

A young man with glasses and a grey beanie is shown in profile, looking down at a red string he is holding. The string is looped around his fingers and is attached to two green circular objects. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with blue and white elements.

# Stories of Words: *Nym* Word Groups

By: Elfrieda H. Hiebert  
& Wendy Svec





A retronym is a word for an object that has been renamed because a newer version of that object has been created.

© 2017 TextProject, Inc. Some rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-937889-20-3



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

“TextProject” and the TextProject logo are trademarks of TextProject, Inc.

Cover photo ©2010 by Thomas Hawk in Flickr. CC BY-NC 2.0. Used under license.

# Contents

Learning About Words .....	4
Chapter 1: Outside Inside .....	6
Chapter 2: What's Your Demyonym? .....	8
Chapter 3: Metonym Short Cuts .....	12
Chapter 4: "C" for Capitynoms .....	15
Chapter 5: The Retro(nym) Look .....	17
Our Changing Language.....	19
Glossary.....	20
Think About It.....	21



Groups can be known by their demonyms, or group names.

# Learning About Words

One way to learn about things is to put them into groups with something in common. For example, you can group markers by separating them by color. Words can be put into groups, too.

Some of these groups you learn about in school. When you say *bear* and *bare* aloud, they sound the same. The meanings of these words, however, are not the same. A bear is a large animal. To be bare means to be “not covered.” *Bear* and *bare* are examples of a group of words called **homonyms**—words that sound the same but have different meanings.

You may not know the name of other groups of words but you may still use them everyday. For example, when you say *yo-yo* or *tutu* to someone, you are using a **tautonym**. Tautonyms are words with a repeated syllable. Many groups of words end with the suffix *-nym*, which means “name” in Greek.



The word *tutu* is a tautonym. It has a repeated syllable.



Names for groups of words often have two parts. The first part of the word describes the kind of group. Take the *syn-* in the word *synonym*; it means “together with.” This is why words with similar meanings are placed in the group called **synonyms**. The word *pretty* is a synonym for the word *beautiful*. *Big* and *little* are examples of **antonyms**, which are words with opposite meanings.

In this book, you’ll learn about interesting groups of words. By knowing about the group, you can expand your vocabulary and knowledge about words. Words are labels for things and ideas. It makes sense that we have words to label groups of words, too.



Synonyms are words with similar meanings, such as *spotted* and *polka dot*.



Antonyms show opposites, such as *big* and *little*.

# 1

## Outside Inside

---

The words *exoskeleton* and *exoplanet* share the prefix *exo-*, which means “outside.” An *exoskeleton* is an outside shell that supports and protects an animal’s body, such as the shell of a crab. An *exoplanet* is a planet that is located outside of our solar system.

If *exo-* means “outside,” then an *exonym* must have something to do with being outside. An **exonym** is the name given to a place in a language spoken by people who live *outside* that place. For example, Japan is one name for a country off the coast of Asia. It is the name that English-speaking people gave to it.

The opposite of exonym is endonym. The prefix *endo-* means “within.” An **endonym** is the name of a place in the language spoken by the people who live within that place. The people who live *within* Japan call it Nippon. The name *Nippon* means “from the sun” or “from the Land of the Rising Sun.” Japan is an exonym,

and Nippon is an endonym.



Nippon and Japan are both names for the same country.

Why is there a difference between English and Japanese words for Japan? When European explorers arrived in new places, they translated the names of the people and lands that they encountered into their own languages. Eventually, the new word sounded similar but wasn't the same as the original name that the people gave themselves.

Countries are not the only kinds of places with exonyms. The city of London, for example, is the capital of the United Kingdom. People who speak French call it *Londres*. *Londres* is an exonym.



Tourists pose in telephone booths in London—or *Londres*, if you are speaking French.



# 2

## What's Your Demonym?

Do you live in a large city like Boston or New York? If so, then have you ever been called a Bostonian or a New Yorker? The words *Bostonian* and *New Yorker* are examples of a group of words called **demonyms**. The prefix *demo-* comes from the Greek language for “people.” This means that demonyms are names for groups of people.

Sometimes a demonym is the same word as the word for the language spoken in a place. The main language of people living in Korea is Korean. The demonym for the people living in Korea is also Korean.

A demonym also can be made from the name of a place. For example, Mexican is the demonym for the people who live in the country of Mexico. American is the demonym for people who live in the United States of America. In these cases, adding a suffix to the name of the place forms the demonym.



“New Yorker” is the demonym for people who live in the city.



<b>Place</b>	<b>Suffix</b>	<b>Demonym</b>
Rome	<i>-(a)n</i>	Roman
Canada	<i>-ian</i>	Canadian
Argentina	<i>-ine</i>	Argentine
Seattle	<i>-ite</i>	Seattleite
London	<i>-er</i>	Londoner
Los Angeles	<i>-(en)o</i>	Los Angeleno
Ireland	<i>-ish</i>	Irish



Proud Canadians celebrating Canada Day.

A person can have many demonyms. If she belongs to a club or a sports team, she may have a demonym that describes that interest. She may have a demonym that comes from where she lives or goes to school. A person can have as many demonyms as he has interests and community connections.

The demonym of a fan group can come from the history of the group or a symbol unique to that group. Do you love to listen to music by Beyonce? Then you may be a part of the “BeyHive.” The demonym BeyHive is a play on Beyonce’s name. The *Bey* part of Beyonce sounds like bee, the insect. It is as if Beyonce’s fans are bees following the queen bee, or, as Beyonce is sometimes referred to, the “Queen Bey.” The demonym BeyHive takes advantage of the unique spelling and pronunciation of Beyonce’s name.



This young Beyonce fan is part of the “BeyHive.”

If you live in Wisconsin, then chances are you know of a football team called the Green Bay Packers. The fans of the Green Bay Packers are called “Cheeseheads.” The story goes that an Illinois newspaper writer described fans of a local baseball team as “cheesehead fans.” Why cheese? Because Wisconsin is well known for their dairy farms and cheese products.

After the newspaper article, one fan made a giant block of cheese out of foam to wear as a hat to a game. People loved the “cheesehead” hat. Many fans started wearing them. Eventually fans of the Green Bay Packers called themselves by the demonym Cheeseheads.



Fans of the Green Bay Packers are sometimes called “Cheeseheads.”



# 3

## Metonym Short Cuts

---

Symbols are marks or characters that stand for something else. Look at the green sign in the picture on the right. Cities use this symbol to direct people to a public library.

A **metonym** works much like a symbol does. However, instead of a picture that stands for an idea, a metonym is a phrase or a word that stands for an idea. *Meto-* comes from the Greek word for “change.” People use metonyms to change a phrase or word into a new phrase or word.

Let’s look at the metonym for the White House. Many people work for the Executive Branch in the capitol building of the United States of America in Washington, D.C. The color of this building is white. People say “the White House” as a short cut to describing everyone who works there.



Metonyms are often used in science. They provide a quicker way to say something. Look for metonyms during the following historic moment in science:

*Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed.  
Roger, Tranquility. We copy you on the ground.*



Houston

Who is Houston or Roger? What is Tranquility or Eagle? This important exchange doesn't make a lot of sense unless you know that the metonyms are and what they mean.

Read the meanings behind the metonyms:

**Houston:** The team of scientists working at the headquarters of the National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA) in Houston, Texas

**The Eagle:** The spacecraft holding astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin

**Roger:** A short way to say "message received"

**Tranquility:** The place on the moon where the spacecraft and the astronauts landed.

**Ground:** The planet earth

Take another look at what was said:

*Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed.  
Roger, Tranquility. We copy you on the ground.*

Now it should be clear to you that Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin had landed their spaceship safely on the moon. They were telling this information to the team of scientists back on Earth.



Neil Armstrong

But not all metonyms stand for historic or scientific ideas. Some are a part of everyday life. Here are some common metonyms:



<b>Metonym</b>	<b>Meaning of metonym</b>
The Crown	The British Monarchy, as in the British Royal Family
The media	The people and businesses that provide reports on events or news that happen around the world.
Blood, sweat and tears	The hard work it takes to accomplish a difficult task.
Your word	A promise
Hollywood	The people and the companies that work together to make movies and television shows.
Downtown	An area of a town or city where many people go to shop or to eat at restaurants; It is usually the oldest part of a town.
Mom and pop stores	Stores in a community that are owned by people who live in the community.
Detroit	The automotive industry originally located in and around the city of Detroit, Michigan.



# 4

## “C” for Capitonyms

---

Take a look at the sentence below. See if you can find something in common with the words that are underlined.

*Please take the book to the study.*  
*Now it's time to study.*

The words that are underlined are **homonyms**. They are said the same, but they have different meanings. The *study* in the first sentence is a room in a house. The *study* in the second sentence means “to learn.”

**Capitonyms** are similar to homonyms. They also are pairs of words that are spelled and said the same but have different meanings. The main difference is that, in capitonyms, one of the pairs of words is capitalized. *Capito-* comes from the word *capital*, as in capital letters. In the example below, *Mark* and *mark* are capitonyms:

My best friend is Mark.  
The teacher made a mark  
on the paper.



My teacher made a mark on my paper.

In fact, many capitonym pairs happen to include names of people. This is partly because, long ago, people's names came from what they did. For example, someone whose last name is Fisher may have had an ancestor who was a fisherman.

Everyday new capitonyms are being created. People name new products after common words. When that word is used as the name of the new product, then it becomes a proper noun. It will need to be capitalized. This is the case with the movies *Frozen* and *Cars*, which are both capitonyms.

Sometimes the opposite happens, and it is the company name that becomes part of our everyday vocabulary. Take the capitonym *thermos*. A company was created and named Thermos in 1904. It made only one type of product, a container that kept cold drinks cold or hot drinks hot. The container was also called "Thermos." The popularity of the product grew so much that other companies started to make similar containers. People began to call those containers "thermoses," too.



A frozen lake is a fun place to go ice skating.



After the movie *Frozen* came out, many children enjoyed dressing up like the characters in the movie.

# 5

## The Retro(nym) Look

---

If something is described as “retro,” it usually means that it is something from the past. For example, bell-bottom pants were very popular in the 1970’s. Today, if someone was wearing a pair of bell-bottom pants, then that person would be described as having a “retro look.”

*Retro* comes from a Latin word that means “backwards.” A **retronym** is a word for an object that has been renamed because a newer version of that object has been created.



Bell-bottoms can give the wearer a “retro look.”



The history of televisions can teach us a lot about retronyms. The first television sets could only show black and white pictures. Then scientists made a version that could show color pictures. Now there were two kinds of televisions. People began to use the retronym “black and white television” to tell it apart from the newer televisions that showed colors.



What was once called television is now known as “black and white television.”

A few decades later, technology improved upon the television once again. Images were crisper and more life-like. These new television sets were called “high-definition television,” or “HDTV.” People called the television sets that didn’t have the higher-resolution by the retronym “standard definition.”

Today, some televisions have the ability to connect directly to the Internet. These television sets are called “smart televisions” or “Smart TV.” What is the retronym for a television that is not connected to the Internet? It’s a “dumb TV.”



In a few years, televisions known today as “Smart TVs” might be called something else.

# Our Changing Language

Grouping words can help people learn words more easily. As you have just read, there are many ways to group words. Words can be grouped by similar sounds. They can be grouped by meaning or by ideas.

As the English language changes, we find that new words can be added to groups. For example, the word *mouse* was mainly known as a kind of an animal. After computers, the word *mouse* gained another meaning. It stands for the device that we use to move a computer cursor.

There are almost a million words in the English language. Learning all of them would take a very long time. It is easier to remember words and their meanings if they are grouped with similar words and ideas. So we learn the name of the *-nym* word group instead.



# Glossary

**homonym** each of two or more words that have either the same sound or same spelling but different meanings

**tautonym** a word with a repeated syllable

**synonym** a word that means nearly the same as another word

**antonym** a word that means the opposite of another word

**exonym** a word given to a place in a language spoken by people who live outside that place

**endonym** a word of a place in the language spoken by the people who live within that place

**demonym** a word for a group of people, usually those who live in a particular place

**metonym** a word used as a stand in for something else to which it is closely connected

**capitonym** a word that changes its meaning when it is capitalized, usually because the capitalized form is a proper noun

**retronym** a new word created from an existing word because the meaning has changed due to technological progress



Fans of Harry Potter are sometimes called by the demonym “Potterheads.”



## Think About It

- Do research on a retronym. Find out why the object changed names over time.
- Create a pseudonym or metonym for yourself. Explain why you chose that name or phrase to describe yourself.
- Work with a friend to make a list of possible demonyms for yourself, your class, and your community. Share your findings with the class.



What might be the retronym for this old van?

## Photo Credits

- p02 Released into Public Domain by Nate Steiner. Image taken in 2010.
- p03 ©2013 by Focka in Flickr. CC BY-NC 2.0
- p04 ©2005 by Toby Bochan in Flickr. CC BY-NC 2.0
- p05 ©2006 by Nikaralfmik in Flickr. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0  
©2008 by bingham30069 in Flickr. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
- p06 ©2016 by Toomore Chiang in Flickr. CC BY 2.0
- p07 ©2015 by Angelo Domini in Flickr. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
- p08 ©2017 by jun560 in Flickr. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
- p09 ©2005 by Stephen in Flickr. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
- p10 ©2012 by Clotee Pridgen Allochuku in Flickr. CC BY 2.0
- p11 ©2008 by Santiago Blinkis in Flickr. CC BY-NC 2.0
- p12 ©2008 by Michael Sauers in Flickr. CC BY-NC 2.0  
©2012 by Alex Proimos in Flickr. CC BY-NC 2.0
- p13 Spacecraft communicators at the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, USA, keeping in contact with the Apollo 11 astronauts during their lunar landing mission on 20 July 1969. From left to right, they are astronauts Charles M. Duke Jr., James A. Lovell Jr. and Fred W. Haise Jr. Image released into public domain by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.  
Neil Armstrong photographed by Buzz Aldrin after the completion of the Lunar EVA on the Apollo 11 flight. Image released into public domain by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.
- p14 ©2016 by ukhouseoflords in Flickr. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
- p15 ©2012 by NJLA: New Jersey Library Association in Flickr. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
- p16 ©2014 by Melissa Hillier in Flickr. CC BY 2.0  
©2009 by Peter Voerman in Flickr. CC BY-NC 2.0
- p17 Image taken in 1974. Uploaded into Flickr by simpleinsomnia in 2016. CC BY 2.0
- p18 ©20154 by Michel Curi in Flickr. CC BY 2.0
- p18 ©2013 by LG in Flickr. CC BY 2.0
- p19 ©2014 by Clouttail the Snow Leopard in Flickr. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0  
©2010 by Leon Lee in Flickr. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
- p20 ©2011 by Kevin Baird in Flickr. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
- p21 ©2009 by Kenny Louie in Flickr. CC BY 2.0
- p22 © 2010 by martin zoul in Flickr. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

ISBN: 978-1-937889-20-3