

## Ambiguous Expressions Found in Essays Written by English Students at IKIP Budi Utomo Malang

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**Abstract:** Naturally, language has sound as form and meaning to provide comprehensive understanding in communication. Sound or form is a representation of surface structure, while meaning a representation of deep structure. Language meaning in Semantics belongs to one of the most important elements being analyzed nowadays because it is the language soul. One of the interesting topics which becomes a great concern that people are discussing is ambiguous meaning that is always found on such expressions as words, phrases, and sentences in language. This article exposes the research findings on ambiguous expressions as found in the English essays written by the English students of IKIP Budi Utomo Malang. The research is descriptive-qualitative one as a content analysis since it describes phenomena which naturally occurs. They are ambiguous expressions such as words, phrases, and sentences on the English essays written by the English students. The subject of the research is the fifth semester students of 2018/2019 that totals 45 students taking English Semantics. The sample was then taken based on the certain criteria, namely their origin representation and competences which finally became 12 students. Based on the data analysis, it was found that the ambiguous expressions found on the English students essays covers lexical and structural ambiguities. In lexical ambiguity, it was found that not all the students' English essays are lexically and structurally ambiguous. It means that some of the essays are lexically and structurally ambiguous.

**Keywords:** *language; sound; meaning; lexical; structural ambiguities*

### INTRODUCTION

As a means of communication, human beings use language to express their thoughts, feelings, and needs to interact with each other in everyday life. To realize their goals, they use language into two main functions, namely transactional and interactional functions (Brown, 1982). The transactional function refers to the use of language to obtain and provide both formal and informal information. This function is elaborated into news sentences, questions, and commands. While the interactional function means that humans use language to maintain intimate relationships (interpersonal) and build brotherly ties (Chaika, 1982).

By nature, language has an element of sound as a form and meaning that provides a complete understanding of communication. Sound or form is a representation of the outer structure (surface structure) while the meaning is a representation of the inner structure (deep structure). Therefore, these two elements are inseparable from each other when language is used in communication because knowing language means knowing its sound and meaning (Fromkin, 1983). These two elements of language invite the attention of linguists to analyze and research them so that linguistics is born as a science of language. The branch of linguistics that studies language forms includes phonology (sound), morphology (words), and syntax

(sentences), while the meaning of language is semantics.

The meaning of language in Semantics is one of the elements of language that is mostly studied in depth today because it is the spirit of the language itself. One of the interesting topics that has received attention and is widely discussed is the ambiguous meaning frequently found in expressions such as words, phrases, and sentences in language. An expression is said to be ambiguous if it has more than one interpretation of meaning (multiple meanings). Human beings as language users in daily communication can misunderstand because the expressions conveyed have multiple interpretations so that they are confusing to the interlocutor. There are many cases that occur in society, regions, and even in our country that trigger debates and conflicts because of understanding and interpreting the meaning of different language expressions. The different interpretations because they contain ambiguous meanings can be found in understanding and interpreting religious, customary, and state laws and laws made to carry out their rights and obligations as citizens. That is why the State of Indonesia established the Constitutional Court (MK) which is actually to solve problems of multiple interpretations (double meanings) related to laws that are understood differently by people.

Based on this reason, it is important to study and analyze the ambiguous meaning of language expressions, including English expressions in terms of vocabulary, phrases, or sentences that build communication, especially in written language. This article describes the results of research on ambiguous expressions found in English essays written by students majoring in English at IKIP Budi Utomo Malang. As one of the interesting topics in Semantics, understanding ambiguous expressions is

expected to provide broad knowledge and insight in Semantics courses, especially to students majoring in English and to readers in general.

Based on the description above, the research problem to be answered in this article is "How are the ambiguous expressions found in the English essays written by students majoring in English at IKIP Budi Utomo Malang?" This question is specifically formulated into (1) What types of expressions have ambiguous meanings in an English essay written by an English student at IKIP Budi Utomo Malang?, and (2) What is the interpretation of the meanings of ambiguous expressions in English essay written by English student of IKIP Budi Utomo Malang?"

### **AMBIGUITIES IN MEANING**

As explained above, understanding a word means understanding the sound and meaning that cannot be separated from each other. These two aspects of language are the most important elements because sometimes the same sound can have different meanings. When expressions such as words are pronounced identically (identically pronounced) but differ in meaning (semantically different), the case is called a homonym or homophone in Semantics. Even these expressions may have the same spelling or different spellings in English. For example, the words to, too and two which are pronounced the same /tu:/ in the dictionary have different meanings. That is why these expressions are categorized into groups of words that are homophones or homonyms (Fromkin, 1983).

From the presentation of these examples, it can be concluded that homonyms can create ambiguity in expressions that have more than one meaning or interpretation. Therefore, linguistic expressions such as words, phrases, and sentences are said to be

ambiguous if they are understood and interpreted more than one meaning or in other words have multiple meanings. So, the ambiguities of expressions in language are classified into two types, namely lexical ambiguities and structural ambiguities.

### Lexical Ambiguities

The word lexical comes from the word lexicon which means word. So a pair of words are called lexically ambiguous if they have more than one meaning. This means that words with the same sound (phonemically identical words) have semantically different properties/features. An example can be seen in the example below:

- She cannot bear children.

This sentence seems lexically ambiguous, especially in the word bear, which can mean (1) She is unable to give birth to children or (2) She cannot tolerate children. From this example, the word bear which has different meanings can mean give birth and tolerate. Often, the addition of another word can eliminate the ambiguity of the meaning of the word. In other words, if you add a word, the expression of the word will be clear and not taxa meaning as in the following pair of sentences.

- She cannot bear children if they are noisy
- She cannot bar children because she is sterile.

In addition, the word bear in other contexts can function as a noun which means bear that is a large animal with thick fur and includes animals that eat fruit, skeletons, and so on. Lexical ambiguities can sometimes create a sense of humor because they sound funny and confusing in some of the English conversations shown below.

“How is bread made?”

“I know that!” Alice cried eagerly.  
“You take some flour.”

“Where do you pick the flower?” the White Queen asked. “In the garden or in the hedges?”

“Well, it isn’t picked at all.” Alice explained. “it’s ground”

“How many acres of ground?” said the White Queen.

The word that sounds funny but confusing in the question and answer conversation between Alice and the White Queen above stems from two homonymous words, namely flower (flower) and flour (flour) and another word, ground, which has a different meaning. Alice interprets the word ground as the past form of grind, while the White Queen interprets the word ground as earth. The following are examples of sentences that have lexical ambiguity.

- I found a book on Agus Salim.
- Professor Jones caught a fly.

In the sentence I found a book on Agus Salim, the preposition *on* gives rise to a lexically ambiguous meaning which can be interpreted (1) as designating a street name (I found a book on Jalan Agus Salim) and (2) about/about what is considered more formal and scientifically rather than using the preposition about, namely a book about Agus Salim (I found a book about Agus Salim). Lexical ambiguity also occurs in the word fly which means fly and the name of the ball in baseball.

### Structural Ambiguities

Not only does single words give rise to lexically ambiguous, but also in certain situations occurs in groups of words that have multiple meanings. Groups of words that have more than one interpretation or meaning of taxa can be in the form of phrases and sentences. The following are

examples in communication that are often heard:

- (1) hot dog
- (2) John and Jane were married.

Phrases (1) and sentences (2) seem ambiguous because each has more than one meaning. For example, the phrase hot dog in (1) can be interpreted as a dog that is hot and a type of bun with sausage sold at Mac Donald. In spoken language (speaking), the use of the right word stress (stress) can make the phrase clear so it doesn't sound ambiguous or ambiguous, that is, if you put a strong stress (prominent stress) on the word dog, the meaning is a dog that is hot. But if stress or strong pressure is placed on the word hot, it will mean the type of bread with sausage. The same case also occurs in sentence (2) which can be interpreted into John were married to Jane (John married to Jane) and Both John and Jane were married to each of their couples (Both John and Jane married other people).

If they are studied and analyzed carefully, it is clear that the factors causing the ambiguity of the phrases and sentences above are principally due to the internally built arrangement between words and other words which ultimately leads to the ambiguity of phrases and sentences. In other words, because of the arrangement of phrases and sentences that give rise to the ambiguous meaning so that the interpretation is more than one meaning than the words themselves. So, every phrase or sentence that has more than one meaning is called structural ambiguity. According to Transformational Grammar, a sentence consists of an outer structure (surface structure) and a deep structure (deep structure). Sentence (2) John and Jane were married above is a clear case where the sentence has one outer structure (surface structure) and two deep structures (deep structure). Therefore, this concept teaches us

about the nature of language that language has two structures (dual structures) which show sound or form as a surface structure and meaning or meaning as a deep structure.

### **Essay**

Oshima and Hogue (1983) define an essay as a writing that contains at least three paragraphs consisting of (1) introductory/opening paragraphs, (2) body paragraphs, and (3) closing paragraphs that discuss one main idea or topic. Based on this explanation, the essay has three important parts, namely the opening paragraph, the body paragraph, and the closing paragraph.

The opening/closing paragraph in an essay contains two parts, namely a general statement which is written to attract the reader's attention and a thesis statement which contains the main idea. The thesis statement of an essay can be analogous to the topic sentence of a paragraph. The conclusion is that the thesis statement contains the following characteristics: (1) states the main idea, (2) lists the various subtopics that will be discussed in the content of the essay, (3) shows the method of organization, and (4) is generally placed in the last sentence of the essay. opening or introductory paragraph.

While the body paragraphs are all paragraphs that do not include the opening paragraphs / introductions and closing paragraphs, which develop the subtopics in the essay. The number of paragraphs of relative content depends on the subtopic of the thesis statement. Sentence by sentence and moving from one paragraph to another are connected by transitional signals so that the main idea being discussed can be coherent and cohesive.

The last paragraph in the essay is the closing paragraph which contains the essence and conclusion of what has been discussed in the previous content paragraphs. This paragraph serves not only

to provide conclusions on very important issues but also to briefly re-explain the thesis statement in a different way.

### **Essays and Ambiguities**

Human beings can express their thoughts, feelings, and needs not only through spoken language but also in written language. There is a fundamental difference between spoken language and written language. The spoken language is used with the use of the correct context so that language expressions can be understood by speakers and listeners. Therefore, there are pragmatic elements that must be understood by the two language actors, namely when, where the conversation takes place, who and with whom they speak. Therefore, if the spoken language expressions are used in the right context, ambiguous utterances will not occur (Wijaya, 1996). In contrast to spoken language, the use of written language does not require context as in spoken language in order to understand the messages conveyed by the author to the reader (Brown, 1983). Therefore, the written language often creates multiple meaning or ambiguity in its interpretation. In other words, ambiguity in the meaning of language expressions is found in written language. One of the written languages that I analyze in this research article is an essay written by a student majoring in English. Therefore, the essay here as a data source will analyze how the ambiguous expressions are found in English essays written by students majoring in English at IKIP Budi Utomo Malang.

### **METHOD**

This research is classified as qualitative descriptive because it describes phenomena that occur naturally. This phenomenon refers to the ambiguous expressions found in English essays written by English students at IKIP Budi Utomo Malang. This research is also a type of

content analysis because it analyzes data in the form of words, phrases and ambiguous sentences found in English essays written by English students.

The subjects of this study were students majoring in English in the fifth semester of the 2018/2019 class, totaling 45 people who took the English Semantics course. Then the samples were taken based on certain criteria, namely representatives of the students' regions of origin and their English language skills so that there were 12 students. The data of this research is a collection of English essays written by 12 English students of IKIP Budi Utomo Malang. To collect data, the instrument used is the researcher himself as the key instrument. After the data is collected, it is analyzed using the following steps: data collection, data reduction, data display and interpretation and verification in accordance with the formulated research problem which ultimately becomes the findings. or research results in this article.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

Based on the results of data analysis, it was found that ambiguous expressions contained in essays by students majoring in English at IKIP Budi Utomo Malang can be grouped into two types of ambiguities, namely lexical ambiguities and structural ambiguities.

#### **A. Lexical Ambiguities in Essays**

Lexical ambiguity is the ambiguity of language expressions in single words. In the essays of students majoring in English, there are expressions that contain lexical ambiguity. The following data are in the form of extracts of the essays that have lexical ambiguity.

**(Data 1)**

We should start from our own society,  
never **let** this problems touch our  
beloved family and  
neighbours.....

This sentence has a lexical ambiguity in the verb *let* which can mean to allow and to let. So the sentence above can be interpreted with the following meanings:

- We should start from our community, this problem should not touch our beloved family and neighbors.
- We should start from our community, don't let this problem touch our beloved family and neighbours.

If you look closely, the word *let* is lexically ambiguous and has more than one meaning, but the two meanings will not be confused if they replace each other.

**(Data 3)**

The political actors also **must** to know that “small people is “grass” and “grass” needs lands for support their life, therefore a politician don’t become a “phlegmatic killer”.....

The ambiguous word in this sentence is *must* which means obligation and definite. So if one of the words replaces each other, then the meaning will be different as follows:

- Political actors must also know that the small people are grass that needs land to support their life.....
- Political actors must also know that the small people are grass that needs land to support their life.....

In addition, the word *grass* also has lexical ambiguity because it contains connotative meanings.

**(Data 1)**

One of them is teenager’s prostitution. In this internet era, people can easily **find** teenagers that had been trading by their brothel keeper. And it is sadly because there are still many predators out there who love to use these teenagers’ service.....

The ambiguous word in this sentence lies in the word *find* which can mean finding and fines. These two meanings are very possible interchangeably so that their meanings can be different in the following translations:

- One of them is a teenage prostitute. In this internet era, one can easily find teenagers who are trafficked by their mujikari.....
- One of them is a teenage prostitute. In this internet era, people can easily fine the teenagers who are trafficked by their mujikari.....

**(Data 5)**

These approaches finally points and **determines** the quality of education.....

In this sentence, the ambiguous word lies in the word *determines* which means to determine and consider. Here's what it means:

- This approach ultimately indicates and determines the quality of education...
- This approach finally shows and considers the quality of education...

**B. Structural Ambiguities in Essays**

Structural utterances are ambiguities that arise because of the arrangement of these words in forming phrases and sentences, not because of the words themselves. Related to the essays of English students, structural ambiguity was also found in their essays. The following are the findings of data containing expressions containing structural ambiguities:

**(Data 2)**

The media also help the teacher in learning process such as **helping the teacher to explain the lesson, giving example or exercise**. Media are very essential means in teaching to support the process of learning in the classroom.

Sentences in data 2 contain sentences that are structurally ambiguous, especially in *The media also help the teacher in learning process* such as helping the teacher to explain the lesson, giving example or exercise. This sentence can mean (1) The media help the teacher explain and give the lesson. So it is the teacher who explains and gives lessons. While the second is (2) the media explain and give the lesson, namely the media that explains and provides lessons to replace the role of the teacher.

**(Data 1)**

**Prostitution and sex commercial workers** have become poison in our.....

This extract contains a structurally ambiguous meaning in the phrase *prostitution and sex commercial workers* which means (1) prostitution and sex commercial workers (prostitution and commercial sex workers) and (2) workers of prostitution and sex commercial

(prostitution workers and commercial sex workers).

**(Data 8)**

For example, the wife cannot bear children while the husband wants to have children.....

Data of sentence 7 means structural ambiguity which can be interpreted as follows:

- The wife cannot give birth to children if the husband wants to have them
- While the husband wants to have children, the wife is unable to give birth to them

This structural ambiguity means (1) the wife cannot give birth to children if the husband wants it and (2) the wife cannot give birth to children (difficulty) as long as/when the husband wants it.

**(Data 11)**

But, apparently, it's not able to bring education its self **to what education actually wants**.

The structural ambiguity in the sentence above lies in *what education actually wants*, which can be interpreted as (1) what education actually wants, namely what education actually wants and (2) what does the education actually want, which is what education actually wants.

**Discussion**

Based on the findings described above, there are two types of ambiguity found in essays by students majoring in English at IKIP Budi Utomo Malang. The taxa are lexical ambiguities and structural ambiguities. The findings of lexical ambiguity in the essays of English students are not so numerous and productive. This

means that the words built by students in developing their ideas in their essays do not involve too many ambiguous words. From the essays written by 12 students, it was found that ambiguous words were found in 3 essays, namely in Data 1 as many as 2 ambiguous words, Data 3 and Data 5 each found one ambiguous word. This means that not all 12 students majoring in English who were the subjects of this study wrote ambiguous words (lexical ambiguities) in their English essays.

Likewise, the expressions of structural ambiguities found in essays by English students are not very varied and productive. Of the 12 data for English essays, only 4 data for students' essays contain ambiguous expressions or structural ambiguities, namely Data 1, Data 2, Data 8, and Data 11. From the above findings, the structural ambiguities that found in English essays of the students have standard English sentence structure as in Data 1, Data 2, and Data 8. Meanwhile, structural ambiguity that does not meet the standard grammar is located in Data 11, namely

But, apparently, it's not able to bring education its self to **what education actually wants**.

In this sentence, especially the clause in bold, contains a somewhat confusing meaning because the structure and meaning are not appropriate, which can literally be translated (1) what education really wants, and (2) what education really wants. The meaning (1) is correct in form and grammar but in terms of meaning, it is semantically strange. While in meaning (2) both the form and the meaning are considered correct.

If they are analyzed from the standard of language, indeed many grammatical errors were found in their essay

writing. As a result, the meaning of the sentence is a bit confusing. Even between meaning and form experience incompatibility. Therefore, the results of this study can provide input on the writing competence of students majoring in English at IKIP Budi Utomo Malang.

## CONCLUSION

From the results of the research data analysis, the ambiguity of the expressions found in the essays of English students includes two ambiguities, namely lexical and structural ambiguities. Lexical ambiguity refers to the ambiguity found in a single word. In other words, words that build sentences in essays have multiple meanings. At the level of lexical ambiguity, some ambiguous words were found, and not all students' essays had lexical ambiguity.

Meanwhile, structural ambiguity refers to the ambiguity of the expression, either a sentence or a phrase, which is caused by the arrangement not word for word. The findings of the ambiguity of these structural expressions are not much different from the findings of the lexical ambiguity. In other words, not all students' essays have structural ambiguity.

By the results of this study, the students are expected to be able to know that ambiguity can lead to multiple meanings so that misunderstandings sometimes occur. Therefore, it is recommended that if the students write expressions, sentences or phrases, the words that make up the sentence must be sufficient according to their needs so that the explanations will be clear and ambiguity will be avoided. It is recommended to lecturers and teachers that the material on language expressions that are ambiguous is more emphasized so that the students can understand the ambiguity in language expressions, both lexical and

structural ambiguities. Researchers are expected to carry out follow-up research in addition to ambiguity, as well as sense relations, such as polysemy, synonyms, antonyms, and others.

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