



An Animated and Narrated Glossary of Terms used in Linguistics presents

Minimal Pair



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Basíc Idea

 A minimal pair is a pair of forms that are identical except for a minimal difference, which is relevant for meaning contrast.

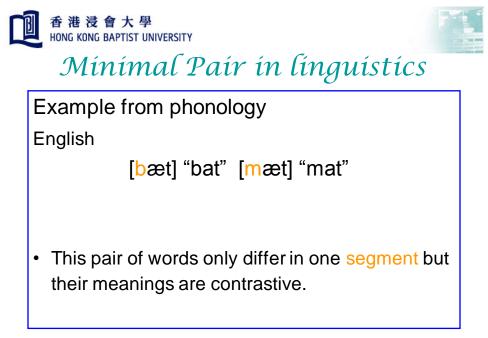
	Similarities	Differences
Rotini	Made of egg, flour, water	Shape: twisted spiral
Farfalle	Made of egg, flour, water	Shape: butterflies

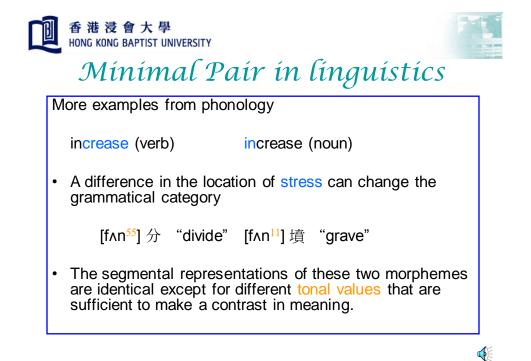


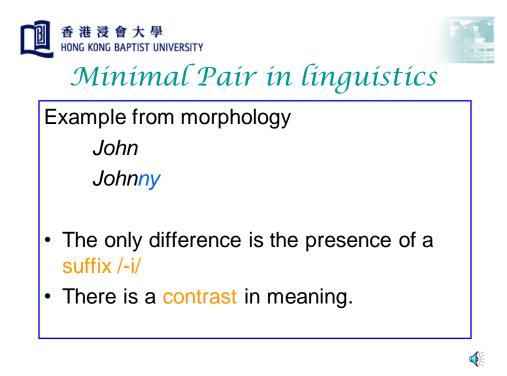


Basíc Idea

- Difference is minimal when other things are kept constant except for one element.
 - Orange and apple: not a minimal pair
 Different in color, but also in texture and shape.
- In establishing a minimal pair, difference must be contrastive.
 - A fat woman Vs. a thin woman, other things being constant such as ages and heights, is contrastive.
 - A thin woman Vs. a rich woman is not a contrastive pair.











Language Specificity

 What counts as a minimal pair could be language specific.

Malayalam [palam] "a weight" [p^halam] "result"

This is a minimal pair. The two items are contrastive.

This is a **NOT** minimal pair. The two items are not contrastive.

English [stɔp] "stop" [stɔp^h] "stop"





The End

Wee, Lian-Hee and Winnie H.Y. Cheung (2009) An animated and narrated glossary of terms used in Linguistics. Hong Kong Baptist University.

