The Use of Ambiguity Expressions by EFL University Students

A Paper

Submitted to the Council of the Department of English/ College of Education for Human Sciences/ University of Babylon in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of B. A. in English Language and Linguistics

By:

Zahraa Ali Talib Obyed

Supervised By:

Dr. Wafaa Mokhlos Faisal

مسب الله رلانمح ميحرلا

"وَأَنزَلَ ا ٧ ُ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَعَلَّ مك مَا لَمْ تَكُنْ تَعْلَمُ وَكَانَ

فضْلُ ا ٧ ِ عَلَيْكَ عَظِيما"

قدص الله يلعلا ميظعلا

(النساء،الآية ١٣٣)

To My Family

Acknowledgments

Abstract

A word, phrase, or sentence is ambiguous if it has more than one meaning. The ambiguity, however, can be noticed if one really has a linguistic knowledge on how to analyze the phrase or sentence. Of the Three kinds of ambiguity, lexical structural, scope ambiguity. Structural ambiguity occurs when a phrase or sentence has more than one underlying structure. Lexical ambiguity occurs when context is not enough to define the meaning of a word. This paper aims to test a random sample of Iraqi EFL university students taken from the fourth year classes in the Dept. of English , College of Education for Human Sciences ,University of Babylon during the academic year(٢٠٢١-٢٠٢٢). It is hypothesized that Iraqi EFL university students often find difficulty in using ambiguity expressions.

List of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter Two

Ambiguity Expressions

Chapter Three

Testing and Data Collection

Chapter Four

The Results of the Test

Chapter Five

Chapter One Introduction

۱-۱ The Problem

Ambiguity as an actual or uncertainty of meaning occurring when a word, phrase or sentence can be understood in two ways. (McArthur ۱۹۹۲:۳٦)

The problem arises from the state that most EFL university students often find difficulty in using ambiguity expressions because they have no mastery of using ambiguity expressions.

۱.۲ Aims

This paper aims to find out the difficulty faced by Iraqi EFL university students in using ambiguity expressions.

۱.۳ Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that Iraqi EFL university students often find difficulty in using ambiguity expressions.

۱.٤ Procedures

The following steps will be followed in this paper:

۱-Presenting a comprehensive theoretical study about ambiguity expressions.

۲-Testing a random sample of students regarding using ambiguity expressions to show the difficulty faced by Iraqi EFL university students.

۳- Analyzing the result of the test to point out the difficulty faced by the students. ۱.٥ **Limits**

This paper is limited to the study of ambiguity expressions.The test will be applied to a random sample of Iraqi EFL university students taken from the fourth year classes in the Dept. of English , College of Education for Human Sciences ,University of Babylon during the academic year(۲۰۲۱-۲۰۲۲).

۱.٦ Value

This paper is hoped to be of value for English learners and to pave the way for further research in this area.

<center>**Chapter Two Ambiguity Expressions**</center>

٢.١ **Definitions**

Gillion (١٩٩٠:٣٩٤).mentions that ambiguity expressions are the expressions which can have more than one meaning.McArthur (١٩٩٢:٣٦) defines ambiguity as an actual or uncertainty of meaning occurring when a word, phrase or sentence can be understood in two ways. Pinkal (١٩٩٥:١٩) states that "Ambiguous expressions can assume an arbitrarily but finitely large number of readings".

٢.٢ **Types of Ambiguity**

٢.٢.١ **Lexical Ambiguity**

Lexical ambiguity occurs when context is not enough to define the meaning of a word that has more than one meaning.Fromkin (٢٠٠٣, p.١٢٢) explained that: Lexical ambiguity occurs when at least one word in a phrase or a sentence can produce more than one meaning ,for example, ١-This will make you smart.

This sentence is ambiguous because it has two meanings for the word smart which is "clever or burning sensation.According to Lobner,(٢٠٠٢:٤٢) there are two types for lexical ambiguity which are homonymy and polysemy.

٢.٢.١.١ **Homonymy**

Homonymy is a phenomenon that refers to words which have the same form and pronunciation but they differ in meaning. A very famous example is the sentence: ٢- I'll meet you by the bank.

This sentece has two interpretation.The first interpretation is 'I'll meet you by the financial institution'.The second interpretation is 'I'll meet

<center>٣</center>

you by the riverside'. Therefore, this sentence regards an ambiguous sentence .

(Fromkin et al. ٢٠٠٣:١٨٠)

٢.٢.١.٢**Homophones**

Homophones can be defined as two or more different (written) words that have the same pronunciation but differ in meaning.For example;

The words "too/two" ٣-I

love you too.

٤-There are two teachers in the class.

This leads to ambiguity in speaking and we will not know the meaning of the words unless we know the context.

(Yule,٢٠٢٠:١٣٧)

٢.٢.١.٣ **Polysemy**

Polysemy are those words who have several meanings but they are related to one another. For instance, the verb 'open' has many meanings concerning unfolding, expanding, revealing, moving to an open position, making openings, and so on.Unlike, homonymous words whose meaning have no relevance to another.

(Hirst,١٩٩٢:٥)

٢.٢.٢ **Structural Ambiguity**

It is also called structural or grammatical ambiguity. It refers to the condition when the sentence has two or more possible meanings because of its structure.(Hurford and Heasley ١٩٨٣: ١٢٨) ,for example:

٥-Nicole saw the people with binocular.

The sentence can be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation is that Nicole used binoculars to see the people. In this case , binoculars modify Nicole (Nicole with binoculars). The other interpretation is that

٤

the people had binoculars when Nicole saw them. In this case ,
'binoculars' modify the people.Let's take another example:
٦-The chicken is ready to eat.
This sentence also can be interpreted in two ways.The first interpretation
is that the chicken is cooked and can be eaten now .Whole the second
interpretation could be the chicken is ready to be fed.
(Net source ١)

٢.٢.٣ Scope Ambiguity

This ambiguity occurs when different semantic scope in a sentence
,for example :
٧-Every man loves a woman.
This sentence can be interpreted in two ways.The first interpretation is
that for every man, there is a woman.The second interpretation is that
each man loves a different woman. Another example, ٨-All that
glitters is not gold.
This sentence also can be interpreted in two ways.The first interpretation
is that everything that glitters is not made of gold.This rock glitters so it
cannot be gold.The second interpretation is that not everything that
glitters is gold.This rock glitters so it might be gold but it does not have to
be.

(Cann, ١٩٩٣:٩٥)

We see that the sentence is ambiguous because it has two different
meanings. Moreover, there is no good reason to say that the ambiguity
should be syntactic. So we can say that scope ambiguities are genuine
semantic ambiguities.

(Net source ٢)

Chapter Three

The Test

٣.١ **Testing**

According to Al-Juboury(١٩٩٩:١)a test can be defined as any means of checking what the students can do with the language and what they cannot do with it.

A test can be also defined as a way of discovering, by questions or practical activities, what someone knows, or what someone or something can do.

(Net sources ٣)

٣.٢ The Characteristics of a Good Test

The most important features of a good test are:

٣.٢.١ Validity

Kumar(٢٠١١:١١٣) denotes that validity is a test which helps predict whether a person will be successful in a given job.A test that has been validated can be helpful in differentiating between prospective and employees who will be able to perform the job well and those who will not.

The most important types of validity are:

٣.٢.١.١ Content Validity

It is the extent to which the test related to the features of the material to be tested. (Armstrong,٢٠٠٦:٤٦٣)

٣.٢.١.٢ Face Validity

It refers to the way in which the test looks to the examinees, supervisors or to the people concerned with students' education, in order to have its face validity. (Al-Juboury, ١٩٩٩:٢٦)

The present test has been approved by the following supervisors:

-Asst. Prof Nasaem Mahdi(Ph.D)

-Asst. Prof Sadaq Mahdi(Ph.D)

-Asst. Prof Muneer Ali(Ph.D)

٣.٢.٢ **Reliability**

It refers to the standardization of the result of the test.A person who takes a certain score in a certain test ,he should be able to take the same score if the test is given to him another time.(Kumar ,٢٠١١:١١٣)

٣.٢.٣ **Practicality**

It is also known as usability. A test which is valid and reliable but difficult to administer or score or which is expensive, may fail to gain acceptance. (Ibid: ٢٧)

٣.٣ **Test Design**

The test consists of two questions ,the first question includes (١٠) items and the second question includes(٥) items to measure the recognition level and the production level of the student's performance in using ambiguity expressions.

٣.٤ **Test Material**

Most items of the test are taken from grammar books mentioned in chapter two.

٣.٥ **The Sample of the test**

The sample of the test consists of (٣٠) students taken randomly from the fourth year level in the Dept. of English , College of Education for Human Sciences ,University of Babylon during the academic year ٢٠٢١٢٠٢٢.

Chapter Four The Result of the Test

٤.١ **The Result of the Test**

The following table shows the result of the recognition level:.

Table (١) The Result Of The Answers Of Question One

Items	Number of Correct Responses	Percentage%	Number of Incorrect Responses	Percentage%
١	١٨	٥٣٪	١٦	٤٧٪
٢	١١	٣٣٪	٢٣	٦٧٪
٣	١٣	٣٨٪	٢١	٦٢٪
٤	١٧	٥٠٪	١٧	٥٠٪
٥	١٠	٣٠٪	٢٤	٧٠٪
٦	١١	٣٣٪	٢٣	٦٧٪
٧	١٤	٤١٪	٢٠	٥٩٪
٨	٢١	٦٢٪	١٣	٣٨٪
٩	٢٠	٥٩٪	١٤	٤١٪
١٠	١٤	٤٢٪	٢٠	٥٨٪
Total	١٤٩	٤٤٪	١٩١	٥٦٪

٤.٢.١ Test Analysis for question (١)

According to the results shown in the table above. It is noticed that the number and the percentage of incorrect responses (١٩١,٥٦٪) are more than those of the correct responses (١٤٩,٤٤٪) .

Item(١) the number and percentage of correct responses(١٨,٥٣٪) are more than those of incorrect responses(١٦,٤٧ %) because the students are familiar with these items.While Items(٢,٦) the number and percentage of incorrect responses(٢٣,٦٧٪) are more than those of correct responses(١١,٣٣٪) because the students are unfamiliar with these items.

Item(٣) the number and percentage of incorrect responses(٢١,٦٢٪) are more than those of correct responses(١٣,٣٨٪) because the students are unfamiliar with these items.In contrast Items(٤) the number and percentage of correct responses and incorrect responses are (١٧,٥٠٪).

Item(٥) the number and percentage of incorrect responses(٤٢,٧٠٪) are more than those of correct responses(١٠,٣٠٪) because the students are unfamiliar with these items.Also with Item(٧) we notice the number and percentage of incorrect responses(٢٠,٥٩%) are more than those of correct responses(١٤,٤١٪) because the students are unfamiliar with these items.

Item(٨) the number and percentage of correct responses(٢١,٦٢٪) are more than those of incorrect responses(١٣,٣٨ %) because the students are familiar with these items.Unlike Item(٩) the number and percentage of incorrect responses(٢٠,٥٩٪) are more than those of correct responses(١٤,٤١٪) because the students are unfamiliar with these items. Item(١٠) the number and percentage of incorrect responses(٢٠,٥٨٪) are more than those of correct responses(١٤,٤٢٪) because the students are unfamiliar with these items.

The following table shows the result of the production level:

Table (٢) The Result Of The Answers Of Question Two

Items	Number of Correct Responses	Percentage%	Number of Incorrect Responses	Percentage%
١	١٣	٣٧٪	٢٢	٦٣٪
٢	١٤	٤٠٪	٢١	٦٠٪
٣	١٣	٣٧٪	٢٢	٦٣٪
٤	١٦	٤٦٪	١٩	٥٤٪
٥	١٠	٢٨٪	٢٥	٧٢٪
Total	٦٦	٤٨٪	١٠٩	٦٢٪

٤.٢.٢ **Test Analysis for question (٢)**

According to the results shown in the table above. It is noticed that the number and the percentage of incorrect responses (١٠٩,٦٢٪) are more than those of the correct responses (٦٦,٤٨٪) .

Items(١ and ٣) the number and percentage of incorrect (١٣,٣٧٪) are more than those of correct responses(٢١,٦٣٪) because the students are unfamiliar with these items.

Items(٢) the number and percentage of incorrect (٢١,٦٠٪) are more than those of correct responses(١٤,٤٠٪) because the students are unfamiliar with these items.

Items(٤) the number and percentage of incorrect (١٩,٥٤٪) are more than those of correct responses(١٦,٤٦٪) because the students are unfamiliar with these items.Also we have with Items(٥) the number and percentage of

incorrect (٢٥,٧٢٪) are more than those of correct responses(١٠,٢٨٪) because the students are unfamiliar with these items.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Ambiguity expressions are the expressions which can have more than one meaning.There are several types of ambiguity among them lexical ambiguity structural ambiguity and ,scope ambiguity.

A random sample of (٣٠) students was taken from the fourth year classes in the Dept. of English,College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Babylon to apply a diagnostic test to them in using ambiguity expressions are the expressions which can have more than one meaning during the academic year(٢٠٢١-٢٠٢٢).According to the result of the whole test ,the number and the percentage of incorrect responses (١٥٠,٥٩٪) are more than those of correct responses(١٠٨, ٤١٪).The results indicate that Iraqi EFL university learners face difficulty in using ambiguity expressions are the expressions which can have more than one meaning and this confirms the hypothesis of the study.

Bibliography

Cann, R. ١٩٩٣. **Formal Semantics: an introduction.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fromkin, V.; Rodman, R.; and Hyams, N. ٢٠٠٣. **An Introduction to Language.** USA: Heinle, a part of Thomson Corporation.

Gillon, B. ١٩٩٠. **Ambiguity, Generality, and Indeterminacy: Tests and Definitions** (pp٣٩١-٤١٦). Synthese.

Hirst Graeme.١٩٩٢. **Semantic Interpretation and the resolution of ambiguity**.Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hurford, R.S. and B. Heasley ١٩٨٣. **Semantics:A coursebook.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Löbner, Sebastian. ٢٠٠٢. **Understanding Semantics.** London [a.o.]: Arnold [a.o.].

McArthur, T. ١٩٩٢. **The Oxford Companion to the English Language.**Oxford :University Press.

Pinkal, M. (١٩٩٥). **Logic and lexicon,** Kluwer Academic Publishers, ٧٥.

Net Sources

Net source(١)

Internet.https://www.thoughtco.com/syntactic-ambiguity-grammar-

١٦٩٢١٧٩.

Net source (٢)

Internet. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/test.

Net source (٣)

Internet.https://www.lexical-resource-

semantics.de/wiki/index.php/Glossary:Scope_Ambiguity **Appendix (١)**

The Test

Q١)Choose the correct answer for the following sentences:

١-This will make you smart. a.Lexical

Ambiguity

b.Structural Ambiguity

c.Scope Ambiguity

٢-The chicken is ready to eat. a.Lexical

Ambiguity

b.Structural Ambiguity

c.Scope Ambiguity ٣-(too,two).

a.Homophones

b.Polysemy

c.Homonymy

٤-I'll meet you by the bank. a.Homophones

b.Polysemy

c.Homonymy

٥-Nicole saw the people with binocular a.Lexical

Ambiguity

b.Structural Ambiguity

c.Scope Ambiguity ٦-Every

man loves a woman.

a.Lexical Ambiguity

b.Structural Ambiguity

c.Scope Ambiguity

٧(-sew/so)

a.Homophones

b.Polysemy

c.Homonymy

٨-(bat,bat)

a.Homophones

b.Polysemy

c.Homonymy ٩-(mole,mole)

a.Homophones

b.Polysemy

c.Homonymy

١٠-All that glitters is not gold. a.Lexical

Ambiguity

b.Structural Ambiguity

c.Scope Ambiguity

Q٢ Give well formed sentences for the following:

١-Lexical Ambiguity.

٢-Structural Ambiguity.

٣-Scope Ambiguity.

٤-Homonymy.

٥-Polysemy

Appendix (٢) The Answers of the Test

Q١)

١-a

٢-b

٣-a

٤-c

٥-b

٦-c

٧-a

٨-c

٩-c

١٠-c

Q٢)

١-This will make you smart.

٢--The chicken is ready to eat.

٣-All that glitters is not gold.

٤-I'll meet you by the bank.

٥-My father is the head of the department.