

DIFFERENT INTERPRETATION OF AMBIGUITIES SENTENCES (A Study of Class C the Second Semester Postgraduate Students Majoring English of State University of Semarang)

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ABSTRACT

Ambiguity is strictly speaking, used to describe a word, phrase, or sentence when it has more than one interpretation. Sometimes we found many ambiguous sentences when we are reading or listen to the English sentences. Multi interpretations not only happen from the English language learners, but also in native speakers themselves. This study investigated about is there any different interpretation of ambiguous sentences made by students of class c, second semester students of PPs Unnes?, and what types of ambiguous sentence majority missing in their translating. The objectives of study were to know that the students of PPs Unnes have different interpretations when they are translating the ambiguous sentences and to identifying the types of ambiguities. This study used descriptive qualitative approach; ten postgraduate students from Class C PPs Unnes participated in this study as respondents. All were university students majoring in English. They were given 5 ambiguous sentences. Sentences include different sources of ambiguity such as, structural ambiguity, and lexical ambiguity. The subjects were asked to translate the sentences into Indonesian language. The result of study presented that participants who are not native speakers of English exhibited the different interpretations in translate both the given types of ambiguous sentences. Almost all of ten respondents have different interpretations in each ambiguous sentence. Most respondents show different translating majority in lexical ambiguous sentences.

Key words: *ambiguity sentence, multi interpretation, non native speaker.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In this part the writer will present the reasons for choosing the topic, statement of the problems, the objective of the observation, the significance of doing the observation, and the method of doing the observation. The writer reason for choosing this topic is because sometimes we found many ambiguous sentences when we are reading or listen to the English sentences. Multi interpretations not only happen from the English language learners, but also in native speakers themselves. Native speakers of any natural language have an implicit knowledge of their language usually referred to as competence. Part of this tacit knowledge is concerned with interpretation, i.e. native speakers are capable of assigning an interpretation to any structure they generate. Native speakers not only assign an interpretation to every structure in their language, but also know that there are structures that may have more than one semantic interpretation. These structures are usually referred to as ambiguous structures (Taher; 2010).

There are many definitions about ambiguity, and the writer take one definition by Khawalda & M. Al-Saidat (2012) stated that ambiguity is, strictly speaking, used to describe

a word, phrase, or sentence when it has more than one interpretation. Generally, two types of ambiguity are distinguished, lexical and structural ambiguity. Lexical ambiguity, which is so common, indicates that the word itself has more than one meaning. The word 'hard', for example, can mean 'not soft' or 'difficult'. Structural ambiguity, on the other hand, occurs when a phrase or a sentence has more than one underlying structure, such as the phrases 'English history teacher', 'short men and women', 'The girl hit the boy with a book', etc.

Ambiguity of sentences often happened in the students, and some studies already prove that. In this study, the writer tried to investigate the different interpretation from the second language learners when they are translating English in their native language, in this case was Indonesian language. The respondents of this study were the second semester students of PPs Unnesin Rombel C. just like the previous study, the respondents of Indonesian students majoring English were translating the ambiguous sentences into English.

Statement of the Problems

Basically there are many problems that the writer would like to investigate in this study, but

the limited time and to narrow scope don't let me investigate more about ambiguity in sentence, so that the writer only state two statements of problems as follows:

- a. Is there any different interpretation of ambiguities sentences made by students of class c, second semester students of PPs Unnes?
- b. What types of ambiguous sentence majority missing in their translating?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To know that the students of PPs Unnes have different interpretations when they are translating the ambiguities sentences.
2. To identifying the types of ambiguities sentences are missing in students translating.

Significance of the Study

The significant of the study both theoretical and practical, also for students in majoring English. The writer supposes the study will give the valuable contributions for the readers to know more about the types of ambiguities in English sentences hopefully.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Concept of Ambiguity

In this point, the writer tries to explore some definition from the experts that stated about ambiguity. The first definition based on Haegeman and Gueron (2004) explain that ambiguity occur when an utterance has more than one interpretation, it is usually referred to as ambiguous. Ambiguity means that utterances may differ semantically but not phonetically, i.e. they differ in their interpretation but not in their form. Ambiguity may result from two homonyms occurring in the same structural position, as in: He was on his way to the *bank*. It may also occur when constituents in larger structures have more than one interpretation according to their internal structure and syntactic position.

Another definition comes from Piantadosi et al (2011) elaborate that ambiguity is a pervasive phenomenon in language which occurs at all levels of linguistic analysis. Out of context, words have multiple senses and syntactic categories, requiring listeners to determine which meaning and part of speech was intended. Morphemes may also be ambiguous out of context, as in the English *-s*, which can denote either a plural noun marking

(trees), a possessive (Dylan's), or a present tense verb conjugation (runs). Phonological forms are often mapped to multiple distinct word meanings, as in the homophones too, two, and to. Syllables are almost always ambiguous in isolation, meaning that they can be interpreted as providing incomplete information about the word the speaker is intending to communicate. Syntactic and semantic ambiguity is frequent enough to present a substantial challenge to natural language processing.

B. Benefits of Ambiguity

In this section the writer will discuss about two benefits of ambiguity which is described by Piantadosi et al, they presented two similar perspectives on this point that efficient communication systems will be ambiguous when context is informative about what is being communicated. The first shows that the most efficient communication system will not convey information already provided by the context. Such communication systems necessarily appear to be ambiguous when examined out of context.

Second, Piantadosi et al argue that specifically for the human language processing mechanisms, ambiguity additionally allows re-use of "easy" linguistic elements— words that are short, frequent, and phonotactically high probability. Both these perspectives assume that disambiguation is not prohibitively costly (Levinson, 2000)—that using information from the context to infer which meaning was intended does not substantially impede comprehension (2011).

More recently, the view that there is a processing advantage for semantic ambiguity has been strongly challenged. Rodd, Gaskell, and Marslen-Wilson (2002) argue for a distinction between words like *bark* which, by chance, have two unrelated meanings, and words like *twist* that have multiple, related senses. It is likely that the mental representations of these two types of words will differ significantly. In a set of visual and auditory lexical decision experiments, Rodd et al. (2002) replicate the ambiguity advantage forwards that have multiple related word senses (e.g., *twist*), but found that for ambiguous words that have multiple unrelated meanings (e.g., *bark*) the effect of ambiguity is reversed— multiple meanings delay recognition.

C. Translation Ambiguity

Natural languages are notoriously ambiguous on various levels. Semantically, a single word can have more than one meaning, with the two readings belonging either to the same (i.e., *bank*) or different (i.e., *back*) grammatical categories or parts of speech (Lyons, 1995). Syntactic ambiguity arises when an entire sentence can imply more than one underlying structure, as in *flying planes can be dangerous*. Thus, the intended meaning of a single word can vary greatly depending on the linguistic context in which it appears.

Psycholinguistic studies of monolingual language processing have demonstrated that, in most cases, both meanings of ambiguous words are accessed, and that the cognitive system overcomes this obstacle mostly by relying on the linguistic context (Gernsbacher, Robertson & Werner, 2001; Kambe, Rayner & Duffy, 2001; Kellas, Ferraro & Simpson, 1988; for a review of cross-linguistic lexical ambiguity resolution, see Altarriba & Gianico, 2003). It is somewhat surprising that the cross-linguistic implications of word sense ambiguity, as well as additional sources of translation ambiguity, have only recently come under experimental scrutiny within cognitive psycholinguistics (Degani, Prior, & Tokowicz, 2009; Jiang, 2002; Prior et al., 2007; Tokowicz & Kroll, 2007; Tokowicz et al., 2009).

Translation equivalents may have a one-to-many mapping for different reasons.

1. *Synonymy*: Words that are very close in meaning in a first language (L1) may have a single translation in a second language (L2). For example, English *close* and *shut* both translate to Indonesian *tutup*; Indonesian *meninggal* and *wafat* both translate to English *passed away*.
2. *Polysemy*: One word in the L1 may have several related meanings, each expressed by a different word in the L2. For example, Indonesian *bayangan* can be translated to English as either *shade* (of a building or a tree) or *shadow* (cast by a person).
3. *Homography, homophony, and homonymy*: Linguistic “accidents” can cause two unrelated words to be written in the same way. Such forms are called *homographs*. For example, English *bark* can be mapped to Spanish *corteza* (outer layer of a tree) or *ladrido* (sound made by a dog). Homographs may have the same

pronunciation, in which case they are also *homophones*, but not necessarily. The English word *bark* has two homographs that are also homophones. In contrast, the English word *row* has two homographs that are not homophones. One homograph of *row* matches Spanish *pelea* (fight) and the other match Spanish *hilera* (straight line). When homographs are also homophones, they are called *homonyms*. Homographs may belong to the same grammatical class (i.e., nouns, verbs) and share the same part of speech, as in the examples above, or belong to different parts of speech, as in *bow*-noun (*arco*, belonging to a musical instrument) and *bow*-verb (*inclinarse*).

4. *Morphological ambiguity*: In languages with limited morphology, like English, inflectional and derivational variants of some lexeme may have identical forms. When translated to a morphologically rich language, like Spanish, such variants may be mapped to different forms. For example, the English word *walk* can be translated into several Spanish nouns such as *paseo*, *caminata*, or *vuelta*. In addition, it can be translated into over 20 possible verb forms based on the stem *camina-* (*caminas*, *caminaste*, *caminar*, *caminaba*, *caminaron*, etc.), depending on the tense, aspect, person, and number of the verb.
5. *Semantic discrepancy*: There are cases where multiple translations are a result of the differences in the conceptual-lexical mappings of the two languages. The meaning of the English verb *know*, which covers both knowing facts and knowing people, is carried by two distinct verbs in Spanish, *saber* for the former and *conocer* for the latter. Conversely, the Spanish noun *reloj* covers the concepts denoted by both *clock* and *watch* in English, each of which is a correct translation.

D. Types of Ambiguities

1. Lexical ambiguity

Lexical ambiguity refers to the type of ambiguity that results from the occurrence of homonyms. Consider the following sentence:

She could not bear children.

This sentence is ambiguous. The source of ambiguity is lexical; the word bear has two different meanings. Thus, the sentence is either about a person who cannot stand children, or about one who cannot give birth to children. In some cases of homonyms or homophones, the grammatical category and discourse help in disambiguating the reference of the lexical item (Akmajian et al, 1980).

2. Referential ambiguity

This kind of ambiguity takes place when a speaker uses a referring expression to denote a referent and the addressee is thinking of another referent, e.g. *Mohamed is my friend*. The addressee may associate the name Mohamed with a particular individual different from the one in the mind of the speaker. Some cases of referential ambiguity occur when an anaphor can be co-indexed with more than one free form. A pronoun, for example, has to be preceded by the antecedent from which it gets its interpretation. However, in some structures we may find more than one free form, which may function as an antecedent for the same a pronoun, e.g. *John told Jack that Mary was waiting for him*. The pronoun he can be used to refer back to any one of names in the sentence.

3. Scope ambiguity

When other constituents in its structural context determine the meaning of a constituent in a sentence, we say that the constituent is in the scope of the constituents that determine its reference. Thus, constituents may vary in their interpretations according to the structural context in which they occur. Consider the interpretation of the pronoun she in the following example:

Every princess knows that she will find a prince.

The pronoun she may have a referential use, i.e. it refers to someone mentioned earlier or pointed to. It may be used as a bound pronoun; the pronoun in this case is bound by the referring expression. Every princess and used to refer to every person the expression refers to. Other cases of

scope ambiguity are exemplified by the following sentences:

- *He didn't answer one question*
- *Two students talked to every teacher.*

The above examples are called relative scope. In part three, we attempt to provide a syntactic account for them.

4. Structural ambiguity

Structural ambiguity is different from lexical ambiguity in that it cannot be attributed to any lexical item in the structure. When we form structures we select words from the lexicon and merge them to form other constituents, then these constituents are merged with other words to form larger constituents. In some cases the words can be merged together in different ways leading to different constituents with different interpretations, e.g. *the father of the boy and the girl will come to the party*. The source of ambiguity in this sentence is syntactic or structural. The structural representation of the internal structure of the subject affects the interpretation of the whole sentence.

E. Ambiguity in General Communication

In this section, the writer tries to explore an information-theoretic view of ambiguity. For generality, there were many ranges over any possible set of meanings. For instance, ambiguity might be the space of compositional semantic structures, the space of parse trees, or the set of word senses. Intuitively, a linguistic form is ambiguous if it can map to more than one possible meaning. For instance, the word "run" is ambiguous because it can map to a large number of possible meanings, including a run in a pantyhose, a run in baseball, a jog, to run, a stretch of consecutive events, etc. It turns out, however, that we do not need to consider the ambiguity of specific words or linguistic units to argue that ambiguity is in general useful. This is because language can fundamentally be viewed as conveying bits of information about the speaker's intended meaning. By formalizing a notion of uncertainty about meaning, one can show that the optimally efficient communication system should look ambiguous, as long as context is informative about meaning.

F. Previous study

- a. Structural Ambiguity Interpretation: A Case Study of Arab Learners of English by Mohammad I. Khawalda&Emad M. Al-Saidat University of Mu'tah, Jordan (2012) investigated how Arabic native speakers (non-native speakers of English) interpret English ambiguous sentences. It has been recognized that Arabic native speakers encounter problems with English sentences which involve structural ambiguity. Sixty subjects participated in the experiment. All were university students specialized in English. The subjects were given ambiguous sentences contain prepositional phrases, relative clauses etc.
- b. On The Translation of Structural Ambiguity by Dr. Mohamed H. Grenat and Dr. Mohamed M. Taher (2010) examined structural ambiguity and discusses how the translator/interpreter handles ambiguous structures. One of the tasks of the translator is to render a structural meaning in the source language (SL) into an equivalent structural meaning in the target language (TL). However, not all ambiguous structures in the SL have equivalent ambiguous structures in the TL. This is due to different morph syntactic factors.
- c. Translation Ambiguity *in* and *out* of Context by Anat Prior, Brian Macwhinney and AlonLavie (2010) compare translations of single words, made by bilingual speakers in a laboratory setting, with contextualized translation choices of the same items, made by professional translators and extracted from parallel language corpora. The translation choices in both cases show moderate convergence, demonstrating that decontextualized translation probabilities partially reflect bilinguals' life

experienceregarding the conditional distributions of alternative translations.

III. METHOD OF OBSERVATION

This study using descriptive qualitative approach, the qualitative research is research which purposes for understanding the phenomena about what the subject feels, for example; habitual, perception, motivation, action, etc. This study is a non-experimental research. There was no administration or control group as it found in an experimental research and it was not directed toward hypothesis testing either. Instead, it just attempted to get the information about something.

Ten postgraduate students from Class C PPs Unnesparticipated in thisstudy as respondents. All were university students majoring in English. They were given 5 ambiguous sentences. Sentences include different sources of ambiguity such as, structural ambiguity,and lexical ambiguity. The subjects were asked to translate the sentences into Indonesian language. Unlike most of previous studies, the authors prefer to use translation to find out how the respondents interpret the English ambiguous sentences for two reasons; the first is to avoid any problem which could result from how to express the meaning in English. The second, each reading of the English ambiguous sentences has a different translation in Indonesian. Accordingly, we know exactly how the Indonesian native speakers interpret English ambiguous sentences.

A. The Findings Of The Study

The result of five sentences that has been given to the respondents, the writer found some different interpretations of each respondent both structural ambiguity and lexical ambiguity. The writer to present the result of respondents answer by the following table:

No.	Sentences	Total Number of interpretation
1.	I promise I'll give you a ring	9 students answer in the same meaning; word ' <i>ring</i> ' means ' thing which is use for finger (cincin) ' and 1 student answer in other meaning ' calling (menelpon) '.
2.	The lady hit the man with an umbrella	Each student differs in sentence forms, but the same in substance of sentence.
3.	The fisherman went to the bank	7 students answer in the same meaning; word ' <i>bank</i> ' means ' financial institution (lembagakeuangan) ' and 3 students answer in

	other meaning ' riverbank (tepisungai) '.
4. She is looking for a match	8 students answer in the same meaning; word ' <i>match</i> ' means ' matchstick (korekapi) ', 1 student answer in other meaning ' a contest (pertandingan) ', and 1 student interpret in meaning ' being match (pasangan) '.
5. The girl told the story cried	Each student differs in sentence forms, but the same in substance of sentence.

B. Discussion

Based on the finding above, the writer would like to discuss first about the types of ambiguity have been given to the respondents. There were two types of ambiguities sentences have been given to the respondent were: structural ambiguity and the lexical ambiguity; 2 items of structural ambiguity and 3 items of lexical items. Lexical ambiguity refers to the type of ambiguity those results from the occurrence of homonyms. Structural ambiguity is different from lexical ambiguity in that it cannot be attributed to any lexical item in the structure. When we form structures we select words from the lexicon and merge them to form other constituents, then these constituents are merged with other words to form larger constituents. In some cases the words can be merged together in different ways leading to different constituents with different interpretations.

a. Lexical Ambiguity

Lexical ambiguity refers to the type of ambiguity those results from the occurrence of homonyms. Homonymy means one pronunciation, two clearly different meanings; for example: *savingsbank* and *riverbank* (*bank has two pronunciations but differ in meaning*). There were three items of homonymy ambiguity has been tested such us:

1. I promise I'll give you a **ring**

This sentence contains two meaning because of homonymy word "*ring*". The meaning of sentence might be:

- I promised to someone to give her/his call (phone call) or
- I promise to someone to give her/his a ring for a finger

These meaning will be understood when person told that in certain situation and certain context. Meaning of "ring" for "a phone calling" appeared when both people promised each other to making any meeting or

talked something. Then meaning of "ring" for "a finger" supposed to say when a man purposed one girl or when a man want to give a gift for his couple. The meaning of both sentences described above commonly happened in our life. Even though, these events happened in another situation sometimes.

2. The fisherman went to the **bank**

Similar with the explanation above, 'bank' also has two possible meanings are:

- The fisherman go to the river bank
- The fisherman go to the savings bank

Both meaning of sentences have possible meaning and often happened in daily life. Context of situations in which utterance perform are considered.

3. She is looking for a match

Word 'match' has more than two meanings in lexical meaning. It was ordinary when some respondents interpreted this word into more than two meanings. 'Match' in utterance have some possible meanings are:

- The girl tries to find out the boyfriend (couple)
- The girl looking for the matchstick (wooden stick of match)
- The girl watch the competition (sport competition)

Three of sentences meaning will be perform in different situations based on the user of sentence.

b. Structural Ambiguity

Structural ambiguity is different from lexical ambiguity in that it cannot be attributed to any lexical item in the structure. When we form structures we select words from the lexicon and merge them to form other constituents, then these constituents are merged with other words to form larger

constituents. There were 2 sentences contain structural ambiguity has been tested to the respondents:

1. The lady hit the man with an umbrella
The utterance include in structural ambiguity because of the space of compositional semantic structures. The meaning of utterance is according to the how speaker pronoun (spoken) and how the writer put punctuation mark (written). Ambiguity meaning that appeared by this utterance might be:
 - The lady used an umbrella to hit the man
 - The lady hit a man who is carrying an umbrella
2. The girl told the story cried
This utterance is called **garden path sentence** because they are easily misunderstood (they lead you down the **garden path**) even though **the utterance is grammatical**.
The meaning of the utterance might be "*The girl(who was)told the story, cried*".

IV. CONCLUSION

The above discussion shows that our participants who are not native speakers of English exhibited the different interpretations in translate both the given types of ambiguous sentences. Almost all of ten respondents have different interpretations in each ambiguous sentence. Most respondents show different translating majority in lexical ambiguous sentences. Unlike previous studies, the writer applied sentence translation approach to find out the preferable reading of ambiguous sentences. The use of Indonesian translation of the ambiguous English sentences allows us to know exactly how our participants understand these sentences. Except in the case are structural ambiguous sentences.

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