

TYPES OF AMBIGUITY IN LINGUISTICS

The article deals with the linguistic problem of ambiguity. Based on the specialized research sources analysis fourteen types of ambiguity which may lead to misunderstanding of utterances are enumerated.

Natural languages possess many types of ambiguity at every level of description, and this feature distinguishes every natural language from formal languages. Ambiguity often arises when a single word or word collocation are associated in the language with more than one meaning [1, p. 78]. D. Crystal underlines that language is not logically constructed, not beautifully regular. It can change its form unpredictably. That is why, language may, sometimes, be a source of complexity as far as the understanding aspect is concerned [2, p. 12–15]. Thus, knowledge about language, together with knowledge of how to use that language may, sometimes, either hamper or facilitate one's understanding of that language.

G. Chierchia and S. Mc Connell-Ginet state that “ambiguity arises when a single word or string of words is associated in the language system with more than one meaning” [3, p. 29]. P. Saka defines ambiguity as a multiple meaning or multiple interpretations that can be either “syntactic” or “lexical”; and states that the explanation of ambiguity “possesses no difficulties for semantics theory in general, or for truth-theoretic semantics in particular.” However, he supposes that language ambiguity can be found in both artificial and natural languages in “affixes, words, sentences, extended discourse, and also in silence, in art and images.” [4, p. 155]. J. Kess defines ambiguity as “the whole ambiguity paradigm, which suggests multiple interpretation of all stages during the processing of sentences” [11, p. 76], and N. Warburton _as a word or phrase that possesses two or more meanings; that is can be interpreted in different ways [5, p. 10].

W. Empson sees ambiguity as “any verbal nuances, however slight, which give room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language” [6, p. 56–57].

S. Peng Soon states that an item is ambiguous when the following two conditions are met:

- 1) The word can be ambiguous semantically, if it is capable of having two or more distinctly different meanings (senses or references);
- 2) The word can be ambiguous pragmatically, if it's different meanings can be interpreted as stable in a given context [7, p. 57].

T. Stephen also attempts to define ambiguity in terms of both semantic and pragmatic behavior by analyzing the semantic (literal) and pragmatic (invisible) meanings ; the author where lives that ambiguity arises in a certain context [8, p. 150]. J. Aitchison stresses the different functions of language and more precisely, the fact that language is an inner thought. Thus, being liable to different analysis makes it a very indispensable and interesting means of communication [9, p. 7].

Wales states that ambiguity is double (or multiple) meaning. She adds that this concept has special implications in different disciplines [10, p. 19–20]:

1-Linguists would see ambiguity as a linguistic universal, common to all languages, and as one of the inevitable consequences of the arbitrariness of language, i.e., the lack of one-to-one correspondence between signs and meanings.

2-Out of discourse, it is regarded as a fault of styles akin to vagueness and obscurity.

3-In literary language, ambiguity is replaced by ambivalence, which means the property of having more than one meaning of equal value. Ambiguity has been treated differently by various linguists in terms of the purpose of their orientations, a lot of definitions have been formulated to account for what ambiguity is. For example, focusing on the fact that language is a set of both theoretical and practical rules. W. Empson differs from other authors in definitions of ambiguity. Some linguists confirm a multiple meaning or multiple interpretations, but some of them say the word can be ambiguous semantically and pragmatically. Also, J. Aitchison sees different definition for representing ambiguity by being liable to different analysis makes it a very indispensable and interesting.

S. Lobner adds that notion of ambiguity can be applied to all levels of meaning: to expression meaning, utterance meaning, and communicative meaning. The author also mentions metaphor and metonymy as possible sources of ambiguity [11, p. 2].

The most comprehensive view on the ambiguity typology one can find in the book “Seven types of ambiguity” by W. Empson, which is considered today to be one of the most fundamental researches on ambiguity in English-speaking linguistics. The researcher analyzed the discourse of belles-lettres, and identified seven types of ambiguity one can face within a poetical or prose writing. Metaphor is the first type of ambiguity, and it arises, according to W. Empson, in the context where two things which have different properties are said to be alike [6, p. 120]. The second type of ambiguity, antithesis, occurs when contrasting concepts, words or sentences are used within parallel grammatical structure. The third type of ambiguity, a “sound” one, occurs when two ideas, which are connected only by being both relevant in the context, can be given in one word simultaneously. The fourth type of ambiguity can occur when two or more meanings of a statement do not agree among themselves. The fifth type of ambiguity arises when a speaker discovers his/ her idea in the act of speaking not holding it at all in his/ her mind before the speech act. Conflict is the sixth type of ambiguity when the statement says nothing, by tautology contradiction, or by irrelevant statement. Finally, the seventh type of ambiguity, according to W. Empson, occurs when word has two meanings and the two values of the ambiguity are the two opposite meanings [6, p. 133].

P. C. Gomez differentiates the global and local ambiguities and analyzes lexical and structural ambiguity distinguishing them according several criteria, such as contexts extension, grammatical categories, etc. Structural ambiguity is considered as a sub-category of relational category; relational category also

includes referential and functional ambiguity [1, p. 78]. In contrast to structural ambiguity, functional ambiguity is considered as a semantic one without necessarily involving any syntactic distinctions. The matter here is not to present interrelated concepts but their relations to each other. Such relations can be explicit or implicit. The explicit relations are presented by a function word, i.e. a preposition, an article, etc.: *an orange box* ('box with oranges' or 'an orange-colored box'); *on the second floor I've seen a salesman with an artificial leg* ('having it in hands' or 'characterized by'). One more type of ambiguity, P. C. Gomez distinguishes, is a referential one: *He saw a girl with the telescope* (it remains unclear, if the girl had a telescope or he saw it through it) [1, p. 81]. We can define the prerequisites of lexical ambiguity's occurrence. Both linguistic and extra-linguistic factors influence the development of new meanings. Ambiguity, as well as the disappearance of already existing components from the semantic structure of the word. Such a combination of extra-linguistic (the emergence of a new reality) and linguistic (the emergence of a synonymous or thematically related new word) factors constitutes the essence of the evolution of language; semantics of the word and the ways of its interpretation defines its further reception by the addressee.

L. John adds that syntactic ambiguity refers to differences in phrasal structures and considers lexical ambiguity as a syntactic category. The semantic ambiguity refers to differences in meaning, and, consequently, it is further divided by L. John into homonymy or polysemy, depending on whether or not the meanings are interrelated. Syntactic and semantic ambiguities are considered orthogonal, i.e. a word can have related or unrelated meanings in various categories [12, p. 60]. Nevertheless, a mixture of lexical and structural ambiguity may arise in certain sentences. The combination of lexical and structural ambiguity possesses features of both lexical and structural ambiguity, which means that a sentence contains an ambiguous word(s) and it can be interpreted from different points of view in terms of its syntactic structure: *I saw her watch* ('to watch' as a verb and 'a watch' as a noun). As far as the syntactic category of the word changes, the structure and the meaning of the sentence are correspondingly affected. It is worth to note, that L. John offers also to distinguish between linguistic and non-linguistic ambiguity; so, the linguistic ambiguity depends only on the structure of the language system, other types of ambiguity shall be accounted for in other ways, i.e. ambiguity of proper names, personal pronouns, definitive descriptions, etc. [12, p. 102].

R. Cann in the book "Formal Semantics: an introduction" proposes one more type of ambiguity – a "scope" one – and points out that such type of ambiguity is caused by possibility to observe different semantic scope in a sentence from various points of view. Speaking precisely, the author means that even when there is no ambiguity in a single separate word or the complete surface structure the observed semantic scope is considered as indefinite due to other elements. Such elements may include qualification or negation. Scope ambiguity occurs when two similar expressions or quantifiers take scope over other presented in a sentence [13, p. 63].

Using purely linguistic criteria A. Kairyte and L. Bikeliene enumerate five main types of ambiguity: phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, and contextual ambiguities. According to the authors, contextual ambiguity occurs usually due to irony, metaphor, intentional double readings and other cases of polysemy. Contextual ambiguity is quite distinct from a lexical one: the meaning shift does not deal with different meanings of one word, but changes them slightly in order for an expression to fit the context [14].

According to C. Quiroga-Clare, “something is ambiguous when it can be understood in two or more possible senses or ways. If the ambiguity is in a single word, it is called lexical ambiguity. In a sentence or clause, it is structural ambiguity”. When providing examples about lexical ambiguity, [15, p. 100] he considers polysemy to be one of the most common types of words causing ambiguity. This ambiguity, according to C. Quiroga-Clare, occurs when a listener (a recipient) cannot decide which particular meaning among many is used. N. Warburton, enumerates three types of ambiguity 1. Lexical ambiguity 2. Referential ambiguity 3. Syntactical ambiguity, he speaks about lexical ambiguity in a word has two or more possible meanings, and a phrase or sentence can be understood in more than one way. The referential ambiguity “occurs when a word is used so that it could be taken to be referring to either of two or more things”, the third type is syntactic ambiguity “occurs when the order of words allows two or more interpretations” [16, p. 11].

All the types of ambiguity revealed as a result of the analysis of scientific sources, discussed above, are shown in figure 1 below.

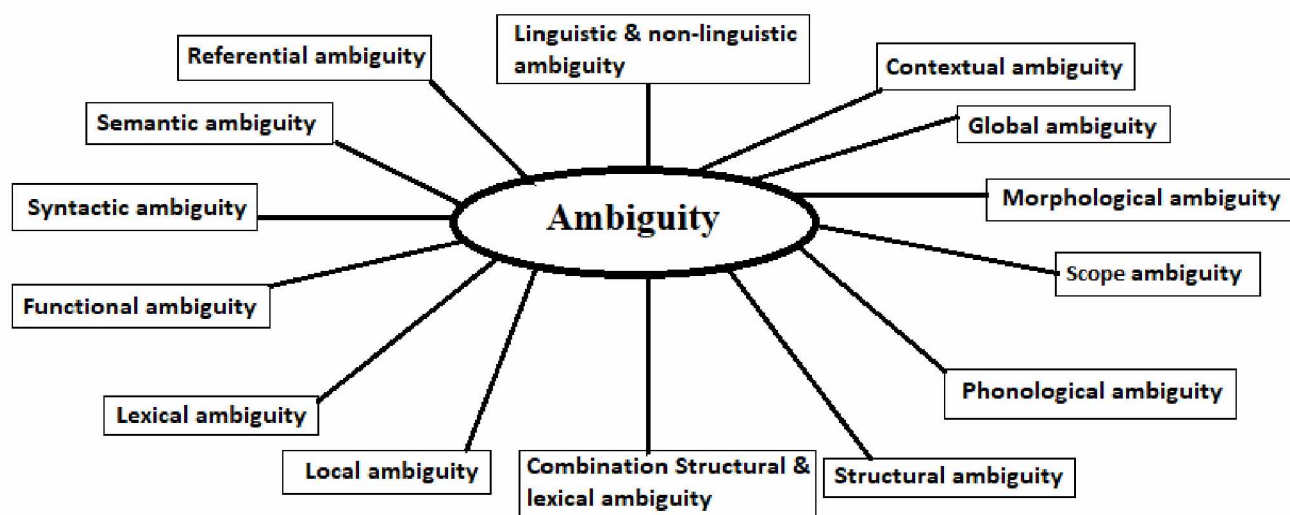


Figure 1. Types of ambiguity

Language is an essential tool of communication, recording and transferring relevant information. However, to a certain extent, communication performed via natural languages may have some inevitable drawbacks, communicative “noise”, other obstacles. The abovementioned matter leads to ambiguity causing confusion in common utterances and their interpretation which is, actually, considered to be a quite common phenomenon among modern languages [17, p. 2933].

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СХОДСТВА И РАЗЛИЧИЯ В ЭКСПЛИКАЦИИ ЗНАЧЕНИЙ ЭМОТИВНЫХ ЛЕКСЕМ В ТОЛКОВЫХ СЛОВАРЯХ АНГЛИЙСКОГО И БЕЛОРУССКОГО ЯЗЫКОВ

Статья посвящена проблеме представления значений эмотивных лексем в лексикографических источниках на английском и белорусском языках, а также сходствам и различиям в их экспликации. Рассмотрены различные способы толкования лексических единиц, называющих, описывающих и выражающих эмоции, и отмечены их некоторые недостатки. Установлены способы представления семы 'эмоция' в определениях анализируемой группы лексем.

Эмоции пронизывают все аспекты нашей жизни, поэтому исследовательский интерес, проявляемый к ним, неудивителен. В центре внимания данной статьи находится эмотивная лексика, под которой понимаются лексические единицы, называющие, описывающие и выражающие эмоции [1].