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## UNIT 4 MULTIPLE MEANINGS-2

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you will be able to

- recognize words which have the same sounds and spellings but entirely different meanings,
- recognize words which have the same sounds but different spellings and meanings,
- recognize words which have the same spellings but are pronounced differently,
- distinguish between words which have some similarity in sounds and spellings, and
- increase your vocabulary for spoken and written English and make your use of the language more effective.

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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In Unit 3, you learnt to recognize and use words which had a number of related but different meanings. In this unit, we are going to deal with words which are either pronounced similarly or spelt in the same way, or have a partial similarity, but which have entirely different meanings. While in Unit 3 we discussed words each of which had a number of related but different meanings, in this unit we shall take up words which are entirely different even though they look and/or sound alike. The recognition and use of these words will help you to distinguish between them and to make your speech and writing clear and effective. These are called *homonyms* and *homophones*. In order to appreciate these we must understand two terms *synonymy* and *antonymy*.

*Synonymy* refers to the sameness of meaning by means of different words within a language. E.g., the word 'laryngitis' and 'sore throat' have the same denotative meaning, although they differ in their context of use, the former used in a more technical sense than the latter. Similarly, the words 'steed' and 'charger' in a more poetic way represent the meaning of the word 'horse'. As a literary device the use of synonyms function as emphasis as well as to expand the range of meaning. E.g.

But wherefore let we then our faithful *friends*,  
*Associates* and *copartners* of our loss  
 Lye thus astonisht on the oblivion pool.  
 (J. Milton *Paradise Lost* II, 264-66)

The synonyms used are 'friends', 'associates' and 'copartners' and these show the close bonds of friendship and co-operations amongst the followers of Satan in Hell.

*Antonyms* refer to contrasts in word meaning, particularly in adjectives though also in nouns and verbs, E.g. *hot-cold*, *young-old*, *male-female*, *alive-dead*, *buy-sell*. These are mainly used to attract attention to a sense of contrast as in the lines below:

Therefore pardon me,  
 And not impute this yielding to *light* love,  
 which in the *dark* night hath so discovered.  
 (W. Shakespeare *Romeo and Juliet* II, ii)

Here the word 'light' means 'frivolous', and we are also made aware of it as an antonym to *dark*.

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## 4.2 HOMONYMS: WORDS HAVING THE SAME SOUNDS AND SPELLINGS

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Look at the word *mint* in the following sentences:

- 1 We grow *mint* in our kitchen garden. (a plant whose leaves are used for chutney and for flavouring)
- 2 These coins have just come from the *mint*. (place where coins are made under government authority)

Would you say that *mint* in sentence 1 and *mint* in sentence 2 were two different *words* pronounced and spelt alike? Or would you say the same word had two different *meanings*?

In this section we shall deal with words of this type.

### 4.2.1 Homonyms as the Same Part of Speech

The words we are going to discuss in this section have three things in common.

- i) They have the same pronunciation.
- ii) They have the same spellings.
- iii) They are used as the same part of speech.

But the meanings of the words are different.

*Example:*

*mole*<sup>1</sup>: The *mole* on her left cheek makes her look more beautiful. (permanent small dark spot on a person's skin)

*mole*<sup>2</sup>: The fur of a *mole* is sometimes used for making garments. (a small, fur-covered animal with tiny eyes. It makes tunnels in the ground to live in.)

Both the words are used as *nouns* in the sentences above.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Say what parts of speech the italicized words belong to in these sentences. Also give their meanings in a few words.

i) a) 'The interior rooms of Bhupati's house faced a *plot* of land that it would be exaggeration to call a garden.'

(Rabindranath Tagore: 'Broken Nest')

b) 'Here lies the chief clue to the Shakuntala image, even above the pathos and erotic sentiment implied in the *plot* or story.'

(Henry W. Wells: 'Shakuntala's Watering Pot')

ii) a) 'O how I long to travel back,  
And tread again that ancient track!  
That I once more might reach that plain,  
Where first I left my glorious train;  
From whence th'enlighten'd spirit sees  
That shady City of *Palm-trees*!'

(From H. Vaughan: 'The Retreat')

b) Your fate is not written on the *palm*, but in your work.

iii) a) 'On such occasions Margayya *charged* a fee for the blank form itself, and then another for tilling in the relevant details.'

(R.K. Narayan: 'The Financial Expert')

b) The atmosphere at the party was *charged* with excitement.

iv) a) A *lock* of hair hangs on her beautiful forehead.

b) The key to the *lock* was missing.

v) a) Don't *lie* on the sand.

b) Don't *lie* to me.

2. The words in the following pairs of sentences are used in two different contexts and have entirely different meanings. Can you say what the context may be in each case? (Choose from the list given below.) Give the meaning of each word. Check your answers.

months, classroom, hotel, soft drink, parade, Diwali cleaning, on a farm, lending library.

i) a) Write with a blue *pen*.

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b) The tiger got into the *pen* and carried off an animal.

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ii) a) *Lime* is used for white-washing walls and ceilings.

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b) Would you like to have some *lime* juice?

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iii) a) *March* is generally pleasant in the hills.

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b) He fainted during the *march*.

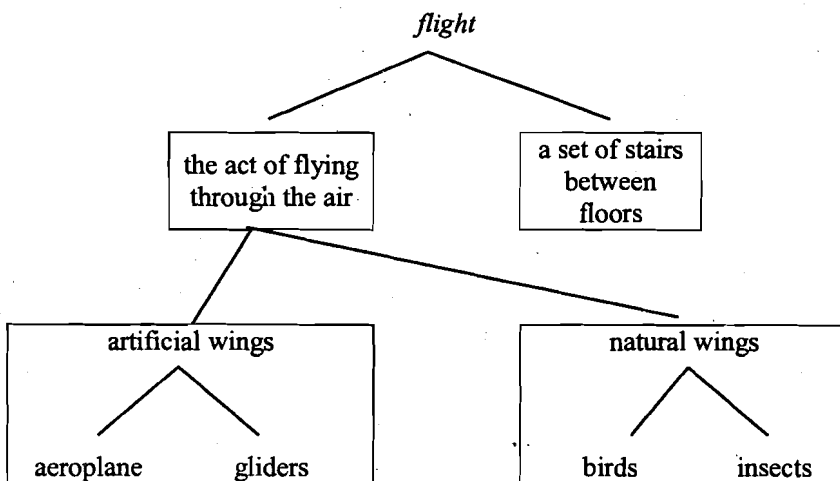
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iv) a) There are several *pages* missing in this magazine.

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b) The *page* will carry your luggage to the taxi.

3 Look at the diagram for the word flight below.



The diagram above explains how the different meanings of the word 'flight' are related to each other and where they branch off or differ from each other. It also gives details of the different uses.

### Activity 1

Make simple diagrams for the following words to bring out the different meanings with examples. Use your dictionary.

game, table, trunk.

#### **4.2.2 Homonyms as Different Parts of Speech**

In this section, we shall deal with homonyms which belong to different parts of speech. For example, the two words in the following pair are pronounced and spelt alike, but have different meanings and are used as different parts of speech.

Example:

- loaf*: a) Some young people prefer to *loaf* about rather than work hard for the examinations.  
(verb: to spend time idly)
- b) Please give me a *loaf* of bread.  
(noun: a mass of bread cooked as a separate quantity)

### Check Your Progress 2

1 Say which parts of speech the italicized words in each pair of sentences belong to. Give the meanings in a few words.

- i) a) He put the money away in a *safe*.

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- b) It's not quite *safe* to go out in the dark here.

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- ii) a) When you *train* children to use their imagination they start creating beautiful things.

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- b) 'The lama, not so well used to *trains* as he had pretended, started at the 3.25 a.m. south-bound roared in.'

(Rudyard Kipling: *Kim*)

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- iii) a) Robinson Crusoe was *marooned* on an island.

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- b) He usually wears a *maroon* pullover.

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- iv) a) The poor woman sat on a straw *mat*.

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- b) The book had a cover with a *mat* finish.

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- v) a) He covered himself with a quilt padded with *down*.

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- b) I am going *down* to get some wood.

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vi) a) That book is *mine*.

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b) There is a gold *mine* at Kolar.

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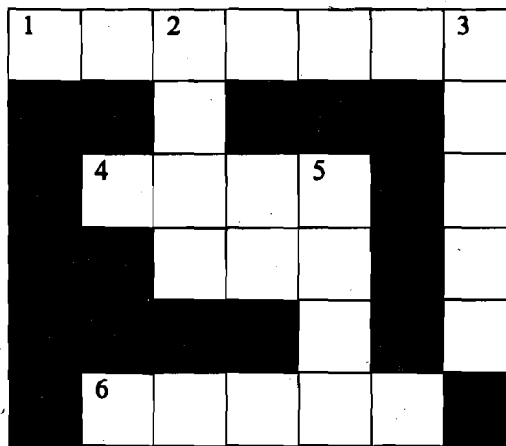
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2 Each of the following is in fact two words with different meanings, that is, homonyms:

ball, customs, last, seal, start, state.

**Activity 2**

Using the clues given, fill in the crossword puzzle below.  
(Use your dictionary if necessary.)



**Clues Across**

- 1 When you enter a country, you have to pass through \_\_\_\_\_ and get your belongings checked.
- 4 Please throw the \_\_\_\_\_ to me.
- 6 The President made a speech on the \_\_\_\_\_ of the nation.

**Clues Down**

- 2 A large fish-eating animal.
- 3 We'll have to \_\_\_\_\_ early to get there on time.
- 5 Let's complete it on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of the week.

**4.2.3 Homonyms Used for Puns**

Writers use words with two or more meanings to say witty things which are clever and amusing.

E.g. 'How is life?'  
'Depends on the *liver*.'

The word 'liver' above can be either of two words, both of which would fit the context above. The sentence could mean: 'Life depends on how good your liver (the organ in the body which produces bile and cleans the blood) is.' Or it could mean: 'Life depends on the person who lives it.' This play on the word 'liver' is called a pun.

Explain the 'puns' in the following puzzles. Use your dictionary if necessary:

- i) Why can't your nose be twelve inches long?  
Because then it would be a *foot*.

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- ii) Why didn't the skeleton cross the road?  
It didn't have the *guts*.

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- iii) What did the traffic light say to the car?  
Don't look now. I'm *changing*.

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### 4.3 HOMOPHONES: WORDS HAVING THE SAME SOUNDS BUT DIFFERENT SPELLINGS

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In the previous sections of this unit we have already discussed homonyms, which have the same sounds and spelling but have different meanings. Now we shall discuss words which are spelt differently but pronounced alike. These are called *homophones*.

#### 4.3.1 Homophones as the Same Part of Speech

Take these words

*doe* (noun) : A *doe* played about on the grass.  
(a female deer)

*dough* (noun) : The woman made *dough* for the bread.  
(paste of wheat flour)

The sounds of the two words above are the same. They are both nouns. But they are spelt differently and their meanings are entirely different, too. We must avoid mixing up such words in our writing.

#### Check Your Progress 4

Say to what parts of speech the pairs of italicized words used in the following sentences belong and give their meanings in a few words.

- i) a) I met Yamuna at the school *fete* yesterday.

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- b) People blame *fate* for all their failures.

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ii) a) He lost a lot of money *gambling* at cards.

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b) The children can *gambol* on the lawn here.

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iii) a) The teacher gave the students an *oral* exercise.

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b) The student must try to develop his *aural* comprehension by listening to spoken English.

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### 4.3.2 Homophones as Different Parts of Speech

The pairs of words used above belonged to the same part of speech. But there are pairs of words pronounced alike but spelt differently, and used as different parts of speech. They have different meanings too.

E.g. braid (noun) : The girl wore her hair in *braids*.  
(strands of hair woven together)

brayed (verb) : The donkey *brayed* aloud.  
(made a sound like that of a trumpet )

### Check Your Progress 5

1 Match the words in columns A and B having the same sounds.

A	B
beer	carrot
ceiling	scent
cellar	serial
corps	boll (=round seed-vessel of cotton)
cent	seller
carat	bier
bowl	core
cereal	sealing
dam	coarse
course	damn

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2 Make sentences bringing out the difference in meaning in these pairs of words. Use your dictionary,

i) fare \_\_\_\_\_

fair \_\_\_\_\_

ii) hew \_\_\_\_\_

hue \_\_\_\_\_

iii) illicit \_\_\_\_\_

elicit \_\_\_\_\_

iv) grease \_\_\_\_\_

Greece \_\_\_\_\_

v) hare \_\_\_\_\_

hair \_\_\_\_\_

vi) gait \_\_\_\_\_

gate \_\_\_\_\_

vii) tyre \_\_\_\_\_

tire \_\_\_\_\_

3 Say whether the words italicized in the sentences below are used properly or not.  
Say what the correct word is.

i) He rang the *belle* to indicate the alarm.

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ii) Would you like to have red *beet* for salad?

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iii) Did they *berry* the dead man?

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iv) The *assent* up Mount Everest was difficult.

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v) Some poor people have to live on *alms*.

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vi) Thank you for the *complement*.

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vii) There is no electric *currant* in the wire.

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4 Where is the play on words or 'pun' in the following?

i) 'How is bread made?'

'I know that!' Alice cried eagerly. 'You take some flour .....

'Where do you pick the flower?' the White Queen asked, 'In a garden or in the hedges?'

Well, it isn't picked at all', Alice explained: it's ground .....

How many acres of ground?' said the White Queen.

(Lewis Carroll: *Alice Through the Looking Glass*)

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ii) 'Mine is a long and sad tale!' said the Mouse, turning to Alice, and sighing.

'It is a long tail certainly,' said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse's tail, 'but why do you call it sad?'

(Lewis Carroll: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*)

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iv) 'Not on thy sole but on thy soul, harsh Jew

Thou mak'st thy knife keen.'

(William Shakespeare: *Merchant of Venice*)

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#### 4.4 WORDS HAVING THE SAME SPELLINGS BUT DIFFERENT SOUNDS

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Look at these sentences:

1 A *row* of books stood on the shelf.

2 There was a big *row* outside my house.

In 1 *row* means 'a number of things in a line'; pronounced /rəʊ/.

In 2 *row* means 'a noisy disturbance'; pronounced /rau /.

We should be careful not to confuse such words.

## Check Your Progress 6

## Multiple Meaning-2

Consult your dictionary and write down two pronunciations of these words and give their different meanings.

bow

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entrance

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live

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### 4.5 WORDS WITH SOME SIMILARITY IN SOUNDS AND SPELLINGS

Till now we have discussed words pronounced or spelt alike. Here are some words which have only slight differences in pronunciation and spelling; this causes confusion.

*Examples:*

- 1) *access* (noun) : right of approaching; way to a place.  
*excess* (noun) : the fact of being more than what is proper .

There is no *access* to the house through this part of the forest.  
An *excess* of rich fried food is bad for anyone.

- 2) *career* (noun) : progress through life; profession.  
*carrier* ( noun) : a person or company that carries goods or people for payment.

A career in journalism is quite exciting.  
India has a number of aircraft carriers.

**Check Your Progress 7**

1 Fill in the blanks in the sentences below with suitable words from the list given here:

alternate	symmetry	carrots	artist	dairy
alternative	cemetery	carat	artiste	diary

- i) You should eat \_\_\_\_\_ if you want to improve your eyesight.
- ii) We bought butter and milk from the \_\_\_\_\_.
- iii) You must come for a check-up every \_\_\_\_\_ day.
- iv) The soldier was buried in this \_\_\_\_\_.
- v) Yamini Krishnamurti is a renowned \_\_\_\_\_.
- vi) This building lacks \_\_\_\_\_ in design.
- vii) Our plan has failed. We must look for an \_\_\_\_\_ solution.
- viii) Shyam bought a 24 \_\_\_\_\_ gold watch.
- ix) It is convenient to make a note of all one's appointments in a \_\_\_\_\_.
- x) The \_\_\_\_\_ painted the portrait in a hurry.

2 Read the following passage and answer the questions given below. Check your answers.

Before actually entering the university for my B.A., I had a whole year's reprieve by failing in the university entrance examination held in the high school. I had expected to fare ill in physics and chemistry, both of which had defied my understanding. I never understood what I was expected to do with the "data" provided with the so-called problems, the relevance of "atmospheric pressure" or "atomic weight," or what to do with logarithm tables, or the why or how of a "normal" solution. These points never became clear to me either through my own efforts or through our teacher's explanations. I had been certain of failure in these two subjects, but, as if by a miracle, I had somehow passed in them, though not with flying colours. On the contrary, I had failed where I was most confident – English. I failed so miserably and completely that everyone wondered if I was literate at all. My father, in spite of his strict attitudes in school matters, had one very pleasant quality – he never bothered about the examination results. He always displayed sympathy for a fallen candidate; he had no faith in the examination system at all. But even he was forced to exclaim in surprise, "Stupid fellow, you have failed in English! Why?" Proficiency in English being a social hallmark, I remained silent without offering any explanation, though I knew why. One of our English texts was a grey-bound book of chilling dullness called *Explorations and Discoveries*, pages full of Mungo Park's expeditions and so forth. In my whole career I have not come across any book to match its unreadability. I had found it impossible, and totally abolished it from my universe, deciding to depend upon other questions in the examination from *Oliver Twist* or *Poetical Selections*. But I found in the examination hall that four out of six questions were based on *Explorations* – that horrible man the question-setter seemed to have been an abnormal, explorationist. I gave up, left the examination hall in half an hour, and sat in contemplation on one of the brick monuments beside the lily pond.

(From R.K. Narayan: *My Days*, Orient Paperbacks)

## Glossary

## Multiple Meaning-2

re'prieve	:	postponement; delay
de'fied	:	offered difficulties that could not be overcome
'data	:	facts
'atmospheric 'pressure	:	pressure due to the weight of the column of air above a point; about 6.6 kg. per square inch at sea level
a'tomic weight	:	weight of an atom of an element expressed on a scale in which an atom of oxygen is 16
'logarithm	:	one of a series of numbers which make it possible to work out problems in multiplication and division by adding and subtracting. Example: $100 = 10 \times 10 = 10^2$ So $\log_{10} 100 = 2$
'miracle	:	a remarkable and surprising event
with 'flying'colours	:	with great success
on the 'contrary	:	a phrase used to make a contradiction more emphatic
'literate	:	able to read and write
pro'ficiency	:	skill; being an expert
'hallmark	:	distinguishing characteristic (of excellence)
'chilling'	:	making cold
'expe'dition	:	a journey for a definite purpose
'unreada'bility	:	the quality of not being easy or pleasant to read
a'bolished	:	did away with
'universe	:	everything that exists
ab'normal	:	different from what is normal
'explo'rationist	:	one who makes a special study of explorations
'contem'plation	:	deep thought
'monument	:	a building, column, or statue serving to keep alive the memory of a person or event

## Questions

- i) In what subjects did the author pass even though he didn't expect to?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ii) What subject did he fail in?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- iii) Choose the best answer:  
The author's father was not disturbed by his son's examination results because
- a) he was a man of wide sympathies.
  - b) he did not think the examination system was fair and reliable.
  - c) he knew that his son was stupid.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- iv) Why was it necessary to learn English well in those days?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- v) 'abolished it from my universe' means that he paid no attention to that book. Therefore, *abolished* and *universe* here are examples of
- a) multiple meanings.
  - b) extended meanings.
- Which? \_\_\_\_\_
- vi) Give homophones for 'whole' and 'fare'  
\_\_\_\_\_

- vii) Say yes or no.
- a) *entrance* in this passage refers to the examination which had to be passed in order to enter the university for higher studies. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) *tables* here mean pieces of furniture with flat tops and legs. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) *subjects* here mean members of a State ruled over by a king. \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) *faith* here means religion. \_\_\_\_\_
  - e) *bound* here means fastened and covered with cardboard. \_\_\_\_\_
  - f) *career* is a support for luggage, etc. fixed to a bicycle, motor-car, etc. \_\_\_\_\_

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## 4.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit you have learnt

- to distinguish words having the same pronunciation and spelling, but different meanings,
- to distinguish words pronounced alike but spelt differently,
- to distinguish words which are spelt alike but pronounced differently, and
- to use such words correctly in your own writing to make it more effective.

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## 4.7 KEY WORDS

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**'homonym:** a word that is the same in form and sound as another but different in meaning,

- e.g. *about* = a little more or less than  
(about three kilometres)
- about* = here and there  
(they were running about)

**'homophone:** a word pronounced like another but different in meaning, spelling or origin.

e.g. *son, sun.*

**pun:** humorous use of different words which sound the same or of two meanings of the same word.

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## 4.8 SUGGESTED READING

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- 1 Lewis Carroll: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.*
- 2 R.K. Narayan: *My Days.*

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## ANSWERS

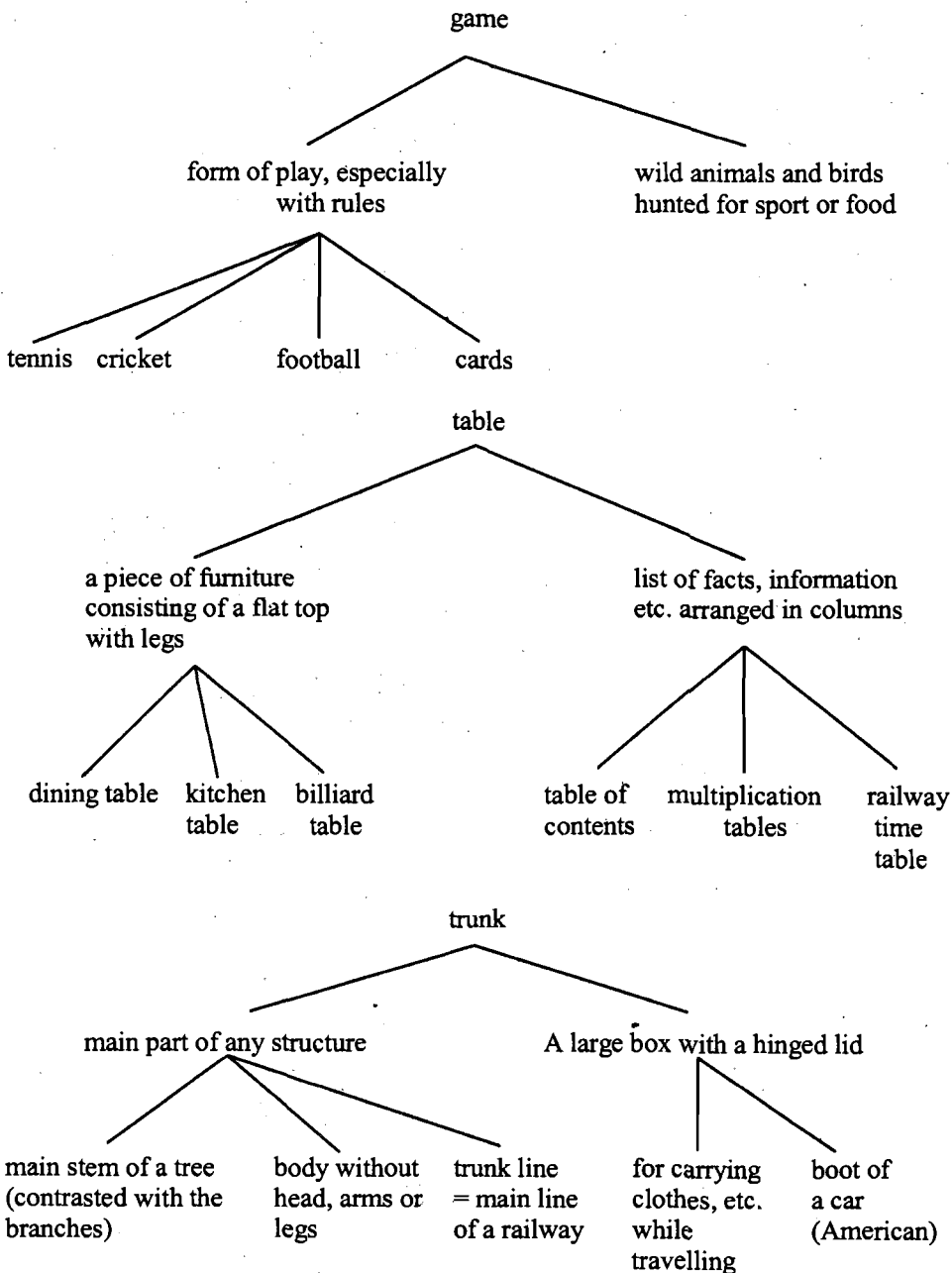
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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1 i) a) noun: a piece of ground, usually small.  
b) noun: plan of the events in a story.
- ii) a) noun: a tree growing in warm climates with no branches and a mass of large leaves at the top.  
b) noun: inner surface of the hand between the wrist and the fingers.
- iii) a) verb: asked as a price.  
b) verb: filled.

- iv) a) noun: portion of hair that naturally hangs together.
  - b) noun: appliance or mechanism by which a door, lid, etc. may be fastened with a bolt.
  - v) a) verb: put oneself flat on a horizontal surface.
  - b) verb: make a statement that one knows to be untrue.
- 2 i) a) classroom; an instrument used for writing.
- b) on a farm; an enclosure for cattle.
- ii) a) Diwali cleaning; white substance got by burning limestone.
- b) soft drink; a round, juicy fruit like a lemon but more acid.
- iii) a) months; the third month of the year.
- b) parade; the act of walking with a regular step.
- iv) a) lending library; one side of a sheet of paper in a book, etc.
- b) hotel; a boy servant in a hotel, club, etc.

3





**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1 i) a) noun: a fireproof and burglarproof box in which money and other valuable are kept.
- b) adjective: free from danger.
- ii) a) verb: teach and give practice to someone.
- b) noun: train = a number of railway coaches, wagons, etc. joined together.
- iii) a) verb: put on a desert island, uninhabited coast, etc. and abandoned there.
- b) adjective: of brownish-red colour.
- iv) a) noun: a piece of material, woven or plaited, of straw, fibre, etc. used as a floor covering or for sleeping on.
- b) adjective: dull, not shiny.
- v) a) noun: soft under-feathers of birds.
- b) adverb: from a higher to a lower place.
- vi) a) (possessive) pronoun: belonging to me.
- b) noun: excavation in the earth from which minerals are extracted.

- 2 Across: 1 customs            4 ball            6 state  
 Down: 2 seal            3 start            5 last

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) 'a foot' can mean both 'twelve inches' and 'the lower end of the leg, beginning at the ankle'.
- ii) 'guts' can mean both 'intestines' and 'courage'.
- iii) 'changing' here can mean both 'changing the colour', e.g., green to red, or 'changing clothes'.

**Check Your Progress 4**

- i) a) noun: a festival or entertainment, usually outdoor.
- b) noun: destiny, the power looked upon as controlling all events.
- ii) a) verb: playing games of chance for money.
- b) verb: make playful, jumping or skipping movements.
- iii) a) adjective: using the spoken word.
- b) adjective: related to hearing.

**Check Your Progress 5**

1

A	B
beer	bier
ceiling	sealing
cellar	seller
corps	core
cent	scent
carat	carrot
bowl	boll
cereal	serial
dam	damn
course	coarse

- 2 i) What is the bus *fare* to the station?  
 I met an old friend at the trade *fair*.
- ii) Let's *hew* down this branch, as it keeps striking the electric wires.  
 Look at the beautiful *hues* of the rainbow.

- iii) Some people have been arrested for *illicit* sale of opium.  
I tried my best to *elicit* the truth from him.
- iv) He applied *grease* to the rusty parts of the machine.  
Athens is the capital of *Greece*.
- v) A *hare* was eating grass on our lawn.  
His *hair* is falling fast.
- vi) I can recognize a person by his *gait*.  
We have to buy the tickets at the *gate* before entering the exhibition grounds.
- vii) The front *tyre* of our scooter was punctured.  
A long walk will *tire* the child.
- 3 i) No. It should be *bell*.  
ii) Yes.  
iii) No. It should be *bury*.  
iv) No. It should be *ascent*.  
v) Yes.  
vi) No. It should be *compliment*.  
vii) No. It should be *current*.
- 4 i) The words *flour* and *flower* are homophones, that is, they have the same sounds, but different spellings and meanings. They are mixed up here by the White Queen. Again 'ground' is two words which are homonyms. In the first use, it means the past participle form of 'grind' that is, reduced to powder by crushing between millstones. In the second use, it means 'the surface of the earth'.  
ii) 'Tale' and 'tail' are homophones. The Mouse and Alice mix up the two words.  
iii) The Jew is shown as sharpening his knife on the under surface or the sole of his shoe. The speaker means that the Jew's 'soul' will suffer. 'Sole' and 'Soul' are homophones.

### Check Your Progress 6

- bow (n. ) a piece of wood curved by a tight string used for shooting arrows. bow!  
Bow (v.) to bend the head or body.  
entrance (n.) opening by which one enters.  
entrance (v.) to fill with emotion and delight.  
live (v. ) to be alive.  
live (adj. ) having life e.g. *live* fish.

### Check Your Progress 7

- 1 i) carrots, ii) dairy, iii) alternate, iv) cemetery, v) artiste, vi) symmetry, vii) alternative, viii) carat, ix) diary, x) artist.
- 2 i) In physics and chemistry  
ii) In English  
iii) b)  
iv) It was a hallmark of social status.  
v) b) extended meanings  
vi) whole — hole  
fare — fair  
vii) a) Yes, b) No, c) No, d) No, e) Yes, f) No.