Heterogeneous versus heterogenous: An eensy difference

*Heterogeneous* and *heterogenous* are often used interchangeably. However, although some sources\(^1\,^2\) consider *heterogenous* (he-tә-rah-je-nәs) to be a less common, alternative spelling of *heterogeneous* (he-ter-o-jee-nee-әs), the two terms have distinct definitions in medical and biological contexts. Something that is *heterogeneous* consists of diverse elements.\(^3\,^4\)

**Examples:**
- The clinical trial recruited patients with heterogeneous racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- The mammogram revealed that the patient had heterogeneously dense breast tissue.

In medical contexts, something that is *heterogenous* is derived from another source or species.\(^2\)

**Example:**
The patient received a heterogenous bone graft.

It is important to note that some sources\(^1\) consider *heterogenous* to be an obsolete medical term and solely an alternative spelling of *heterogeneous*. However, such usage can cause confusion, so it is best to use the more common spelling *heterogeneous* for clarity.

**Confusing:** The tumor consisted of heterogenous cell types.
**Better:** The tumor consisted of heterogeneous cell types.

**References**