

metonymy, n.

Pronunciation: Brit. /mɛ'tɒnəmi/ , U.S. /mə'tɒnəmi/

Forms:

α. 15–16 **metonimie**, 15–16 **metonimy**, 15–16 **metonymie**, 16 **metanymy**, 16 18 **metonomy**, 16– **metonymy**, 17 **metonomie**.

β. 15–16 **metonymia**.

Etymology: < classical Latin *metōnymia* or its etymon Hellenistic Greek *μετωνυμία*, lit. ‘change of name’ < ancient Greek *μετα-* [meta-](#) [prefix](#) + *-ωνυμία* (see [-onymy comb. form](#)). Compare French *métonymie* (1521 in Middle French as *methonomie*), Italian *metonimia* (a1544), Spanish *metonimia* (c1580), Portuguese *metonímia* (16th cent. as *metonomia*).

The form *metonomian* in quot. [1547 at sense b](#) represents the Greek accusative *μετωνυμίαν*.

The position of the stress appears to have been subject to some variation over history: although pronunciations with second-syllable stress are the most common (as, for example, in Johnson (1755)), a number of sources from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries show stress on the first syllable. Johnston (1764) does so, as does the first (1828) edition of Webster. By 1854, Webster indicates a variable pronunciation, but a preference for first-syllable stress; the 1886 edition also shows variability, but this time with preference for second-syllable stress, which becomes the only option listed in the 1900 edition.

a. Rhetoric. (A figure of speech characterized by) the action of substituting for a word or phrase denoting an object, action, institution, etc., a word or phrase denoting a property or something associated with it; an instance of this.

b. In extended use: a thing used or regarded as a substitute for or symbol of something else. Also (esp. in *Linguistics* and *Literary Theory*): the process of semantic association involved in producing and understanding a metonymy. Because the association involved in metonymy is typically by contiguity rather than similarity, metonymy is often contrasted with metaphor.

[1547 J. Hooper [Answer Detection Deuyls Sophistrye](#) D 1 b, Men seyth that they admyt metonomian, and say under the forme of breade is the trew bodye of Christ.]

1553 T. Wilson [Arte of Rhetorique](#) iii. f. 93, When a woorde hath a proper signification of the owne, & beyng referred to an other thyng, hath an other meanyng, the Grecians cal it Metonymia.

1555 R. Sherry [Treat. Figures Gram. & Rhetorike](#) 23^v, Metonymia, when in thynges that be syb together, one name is chaunged for an other.

1562 T. Cooper *Answere Def. Truth* f. 106^v, in [Apol. Priuate Masse](#) The figure is named Metonymia: when the name of the thyng is geuen vnto the signe.

1573 T. Cartwright [Replye to Answere Whitgifte](#) 14 The Apostle by a metonimie *Subiecti pro adiuncto*, dothe giue to vnderstand from whence y^e assured persuasion doth spring.

1625 A. Gil [Sacred Philos.](#) ii. 156 *Shebet* signifies either a staffe, a truncheon, or Scepter,..and so by a metonymia it may signifie authority.

1656 J. Smith [Myst. Rhetorique](#) 15 A metonymie of the effect, is when the effect or thing caused, is put for its cause.

1668 H. More *Schol.* in [Divine Dialogues](#) 575 Here is a double Metonymie, Christ is put for the Doctrine of Christ, and Hope for the Cause of Hope.

1676 W. Hubbard [Happinesse of People](#) 4 By times we are to understand things done in those times, by a metonymy of the adjunct.

1723 W. Meston [Knight](#) i. 24 For every sentence he would prop, With some Metonymie or Trope.

1798 [Anti Jacobin](#) 22 Jan. (1852) 47 Parr's buzz prose. [Note] This is an elegant metonymy... Buzz is an epithet usually applied to a large wig. It is here used for swelling, burly, bombastic writing.

1868 A. Bain [Mental & Moral Sci.](#) iv. xi. 403 By what is called 'metonymy', the fact intended to be expressed is denoted by one of the adjuncts.

1890 [*Catholic World*](#) Aug. 704 A charming book, full of delightful reading in lucid English, not a few strong periods, much of metonymy, little of metaphor.

1948 J. O. A. Tate [*On Limits of Poetry*](#) 172, I am raising the question whether the metonymy which attributes to the literal nightingale the asserted immortality of the song is convincing enough to carry the whole imaginative insight of the poem.

1956 R. Jakobson & M. Halle [*Fund. of Lang.*](#) ii. v. 76 The relation of similarity is suppressed in the former, the relation of contiguity in the latter type of aphasia. Metaphor is alien to the similarity disorder, and metonymy to the contiguity disorder.

1981 [*N.Y. Times*](#) 4 Oct. vii. 47/1 Can it [sc. ice-skating] be a metonymy for bonhomie, the Brueghel-like gathering at the pond?

2009 K.-U. Panther & L. L. Thornburg in K.-U. Panther et al. [*Metonymy & Metaphor in Gram.*](#) Introd. 24 The impact of metonymy on grammar has been demonstrated convincingly by a number of researchers.