



Cihan University
Department of English

A Seminar entitled
Ambiguity in English Language

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Ambiguity in English language

Definition of ambiguity

- ambiguity is a status when a word, phrase, sentence or any other forms of communication has more than one possible interpretation or meaning that might lead to misunderstanding.
- The word comes from a Latin term which means, "wandering about" and the adjective form of the word is *ambiguous*.
- The opposite of ambiguous is **unambiguous**.

We have some types of ambiguity

- 1- Lexical ambiguity
- 2- Syntactic or structural ambiguity.
- 3- Cultural ambiguity
- 4- Religious ambiguity
- 5- Phonetic ambiguity

1- Lexical ambiguity:

This type of ambiguity is also known as "semantic ambiguity" which is concerned with the meaning of a single lexeme that has two or more different meanings.

Here, we have two subtypes:

A- Polysemy: \longrightarrow related meaning

- I saw the face.

Lexical ambiguity

B- Homonymy: → unrelated meaning

The **table** that you showed me is wonderful.

- Each of us saw her **duck**.
- By tomorrow afternoon, I will reach the **bank**.
- A good life depends on a **liver**.



2- Syntactic (structural) ambiguity

- This type of ambiguity is also known as 'structural ambiguity'. It arises when the role of a word plays in a sentence is unclear.
- Word order
- Please, show me the red and yellow balls.
- Foreigners are hunting dogs.

- The well-armed criminal was accused of killing the hard-working peasant with his son.

- 1- The well-armed criminal with the help of his son was accused of killing the hard-working peasant.
- 2- The well-armed criminal was accused of killing the hard-working peasant with his (peasant's) son.
- 3- The well-armed criminal was accused of killing the hard-working peasant who was accompanied by the criminal's son.

syntactic ambiguity

- The old man saw the horse rider with a telescope.
- The old man saw the horse rider by a telescope.
- Scientists see the moon with the telescope.



3- Cultural ambiguity

- The difference between these sentences.
- 1- I am going to a **football** game.
- 2- I am going to a **soccer** game.

- - USA
- - UK
-
- - the ball

4- Religious ambiguity

- 1-God
- 2- Jesus
 - - Muslims' belief/
 - The messenger of Allah and uplifted to heaven alive
 - - Christians' belief/
 - Son of God and was crucified for the sins of men

5-Phonetic ambiguity

- When I was in the market, I lost my sight.
- When I was in the market, I lost my site.
- Here, these two sentences are phonetically identical on the level of spoken language.

- Have you ever heard ice cream.
- Have you ever heard I scream.

- I know your student.
- I know you're student.

The solution

- The best way to resolve the semantic ambiguity is to re-phrase the sentence so that the intended meaning would be clear.
- explanation

Function of ambiguity

- Sometimes you want people wonder of what you mean and make things ambiguous so as to create a misty environment and that is certain purposes.
- This is clearly seen in literature.
- Ambiguity in literature serves the purpose of lending a deeper meaning to a literary work.
- liberty to readers to use their imagination to explore meanings.
- to allow the readers have their own interpretations.
- This active participation of the readers involves them in the prose or poetry they read.



This short lyric by William Blake, is full of ambiguities:

The Sick Rose

“O Rose thou art sick.
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night
In the howling storm:
Has found out thy **bed**
Of crimson joy;
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy”

Thank You