

Did I hear that correctly?

Written by gallupsun
Friday, 21 April 2023 10:33

I've written before about mondegreens — music lyrics people mishear. Many of you mistake Elton John's Tiny Dancer line as "Hold me closer, Tony Danza." Today's column is along those lines.

Now that you're refreshed on mondegreens, I'm sure you're also aware of homophones, two or more words that sound the same but have different meanings and spellings. Examples include peace/piece and whole/hole.

With these in mind, you're all set for today's topic, oronyms. This sounds like a term for different names of gold. In fact, oronym is a recently-coined term by author Gyles Brandreth.

Brandreth, who is famous for being a past European Monopoly champion and president of the Association of British Scrabble Players, is also a witty linguist. He came up with the term "oronym" in his 1980 book, *The Joy of Lex*.

Oronyms, which are also known as continonyms or sliceonyms, are phrases or sentences that

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sound the same but are spelled differently. The difference between oronyms and homophones is that oronyms almost always cause confusion and lead to misunderstandings. Let's get into some examples, shall we?

When it comes to my nine-year-old son, he has seasonal spring allergies, and he fancies himself an expert on many subjects. I could rightly say, "You'll be amazed by the stuffy nose." However, if I want to declare him a harbinger of facts, I could also say, "You'll be amazed by the stuff he knows."

The two sentences are true, and they sound identical. But their meanings are different.

Here are two similar-sounding sentences that have incredibly different meanings. Consider "The drunk man fell into oblivion." Now think about "The drunk man fell into a Bolivian." While the drunk man has negative consequences for his drinking habit, I'm not sure which I'd rather fall into — a Bolivian or oblivion.

Depending on how much of a Star Wars fan you are, you'd be upset if you got these two sentences confused: would you rather hear, "You just won a new toy Yoda" or, "You just won a new Toyota"? I'll take the car, thank you very much.

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Oronyms pass the Word and Google Doc spelling reviewers. So if you wrote, “Eye have a spelling chequer,” you’d find no red lines underneath the words.

Probably the worst oronym to confuse is “her ear” and “her rear.” Although both are located on her body, they definitely serve different purposes. That example was for my third grader, so I apologize if it offended your refined and dignified sense of humor.

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