

The Multiple Meanings of a Word Lead to its Ambiguity

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I. Abstract

Ambiguity, as defined by Crystal (2003), refers to expressions that convey multiple meanings and can be categorized into lexical and grammatical (structural) types. Lexical ambiguity arises when a single word has various meanings, such as "bank," which can denote the side of a river or a financial institution. Grammatical ambiguity involves different interpretations of a phrase's structure, exemplified by the sentence "new houses and shops," which can mean both are new or just the houses are new. Arnold and Moller (2003) discuss examples of verbs like "run," highlighting its multiple interpretations. Transformational ambiguity allows sentences like "visiting speakers can be awful" to possess multiple underlying structures. Hudson (2000) contrasts ambiguity with vagueness, the latter allowing for an infinite range of meanings, as in "I bought a coat." Additionally, Hudson identifies lexical ambiguity with terms like homonyms, homophones, and homographs, and discusses structural ambiguity in sentences like "The police searched for the car with broken headlights," which can lead to different groupings of the sentence components.

Key words: (ambiguous, structural words, multiple meaning, lexical ambiguity).

تعدد المعاني القاموسية للكلمة يؤدي الى غموضها

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المخلص

يشير الغموض، كما عرّفه كريستال (٢٠٠٣)، إلى التعبيرات التي تحمل معاني متعددة، ويمكن تصنيفها إلى نوعين: معجمي ونحوي (بنوي). ينشأ الغموض المعجمي عندما تحمل كلمة واحدة معاني متعددة، مثل كلمة "بنك" التي قد تدل على ضفة نهر أو مؤسسة مالية. أما الغموض النحوي فيتضمن تفسيرات مختلفة لبنية العبارة، كما في جملة "منازل ومتاجر جديدة"، التي قد تعني أن كلاهما جديد أو أن المنازل فقط هي الجديدة.

يناقش أرنولد ومولر (٢٠٠٣) أمثلة على أفعال مثل "يركض"، مسلطين الضوء على تفسيراتها المتعددة. يسمح الغموض التحويلي لجمل مثل "قد يكون المتحدثون الزائرون فطيعين" بامتلاك بنى ضمنية متعددة. يقارن هيدسون (٢٠٠٠) بين الغموض والضبابية، حيث تسمح الأخيرة بنطاق لا نهائي من المعاني، كما في جملة "اشترت معطفاً". بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يُعرّف هيدسون الغموض المعجمي بمصطلحات مثل المتجانسات اللفظية، والمتجانسات الصوتية، والمتجانسات الكتابية، ويناقش الغموض البنيوي في جمل مثل "بحثت الشرطة عن السيارة ذات المصابيح الأمامية المكسورة"، مما قد يؤدي إلى تجميعات مختلفة لمكونات الجملة. الكلمات المفتاحية: (غامض، كلمات بنيوية، تعدد المعاني، الغموض المعجمي)

II. Introduction

Words, phrases or sentences become ambiguous when they contain more than one meaning.

An example is the word light which can have the meaning not very heavy or not very dark. Lexically ambiguous words include such words as light. So, 'light' can be associated with 'colour' or 'weight'.

Another type of ambiguity is 'structural ambiguity', where a phrase or a sentence can have two meanings. For example, 'rich boys and girls', this phrase could be analysed as: rich [boys and girls] (i.e. both are rich) or [rich boys] and girls.

Homonyms are responsible for the occurrence of ambiguity. It is important to differentiate between vagueness and ambiguity. Many linguists try to make it clear that there is a difference between a 'word' and a lexical item.

Testing ambiguity could be carried out by adding a phrase like 'to do so too' or by negating which is the best. However, the pro-form test is a term word for different scope of negation.

Ambiguity is a vast field and it is impossible to solve this problem complete

III. Ambiguity :

Crystal, D. (2003:21) points out to ambiguity is a word or a sentence that represents more than a single meaning. There are two kinds of ambiguity: lexical and grammatical (structural).

Lexical ambiguity means that a word has more than one meaning.
i.e.

'bank', it can refer to river side or the building where commercial (or structural) ambiguity. Alternative constituents structures can be assigned to a construction in phrase structure ambiguity. For example:

1. " new houses and shops "

This sentence can be analysed either as new [houses and shops].

(i.e. both new) or new houses and stores. Arnold, M. and Moller, J.R (2003:388) refer to the verb 'run' and its various meanings (move quickly, operate or administer something, flow, function .. etc.)

For example: 2. ' John ran the marathon '

On one John was a competitor in a race, and on the other a conductor of the same. (ibid:389)

According to Arnold, M. and Moller, J.R (2003:389), there can be the construction of a non compositional semantic system which is the one that constructs meaning of an expression in a systematic and incremental way that is relative to the meaning of its components.

This is done by permitting the syntax to semantics mapping to be a relation that gives an expression more than one meaning represented by a single syntactic expression.

IV.1. Transformational Ambiguity

In this type of ambiguity, the sentence might be bracketed on the surface with respect to both readings, or is connected with more than one structure on a more abstract level of representation. As an example, " visiting speakers can be awful ". This sentence has been connected to either it is awful to visit speakers, or speakers who visit are awful.

(Crystal, D. 2003:22)

Hudson (2000:313) differentiates between ambiguity and vagueness. He mentions that the number of possible meanings is open with vagueness.

For example, there is vagueness in the following sentence: " I bought a coat " . The coat could be made of wool, leather or cotton, it could be black or brown or white, it could be long or short .. etc.

.2. Lexical and Structural Ambiguity

Hudson (ibid) also refers to two kinds of ambiguity: lexical and structural ;yet , he defines lexical ambiguity as follows: " It is ambiguity in the form of a morpheme or a word." He believes that ' homonyms ' is the responsible for the occurrence of the lexical ambiguity.

Homonyms are cases in which a single form has two or more meanings, as in English /mi:t/ (meat , meet) ; another example is ' tear ' [tið] or [teð].

Hudson (ibid: 313) gives two Homonyms:

Homophones

A homophone is a similar pronunciation for two or more words which are actually different in spelling. Another example is [tu] or [flauð] which can stand either to ' flower ' or ' flour '

Homographs

A homograph is simply a word that has a single spelling, but a different pronunciation like (tear , read , use , .. etc.).

It is essential to notice that there are some homographs that can stand as a homophone at the same time, like ' bat ' [bat] , it could be ' a club for hitting in baseball ' , and ' a type of flying rodent ' .

(Hudson. 2000:313)

On the other hand, Hudson (ibid) characterizes two types of structural ambiguity.

V.3 Grouping ambiguity

It deals with the relation of a group of words that constitute a sentence. For example: ' The police searched for the car with broken head lights ' .

This sentence could have two structures. One in which the prepositional phrase ' with broken head lights ' is about the car and is grouped with car in a noun phrase, and another it is about the searching, and it is grouped a part from the NP, but still with ' searched ' in the VP.

VI.4 Function Ambiguity

Function ambiguity is similar to transformational ambiguity. For example; visiting professors can be boring. Here visiting is the present participle of ' visit ' , the sentence concerning either professors who visit, that is professors is the subject of ' visit ' , or professors who get visited. (ibid:314)

A sentence that has a structural meaning other than two is said to be multiply ambiguous. A set of sentences that was used to analyze a sentence to create the ambiguity of the sentence are termed to disambiguate the sentences. (Crystal, D. 2003:22)

VII. Suggestions to solve structured ambiguity

Yule, G. (2006:88) suggests two distinct deep structures to solve the problem of structural ambiguity in the following sentence: " Annie whaked a man with an umbrella " . One of them is the expression that Annie had a umbrella and she whaked some guy with it, and the other one can be that Annie whaked some guy and he happened to be holding an umbrella. Therefore, the following sentence Annie whaked a man with an umbrella " can be used as an example of structural ambiguity. There are two underlying interpretations to it which must be denoted differently in deep structural.

Yule, G. (ibid) cites the example of the comedian Marx who understood how to have fun with the structural ambiguity in the movie 'Animals Crackers ' he first says: " I once shot an elephant in my pajamas " and then continues: " How he got into my pajamas I will new know " . The initial meaning of the sentence may be that of: I shot an elephant (as I did) in my pajamas. In the other ho, ho interpretation, a section of the underlying structure would be one of the form I shot an elephant (why was) in my pajamas.

Some phrases are ambiguous. For example, " Small boys and girls " . It can be either ' small boys and (small) girls ' or 'small boys and (all) girls'.

VIII. Words and Lexical item

Kempson, R. (1980:123) states, it is quite misguided to suppose that there is not much trouble in determining of a particular sentence whether it is ambiguous or not.

Word, lexical item and the problem of homonymy

kempson, R. (ibid:79) tries to clear up an ambiguity in the use of the term 'word' before entering into the details of providing a formal characterization of word meaning.

Conversely, it can be said that there is a single word tap, which has numerous different meanings, in the phrases, to give someone a tap on the shoulder, and water tap; but conversely, it can also be said that the phrases have two different words. In this later sense of word, the words are commonly called lexical item. Kempson (ibid:80) prefers to apply this individual term to confine the word into the phonological complex: Isolating the construct of lexical item, or lexeme as it is sometimes called, enables us to characterize the form ' runs ' in the two sentences, ' He runs the motor show ' and ' He runs for Hampshire as two separate lexical items, each with a separate entry in the dictionary.

So, although there is one word ' bank ' , there are two lexical items ' bank ' one describing a side of a river, the other describing the financial institution referred to by the same phonological word.

IX. Multiple Ambiguity

This phenomenon of multiple ambiguity of (phonological) words is defined by Kempson as well as other linguists as homonymy. It is a term used for unrelated meaning of words.

Kempson continues that what appear in the lexical (theoretical dictionary) are what he refers to as lexical items, not words.

(kempson, R. 1980:80)

What is needed of the theoretical model of the meaning of lexicon is that the lexicon contains a specification of every lexical object of the contribution that the lexical object contributes to the truth conditions of all sentences containing it.

Kempson admits that the meanings The lexical givenness of an item is not always given but it depends on situations. or as it seems to him, the meaning could be constant, but that some sentences could contain different lexical items. For example : ' Man is mortal ' and ' A man hit me ' . The interaction between context and lexical item should be specified in a systematic way.

To assess the difference between these formulations, Kempson (ibid:81) considers another example, ' run ' which involves multiple meanings,

- (1)He ran onto the Stadium.
- (2)He ran the race for Manchester.
- (3)The ball ran onto the field.
- (4)The car is running fast.
- (5)The road runs from Manchester to Birmingham.
- (6)He ran the motor show.

Each one of ' run ' provides a potentially distinct lexical item.

X. Ambiguity and Vagueness

Kempson (ibid:124) tries to distinguish ambiguity from vagueness by giving four types of vagueness :

- i. Referential vagueness, in which the sense of the lexical item is conceptually clear, but which it might be difficult to determine whether or not the item can be applied to some objects.
- ii. Indeterminacy of meaning, meaning of an item appears indeterminate.
- iii. Lack of specification in meaning of an item, in which meaning is clear, but merely specified.
- iv. Disjunction in the definition of the meaning of an item where the meaning entails an either - or statement of various interpretation possibilities.

A good example for the first type of vagueness i.e. referential are the lexical items ' city ' and ' town ' .

A city is where there is a long row of people living, and it consists of a great number of houses; and a town is just any place where a row of people live, and it consists of a great number of houses. The towns may be small or big, but cities are big by definition (as villages are small by definition). It is however evident that individual cases do not make it easy to determine whether or not a particular place is a city, or a town.

Kempson (ibid:124)

John possessive construction- Johns book, Johns train etc is a case of the second kind of vagueness. The book which John wrote, the book which John owns, the book John has been reading, the book he has been told to read, etc. can be explained with the help of John book.

The third type that corresponds to look of specification in the meaning of an item may be observed in the verbs go and do that both

lack specificity of meaning and, at the same time, encompass a great number of possible actions; the sentence will be the following:

Such a situation as walking, running, going on a bicycle, going on a motor-bike, go can be described as dissimilar to go is unspecified to the specification of action (ibid:125).

The fourth kind of vagueness also involves a rather different kind of specification. In the following sentences :

1) The job seeker was a first class degree holder, or had some ... teaching experience.

(2) All the competitors should be men or wear one piece swimming suit. "

In both instances of the said sentences, the implication that or adds to the overall sentence is that one of the two conjuncts is valid.

In (1) the individuals having the right to be accepted must be either a first-class degree, not teaching experience or teaching experience, but either a first-class degree, possibly both. The interpretation of this is that there is the interpretation in which both implications hold at the same time. (ibid:128)

XI. An ambiguity Test

A test that separates unambiguous situations of vagueness and ambiguity can. be done by adding " to do so too " .

The best way to distinguish ambiguity is by negation. There is a phenomenon mentioned as the scope of negation - the elements upon which the negative element is acting. As an example, " It was not a woman who came to door, but it was a man. There is limited scope of the negation to the state of femininity.

Ambiguity pro-form test indicates that the difference in scope of negation, at least in the case of such a sentence does not lead to ambiguity. (ibid:134)

XII. " Homonymy and Polysemy; Lexical and Grammatical Ambiguity "

Lyons, J. (1995:54) modifies the definition of homonymy by substituting

'lexeme' for 'word'; similar words (lexems) of the same form.

Lyons perceives that such definition is nevertheless flawed since it does not consider the fact that in most languages most lexemes do not have a single form but rather, they have multiple forms. No mention is also made regarding grammatical equivalence. Due to this, Lyons defines two conceptions of homonyms, absolute and partial.

The absolute homonymy will meet the three following criteria: " (i) they will be unrelated in meaning; (ii) they will all have the same forms (iii) they will have the same forms and be grammatically identical. Lyons (ibid:55)

A good example of absolute homonymy is 'bank1' and 'bank2'

Partial homonymy, on the other hand, are those, in which there is one form of identity and one of the above conditions, and one or two and not three of the above conditions. As an illustration, the verbs find and found both have the form found, but not the form finds, finding and founds, founding etc.

One should also pay attention to the fact that 'found (form of find)' is not grammatically equal to found (form of found). (ibid:55)

Lyons (ibid:56) gives the following example to illustrate what is mentioned about the ambiguity of 'find' or 'found'.

e.g. They discovered hospital and charity institutions.

The sentence can be either read as a sentence in the present tense with a form of the verb found or it can be read as a part-tense sentence with a form of find.

Both find and found are transitive verbs, and are somehow grammatical equivalence - that is, they both can accept a NP like hospitals and charitable institutions is not only grammatical, but also semantically acceptable as the direct object of each of the verbs, the sentence is ambiguous.

Part of the ambiguity is lexical and part grammatical. Lexical where relied on a distinction in the lexical meaning of the two lexemes, that are in part homonymous, found and find. It is also, grammatical ambiguous, in the sense that its ambiguity also rests upon the (semantically relevant) grammatical non-equivalence of found construed as a form of found, and of found construed as a form of find. (ibid:56)

Polysemy according to Lyons (1995:58) is a relationship existing between two or more different lexemes.

It should be pointed out that the distinction between homonymy and polysemy is not always obvious in specific cases.

According to Ullman, S. (1977:159) polysemy is an inherent attribute of human speech that can occur in various ways in abundance.

Ullman identifies five causes of polysemy. There are four native ones and the fifth one is connected with the impact of a foreign language:

(1) Changes in application: It is observable in the use of adjectives since they tend to modify their meaning on the basis of the noun to which they are applied. (ibid:160)

Persons:

1. Apt, skilled, clever.
2. Proper, fitting, decent.
3. Beautiful with dignity.

Concretes:

1. Easy to handle.
2. Of fair size.
3. Beautiful with dignity.
4. Proper, fitting, (of dress).

Actions, speech

1. Appropriate, apt, cleaver

Conduct

1. Fitting, seemly.
2. Gallant, brave.
3. Generous, magnanimous.

Size, Sums:

1. Fair, moderately large.
2. Ample, liberal, magnificent.

Ullmann (ibid) assures that most of these sense arose through shifts in application, though another factor, figurative usage, may also have been at work. He also refers to the fact that not all there meanings have survived.

2. Specialization in a social milieu :

Michel Breal (cited in Ullmann, S : 1977 : 161) focuses on the fact that polysemy frequently comes up by a form of verbal shorthand. In all cases, in all professions or trades, one finds something which is so much present in the mind, so strongly insinuated, that one thinks there is no need of saying it when we speak.

(Essai de semantique; 154 cited in Ullmann; ibid)

For example, ' action ' for a lawyer naturally means ' legal action ' ; for soldier it means a military operation ; therefore, the same word may acquire a number of specialized senses only one of which will be applicable in a given environment :

3. Figurative Language :

The word " eye " , for example, may have many metaphorical uses as :

- 1- Something that looks or is in the place of the eye. i.e. the middle of a flower etc.
- 2- The hole in which a well of water fountains.
- 3- The core mass, the most bright place (of light).
- 4- The centre of revolution.
- 5- Aperture or hole in a needle or instrument.
- 6- A metallic, thread, cord or rope loop.
- 7- In architecture The heart of any detail, as the eye of a dome.

In typography 8 - the surrounding in letters such as d, e and o. (Ullmann, S. 1977 : 163)

4. Homonyms reinterpreted :

Regarding this source, Ullmann (ibid : 164) points out that it is rare and most of the examples are doubtful.

5. Foreign influence :

Changing the meaning of an already existing word is one of the numerous ways through which one language can affect the other language.

(ibid : 165)

XIII. More about lexical & structural Ambiguity

Chomsky (cited in Dineen, F. 1967:391) clarifies that the presence of an ambiguous lexical item does not necessarily make the sentence ambiguous; consider the following example :

(1)' The stuff is light enough to carry ' .

The lexical item ' may refer to ' colour ' or weight ' ; yet, in this sentence, the selection rules would determine what reading of light would be admissible as a combination when a projection rule is applied (for example, here, it would allow the reading with weight with compatible with the readings of carry.) (Dinneen, F. 1967:392)

Halliday, M.A.K (2003:45) refers to structural ambiguity in some prepositional group and he asks whether this group is considered as agentive or as instrumental :

e.g. ' He was deceived by a trick ' .

It could be a trick deceived him or they deceived him by a trick.

Verma, S.K and Krishnaswamy (2005:101) point out to the main types of ambiguity : lexical and structural under the title phrase structure grammar. Consider the following example of structural ambiguity.

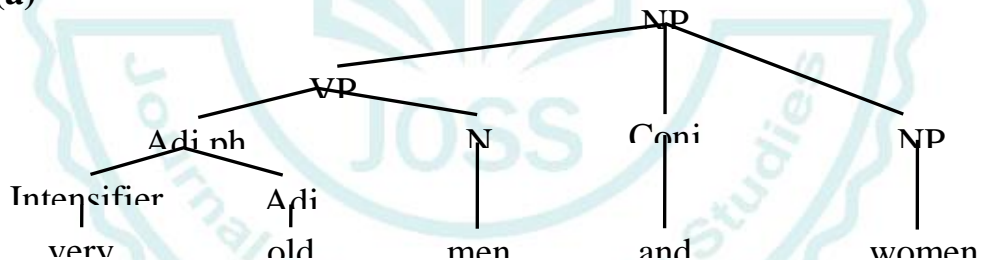
e.g. Very old men and women.

The phrase may mean :

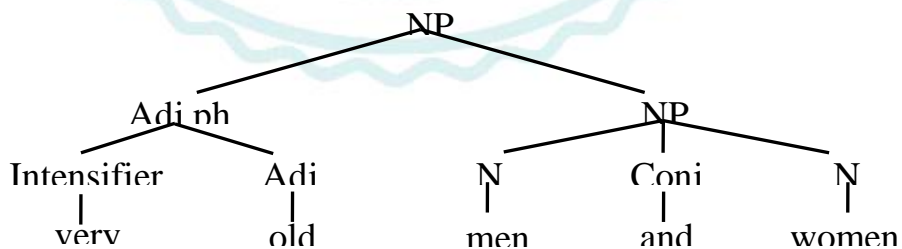
- (a) Very old men and women,
- (b) Very old men and very old women.

This has to be shown in terms of two diagrams :-

(a)



(b)



(verma of krishnaswamy 2005:102)

XIV. Conclusion

Ambiguous expression This term is said to be ambiguous when one expression is capable of having more than one distinct meaning. But as nearly all expressions may be construed to give more than one meaning in one situation or another, the term is typically applied to expressions that have more than one meaning.

The proportion of the uniqueness of meanings is also significant. Take the sentence My best friend has had a vasectomy just now and My best friend is pregnant When in the first case the friend is a male and in the second case the friend is a female. Friend is however not generally regarded as ambiguous.

The ambiguity of an utterance may be due to lexical source such as ' I'll meet you at the bank, where the lexical component, the word bank, may refer to a side of the river or it may refer to a financial institution.

The other form of ambiguity is grammatical, such as old men and women, or may be lexical and grammatical, such as the classic telegram ship sails today.

It is important to note that it was the weakness of TG to solve some ambiguities that led Chomsky to present his generative grammar to solve these ambiguities.

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