

AMBIGUOUS UTTERANCES: CASE STUDY ON STUDENTS' PROJECT OF ENGLISH PRESENTATION

Ozi Satria
STIT Palapa Nusantara
satriaozi41@gmail.com

Abstract

This research purposed to identify the types of ambiguous utterances particularly lexical ambiguity employed by college students on presentation projects of English subjects and to recognize the possible factors which caused the students' presented ambiguous utterances on their presentation. This research implied descriptive qualitative with a case study approach. In which, the researcher employed observation, interview, and documentation as techniques of data collection. Thence, to analyze the data the researcher used three steps based on Miles and Huberman theory such as, the researcher did data reduction, displayed the data as some categories, and the last step manufactured the conclusion. To answer both research focus the researcher adopted Cruse Laporte theory. From the two types of lexical ambiguity, the researcher only found homonyms such as "I look at the duck" presented by the student "HH", "We will miss the unique cat" presented by the student "EW", "One of my friends hold the bat" was employed by the student "JA", "There was a Kecial bird on my back" was uttered by the student "JU", "I like this season so much" was uttered by the student "YK", and the last one was said by the student "IG" it was "I am still young". These homonyms were caused by some factors they were 2 students felt "No knowledge of English", 7 students felt "no context comprehension", 6 students owned "limited vocabulary", and the last factor was "no knowledge of English structure" explained by 5 students. Those results were significantly described as valuable contributions in relation to providing updated knowledge of ambiguous utterances especially lexical ambiguity employed by the college students on presentation projects of English Subjects.

Keywords : Language; Ambiguous utterances; College Students.

Abstrak : Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi kategori-kategori terhadap ujaran yang ambigu khususnya kata-kata ambigu yang di ujaran oleh mahasiswa pada tugas persentasi dalam mata kuliah bahasa Inggris. Serta untuk mengenal faktor-faktor yang mungkin menyebabkan mahasiswa mempersentasikan ujaran yang ambigu dalam persentasi mereka. Penelitian ini menggunakan deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus. Ynag mana, peneliti menggunakan observasi, interview, dan dokumentasi sebagai teknik pengumpulan data. Kemudian untuk menganalisa data peneliti mengadopsi teori dari pada Miles and Huberman yang mengungkapkan bahwa terdapat tiga langkah yang dapat dilakukan dalam menganalisa data yakni; peneliti dapat melakukan reduksi data, penyajian data kedalam katagori-katagori, dan langkah yang terakhir ialah membangun kesimpulan. Untuk menjawab kedua pertanyaan penelitian peneliti mengadopsi teori Cruse dan Laporte. Dari dua kategori terhadap kata ambiguitas tersebut, hanya ada satu katagori yang didapatkan oleh peneliti yakni homonyms seperti; "I look at the duck" dilontarkan oleh siswa "HH", "We will miss the unique cat" diucapkan oleh siswa "EW", "One of my friend hold the bat" diucapkan oleh siswa "JA", "There was a Kecial bird on my back" diucapkan oleh Jsiswa "JU", "I like this season so much" disebutkan oleh siswa "YK", dan yang terakhir diucapkan oleh siswa "IG" it was "I am still young".

Homonyms ini disebabkan oleh beberapa faktor yakni 2 siswa menyatakan “tidak memiliki kemampuan didalam bahasa Inggris”, 7 siswa merasa “tidak memahami konteks”, 6 siswa “memiliki kosa kata yang terbatas”, dan faktor yang terakhir ialah 5 siswa mengatakan “tidak memiliki pengetahuan terhadap struktur bahasa Inggris. Hasil tersebut perlu dideskripsikan sebagai kontribusi yang bernilai dalam menyediakan pengetahuan terbaru terhadap ujaran ambigu khususnya kelas kata ambigu yang digunakan oleh mahasiswa pada tugas persentasi dalam mata kuliah bahasa Inggris.

Kata Kunci : *Language, Ambiguous utterances, College Students*

INTRODUCTION

Language is a complex and fundamental system of communication used by humans to convey thoughts, ideas, emotions, and information. It consists of a set of symbols, whether spoken, written, or gestural, that have agreed-upon meanings within a particular community or culture. Language is essential for human interaction, learning, culture, and the transfer of knowledge across generations. Besides, language is a symbol which used by individuals of specific cultures to talk or communicate with each other. As postulated by Wardhaugh (1986) language is a code or symbol used by humans to communicate with each other. Was stated by Chomsky (2000) that language is a conventional system or written symbol through which human beings as members of social groups and participants of their culture, communicate. Ideally, human beings have to be able to use symbols or code in their communication in written or even spoken language but the situation nowadays is not indicated that potential concept. It may be caused by several factors. In reality in communication, people sometimes encounter many kinds of obstacles one of them is transferring ambiguous utterances which commonly causes misunderstanding between speaker and listener. Therefore, as educated people, we have to understand deeply what is meant by ambiguous utterances in order to avoid such matters.

An ambiguous utterance refers to a statement or sentence that has multiple possible interpretations or meanings due to its ambiguous nature. Ambiguity arises when a word, phrase, or sentence can be understood in more than one way, often leading to confusion or the need for additional context to determine the intended meaning. Ambiguity can occur due to different linguistic structures, word meanings, or syntactic arrangements. In tune with that, ambiguous utterance is a situation where words or even sentences are understood in different meanings just because they have two or more meanings. As Mackay (1967) argued a word or a sentence in written or even in spoken language can be meant ambiguous if it has two distinct meanings and it has no differentiation in grammatical. A current issue came from Stageberg (1966), and Brooks (1987) indicated that ambiguity is a reason for vagueness in students speaking, which means that ambiguity may cause interaction problems, from small misunderstandings to irredeemable

imperfection. Furthermore, Rector (2013), and Pramitasih (2012) argued that the most common problems that people face are lexical and structural ambiguities as this research deals with.

Furthermore, Cruse (1986) postulated that a glossary or lexicon can have homonym entries that are substantially different in meaning. Homonyms are words that share the same spelling or pronunciation but have different meanings. They can create confusion and ambiguity in language, especially when the context doesn't provide clear clues about which meaning is intended. Commonly, a word that has multiple meanings (polysemy) eventually comprehension problems, especially when a speaker is not well-transferred about the context of the conversation or does not have transferred knowledge on the issue. Laporte (2001) stated that estate troubles with lexical ambiguity stem from the large lexical ambiguity of languages just because languages commonly construct with multiple meanings of words. Consistently, Rodd (2002) assumes that over 80% of periodic English words either homographic and this establishes lexical ambiguity in English anywhere. For instance: first, the sentence "I go to my **uncle**'s house". This sentence becomes ambiguous due to the word "uncle". We use the word "uncle" to call both the brother of our mother and father which makes it easy for the listener is not easy to decide the substantial meaning of the sentence. Second, "Numa brings the **light** computer". Due to the word "**light**" has three possible meanings such as, "**Light**, not a heavy computer", "**light** is a computer that has an electric lamp", and "**light** is a shiny computer".

Many investigators were also talking about ambiguous utterances in written or even in speaking competencies. The first researcher was Wakhidah (2018) titled Study of Ambiguity Found in Students' English Workbook of Vocational High School. She focused on lexical and structural ambiguity and in her investigation she obtained around 76% contained lexical ambiguity and only 24% contained structural ambiguity in students' workbooks. The next investigator was Demir (2020) titled Lexical and Structural Ambiguities in Student Writing: An Assessment and Evaluation of Results. The focus of this research was lexical and syntactical ambiguities in student writing. He found that more of students' writing belonged to lexical ambiguities than syntactical ambiguities and when it was compared to another grammatical item, students were more inclined to lexical ambiguity of verbs. Therefore, another relevant issue was investigated by Silvyana (2020) titled Lexical and Syntactic Ambiguity in the Headlines of the Telegraph and Yahoo News. The result of her research was from 30 data that were analyzed, 13 as ambiguity data, 8 data belong to lexical ambiguity, and the other 5 data belong to syntactical ambiguity. Furthermore, written by Puspitasari (2019) about Lexical and Structural Ambiguity Found in Articles in the Jakarta Post Daily Newspaper. The aim of this research was to find out the lexical and structural ambiguity that occurs in the articles and describe the causal factors of each ambiguity. She found 20 ambiguous

words and from nineteen articles of Jakarta post were found phrases and/or sentences. Also, there were 12 cases dealing with structural ambiguity and 8 cases dealing with lexical ambiguity. Thence, the possible factors that caused them ambiguity were polysemy and equivocal phrasing. The next investigator was Usroh (2017) titled *The Analysis of Ambiguity Sentences in the Students' English Textbook*. As printed in her thesis, she found 33 ambiguous data. There was 33.3% belonging to structural ambiguity. 1.0% belong to noun phrases. While 66.7% refers to lexical ambiguity. The other research printed by Britton (1978) about *Methods and designs Lexical Ambiguity of Words Used in English Text*. The result of this research shows that there was 32% of words related to ambiguous words and in a sample text 30% of temporary word definitions which established for special aims. In line with the previous research printed above, there was a different result which had been obtained in this research. Which, this research only gained one type of lexical ambiguity. It was homonyms that were obtained from the English presentation project of college students.

Those matters above will lead everyone to have an optional understanding of the information that the speaker transfers. When we have to decide on one of such optional meanings, it is going to be something that is rather complicated for some people especially for beginners to avoid using them without being able to identify or recognize types of ambiguous utterances that focus on lexical ambiguity in terms of homographic. The researcher's primary observation indicated that some students of STIT Palapa Nusantara particularly in semester two of the study program of Islamic Education Management were facing such problems when they were directed to have an English presentation project. When I commanded them to make conversation talking about free topics, some of them constructed ambiguous sentences such as "I go to the **bank**." It belongs to an ambiguous sentence just because the word "**bank**" has two possible meanings; it can be assumed that the speaker goes to the river or an institution related to money transactions. What more is that one student also said "What is this **season**?" This sentence is also ambiguous due to the word "**season**" has two meanings. It can mean "What is this monsoon/or talking about whether?" or it can mean "what is this flavor?" Such problems are probably caused by the students' knowledge of ambiguous utterances particularly lexical ambiguity in terms of homograph, or they probably don't understand the context of what their friends were talking about.

In relation to the problems and to the previous investigation above, the researcher was extremely interested in investigating "Ambiguous Utterances Employed by College Students on English Presentation Project". This research was limited to identifying types of ambiguous utterances particularly lexical ambiguity employed by college students of STIT Palapa Nusantara particularly in semester two of the study program of Islamic Education Management and to

recognizing the possible factors that caused the students' ambiguous utterances in their presentation.

METHOD

This research was located in STIT Palapa Nusantara, Sebung, Keruak, and was conducted for 3 months (May to August 2023). This research used descriptive qualitative with a case study approach. According to Creswell (2015), a case study is a model that focuses on exploring a bounded system towards an issue as detailed as possible and delving into data as deeply as possible. Many kinds of information sources are used to gain data. The subject of this research was the students of STIT PALAPA NUSANTARA, particularly in semester two of the study program of Islamic Education Management, There were 20 students.

To collect the data the researcher employed observation, interview, and documentation techniques. Thence, to analyze the data the researcher used three steps based on Miles and Huberman, (2018) Theory. Thus the researcher collected the data from observation, interview, and documentation results. Afterward, the researcher did data reduction which means that he chose and made the data simpler aiming to categorize, lead, leave unneeded data, organize data, and finally reach the conclusion. Thence, the researcher also displayed the data as some categories aiming to make it easier to understand so that it is possible to reach a conclusion and take action. The last step that the researcher did was to manufacture the conclusion, here he interpreted the whole gained data, searched and compared one component with others finally could construct a conclusion.

RESULT

This research was limited to identifying types of ambiguous utterances particularly lexical ambiguity in terms of homonyms employed by the college students of STIT Palapa Nusantara particularly in semester two of the study program of Islamic Education Management and recognizing what are the possible factors that caused the students' ambiguous utterances on their presentation. To answer both focuses, the researcher used Laporte's theory which stated that there are two types of lexical ambiguity, they are homonyms and polysemy. However, the researcher was just focused on homonyms ambiguity shared by the college students of STIT Palapa Nusantara, particularly in semester two of the study program of Islamic Education Management on their English presentation project. Below is the result and its interpretation:

Types of Ambiguous Utterances Particularly Lexical Ambiguity in Terms of Homonyms Found on Students' English Presentation Project.

Ambiguous utterances can arise from various linguistic factors, resulting in different types of ambiguity. Based on the observation result, some students employed ambiguous utterances, particularly lexical ambiguity in the form of homonyms when they presented their projects as stated in the following description:

Sentence 1: I look at the **duck**.

The sentence above said by student HH is that it is an instance of an ambiguous word just because it can mean “bend” or “a bird”. Not only that but also she did not describe more context about the word “duck”.

Sentence 2: We will **miss** the unique cat.

The next ambiguous word was presented by EW, it is an ambiguous sentence due to the word “**miss**” here can be meant “fail to catch the unique cat” or “feel sad to lose the unique cat”.

Sentence 3: One of my friends holds the **bat**.

The word “bat” makes this sentence ambiguous due to it has two meanings, it can be translated as an animal/a bird or it can be a tool to play or strike the baseball. This ambiguous sentence was presented by the student JA.

Sentence 4: There was a Kecial bird on my **back**.

Again, this belongs to the ambiguous sentence because the word “back” can mean either a part of the human body or the position behind it. It was spoken by the student JU.

Sentence 5: I like this **season** so much.

What's more, the sentence above was said by the student YK. It becomes an ambiguous sentence due to it has two possible meanings “I like this cooking spices so much” or “I like this weather so much”. So the problem here is the word “season” it can be meant as “cooking spices” or “related to weather”.

Sentence 6: I am still **young**.

This sentence was usually spoken by the beginner of English learners ambiguously due to they could not explain the context of what they were talking about clearly. Absolutely, the word “young” makes it ambiguous because it can mean either “inexpert” or “young of age”. This sentence was uttered by the student “IG”.

The meanings of all the obtained ambiguous words above were based on the Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary (1995).

The Factors which Caused the Students Employed Ambiguous Utterances on Their Presentation

Effective communication is a critical skill for students, especially when presenting information. However, many students inadvertently use ambiguous utterances during their presentations, which can lead to confusion and hinder their message delivery.

To gain the answer to the second focus, the researcher interviewed three times with students dealing with what were the factors that caused the students to employ ambiguous utterances in their presentations. The factors are described below:

1. No knowledge of English.

There were 2 students who clarified in the interview that even though they had learned English starting from Secondary School to Senior High School they still had no knowledge of the English language except the word “**duck**”. They know that the word “**duck**” has two meanings. It can either mean “a bend” or “a bird” so they were ambiguous about their friends' presentation, especially dealing with the sentence “I look at the duck”. This case has commonly happened when students only know an ambiguous word.

2. No context comprehension

What more is 7 students responded on the interview that they interpreted the sentence “We will **miss** the unique cat” which was said by the student EW into two interpretations just because she didn't describe a clear context of her presentation means that each sentence was not related to each other. Actually, most students usually feel ambiguous about a sentence due to they don't understand well toward its context of someone's presentation. As in this case, the 7 students felt ambiguous toward the sentence “We will **miss** the unique cat”. They interpreted the word “miss” into two meanings; it could either be understood as “fail to catch the unique cat” or “feel sad to lose the unique cat”.

3. Own limited vocabulary

Furthermore, there were 6 students who responded to the interview that they hesitantly interpreted the sentence “One of my friends held the **bat**”, “There was a Kecial bird on my **back**”, and “I like this **season** so much” which had been stated by the students “JA, JU, and JK. They had the same problem that made them confused or felt ambiguous toward those sentences. The problem was they had limited vocabulary so that several parts of the speech were not understood well. In, the word “bat” could be meant as an animal/a bird or it can be a tool to play or strike the baseball. Next was the word “back”, which translated it into two definitions they were either a part of the human body or the position behind it. The last was the word “season” just the same reason as the above description it has two meanings. As “I like this cooking spices so much” or “I like this weather so much”. So the problem here is the word “season” it can be meant as “cooking spices” or “related to weather”.

4. No knowledge of English structure

The last factor that made 5 of the students ambiguous toward the sentence “I am still **young**” was absolute, the word “young” was ambiguous because it could mean either “inexpert” or “young of age”. They responded in the interview that they knew nothing about the structure of English which made it difficult to understand each sentence so they were not able to know the context and automatically made them ambiguous toward the sentence “I am still young”.

Therefore, it is important to have knowledge of English, and comprehend the context of the text. Moreover when someone is presenting something, understand or own unlimited vocabulary, and also learn more about its structure. When you have done them all, will make you be able to avoid that kind of ambiguous utterances which deal with lexical ambiguity in the form of homonyms presented by the college students of STIT Palapa Nusantara, particularly in semester two of the study program of Islamic Education Management. From all the factors texted above, the strongest factor that led the students to become ambiguous toward those sentences was they didn't know the context of what their friends presented on the English project since 7 students were aware of that situation according to their responses on the interview.

CONCLUSION

This research was limited to identifying types of ambiguous utterances particularly lexical ambiguity in terms of homonyms employed by the college students of STIT Palapa Nusantara particularly in semester two of the study program of Islamic Education Management. In which, there was 1 type of ambiguous utterance, particularly lexical ambiguity. It was only in the form of homonyms they were: 1) I look at the **duck**., 2) We will **miss** the unique cat. 3) One of my friends holds the **bat**. 4) There was a Kecial bird on my **back**. 5) I like this **season** so much. 6) I am still **young**. Therefore, this research aimed to recognize the possible factors that caused the students' ambiguous in their presentation. The result stated that only 2 students felt no knowledge at all of English, 5 students felt no knowledge of English structure, 6 students felt no vocabulary enough, and 7 students felt no understanding of the context of the student's presentation. Of those factors, only one of them became the strongest factor, it was the students didn't understand the context of the presentation since there were 7 students who felt it.

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