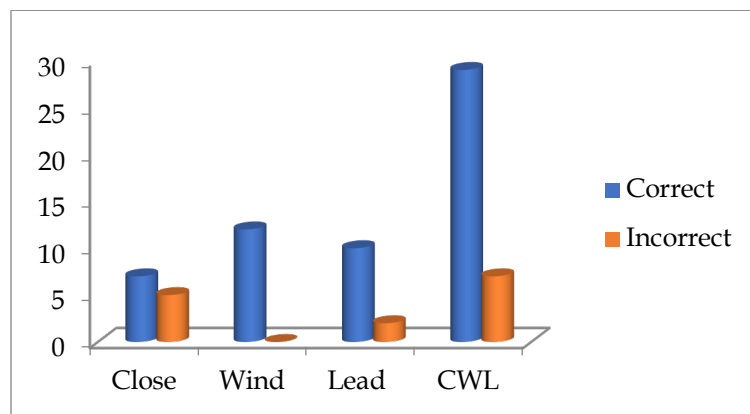


Figure 4 shows that some instructors disagreed that these words were homographs, and some agreed that they were English homographs except for the lexeme 'lead', where all accepted homographic English words. With this regard, it was observed that 5(42%) of the instructors did not accept that the lexeme 'close' is homograph, while 7(58) selected it as homograph. This is different from the word 'lead' whereby 10(83%) accepted it as a homographic English word, and 2(17%) did not accept it as being a homographic word. However, 47% agreed that the three English lexemes, namely: close, lead, wind henceforth (CWL), are homographs, and vice versa, 53% of the instructors.

This result pertinent to the lexeme 'lead' contradicts the study conducted on undergraduate students from Sudan University 'on the Problems that Result of Using Homophones and Homographs among Students of the College of Languages' (Ibrahim, 2018, p. 29). It was observed that 67% of the Undergraduate students failed to judge the use of the word leads as a homographic word against 33% who came to know its use. In this regard, students memorise what has been instructed by their instructors in classes. Moreover, CWL are English homographs because they are words with the same spelling but different pronunciations or articulation and meaning. Consider the data in 6 below:

6. (a) Wind [wɪnd]N and wind [waɪnd]V
- (b) Lead [li:d] V and lead [led] N
- (c) Close [cləʊs] Adv and close [cləʊz]V

The data in 6 shows that close wind and lead henceforth (CWL) are homographic English words. Thus, they have the same spellings but possess different pronunciations and meanings. Lecturers of Semantics in Tanzania's Universities are argued to make extensive and critical reading techniques for cheating avoidance when instructing students. It must be noted that University students note whomever the lectures instruct following the fact that examinations are constructed regarding what has been instructed in classes, hence will make them grasp wrong perceptions not only to homographic issues but also to other related English topics.

Sentences with Stressed words

The English words 'Present' and 'export' received more attention for being selected as homographic words. These words are not homographic English lexeme and that they have no connection with homographic words. The structures in 8, which is complemented with figure 7 are mostly judged containing homographic words:

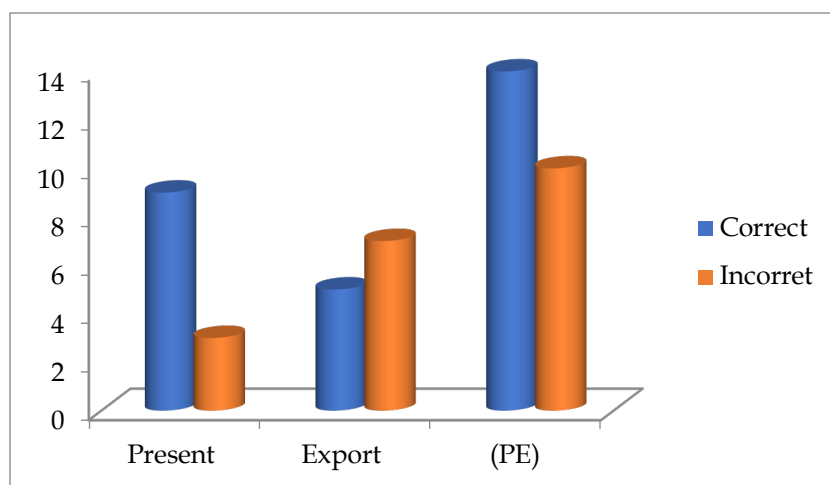
7. (a) They went to **present** their topics
- (b) He is **present** now at the meeting



- (c) Juma's **export** has come on time
- (d) He went to **export** his belongings

In these structures, most semantics lecturers of Tanzania's Universities agreed that the bolded words and the way they have been used are English homographs, and others did not agree according to their ability and knowledge of homographic English words. Let us see more in figure 5 below:

Figure 5: Homograph identification



It is revealed that 75% of the Lecturers of Semantics in Tanzania's Universities agreed that the word 'present' is a homographic. While this is true according to their understanding, 15% of instructors selected it as not a homographic English word. Also, 58% agreed that 'export' is a homograph lexeme, while 42% said it is not. Generally, 14(58%) accepted that present and export henceforth (PE) are English homographic lexemes and vice versa in 10(42%). Thus, this shows that instructors cannot understand and use English homographic lexeme, which facilitates wrong instruction to their students. The same confusion is observed in Nordquist (2019), who also confuses homographs from non-homographic English words, e.g. Conduct (Noun) and Conduct (Verb) are accepted by Richard as English homographs. However, the two English words (Cf, present, export and conduct) are not homographs; their meaning is triggered by stress shifts in English other than spelling and articulation differences encoded in homographic English words.

Conclusion

The paper has discussed the ability of Lecturers of Semantics in Tanzania's Universities to understand homographic English words. It is shown that some semantics lecturers still have problems understanding homographic and non-homographic English words. Some of them lecture incomplete knowledge of homographic English lexemes to undergraduate students, which is not audible in academics. However, lecturers should be committed to teaching professionals in such a way that they read day and night. In academics, a good graduate does not graduate'. Thus, in-service training should be done often to semantics lecturers who lecture semantics in English. Thus, teachers should be qualified to lecture semantics, homophones, and homographic words.



References

- Adha, A.Y., & Ayu, W. (2017). *Students' Error in Lexical Meaning in communication through conversation in the classroom: Journal of Atlantis Press, 104 (2), 442-444.*
- Alghamdi, L. (2021). The Challenges of Homographs among EFL Learners of the College of Foreign Languages. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 3(12), 1-8.* <https://doi.org/10.32996/jeltal.2021.3.12.1>
- Booth, C.W., G.G. Colomb., & Williams, M. J. (2003). *The craft of research* (2ndEd). The University of Chicago Press.
- Ibrahim, M. A. (2008). Investigating the Problems that Result of Using Homophones and Homographs among Students of the College of Languages [Unpublished Master's thesis]. Sudan University of Science and Technology.
- Geis, M. F., and Winograd, E. (2013). Norms of semantic encoding variability for fifty homographs. *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society, 3(6), 429-431.*
- Gray, D. E. (2014). *Doing research in the real world.* SAGE.
- Hemchua, S., & Schmitt, S. (2006). An analysis of Lexical errors in the English compositions of Thai learners. *Prospect, 21 (3) 3-25.*
- Hurford, J. R., Heasley, B., & Smith, B.M. (2007). *Semantics: A course book.* Cambridge University Press.
- McElvenny, J. (2013). Ogden and Richards' the Meaning of Meaning and early analytic philosophy. *Language Sciences, 41, 212-221.* (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2013.10.001>)
- Nordquist, R. (2019). Definition and Examples of Ambiguity. <https://www.thoughtco.com/ambiguitylanguage-1692388>
- Palmer, F. (1981). *Semantics.* Cambridge University Press.
- Ramadan, M. S., & Taleb, I. (2013). Theories of Semantics: Merits and Limitation. *Arab World English Journal, 4(3), 308-316.*
- Riemer, N. (2010), *Introducing Semantics.* Cambridge University Press.
- Safataji, M., & Amiryousefi, M. (2016). Effect of Homonymous set of words instruction on vocabulary development and retention of young female elementary learners in Iranian EFL context through metalinguistics awareness. *Journal of Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 6(11), 209-2101.*
- Suparno, N. O. (1994). *Linguistik Umum.* Debdikbud.