SEMANTICS AMBIGUITY AND ITS IMPACT ON LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

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Abstract

Semantic ambiguity is a linguistic phenomenon that arises when a word, phrase, or sentence has more than one possible interpretation. This type of ambiguity often creates barriers in the process of language comprehension, both in spoken and written communication. This article aims to identify the types of semantic ambiguity, analyze their impact on language understanding, and evaluate strategies to resolve ambiguity, particularly in the contexts of education, law, and cross-cultural communication. Using a qualitative and theoretical approach, the study concludes that semantic ambiguity can slow down information processing, increase the risk of misinterpretation, and lead to significant pragmatic implications in everyday communication. Therefore, awareness of potential ambiguity and the ability to interpret meaning based on context are essential skills in language learning and effective communication. This understanding is also crucial for developing critical thinking and sensitivity to meaning nuances in both intercultural and professional interactions.

Keywords : Semantic Ambiguity, Language Comprehension, Multiple Meanings, Commicative Context, Pragmatics strategies, Language Skills

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Language, as a system of human communication, is rich in flexibility and meaning. However, this very flexibility often leads to challenges in comprehension—one of the most notable being semantic ambiguity. Semantic ambiguity occurs when a linguistic expression has more than one possible meaning, either due to the word itself (lexical ambiguity) or due to sentence structure (structural ambiguity). As Lyons (1977) points out, ambiguity is an inherent feature of natural language and cannot be entirely avoided due to polysemy, where one word can carry multiple meanings.

This phenomenon poses a significant challenge in communication, as it can lead to misunderstanding or dual interpretations of a message. Cruse (2000) emphasizes that meaning in language heavily depends on context, and without adequate contextual cues, ambiguity may hinder comprehension—even among native speakers. This becomes even more problematic in intercultural communication or foreign language learning, where speakers may lack the intuitive grasp needed to determine intended meanings.

In real-world applications, semantic ambiguity frequently appears in academic texts, legal documents, and daily conversations. For example, in educational contexts, ambiguous instructions can confuse students. In legal settings, a single ambiguous clause in a contract can result in multiple interpretations with serious consequences. Kroeger (2022) affirms that careful semantic analysis is essential to avoid the pragmatic pitfalls of ambiguity in formal communication.

Therefore, a deeper understanding of the types of semantic ambiguity, how it operates in communication, and strategies to address it is crucial for language teaching, linguistic analysis, and the development of communicative competence. This study aims to investigate the impact of semantic ambiguity on language comprehension and to propose solutions through appropriate contextual and pragmatic approaches.

1.2 Research Problem

Semantic ambiguity often hinders language comprehension, especially in the contexts of education, law, and cross-cultural communication. A lack of understanding about how ambiguity works and how to address it can lead to serious misunderstandings. Therefore, this study focuses on identifying the types of semantic ambiguity that have the most significant impact and exploring contextual and pragmatic strategies to improve language comprehension in academic and professional communication.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study is designed to explore the phenomenon of semantic ambiguity in depth and to provide a comprehensive understanding of its implications in various communicative contexts. The specific objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To identify and systematically classify the types of semantic ambiguity that occur in natural language use, focusing particularly on lexical ambiguity (where individual words have multiple meanings) and structural ambiguity (where sentence structures allow for more than one interpretation). This classification will serve as a foundation for understanding how ambiguity arises in both spoken and written discourse.
2. To analyze the cognitive and communicative impacts of semantic ambiguity on language comprehension, especially in high-stakes or meaning-sensitive fields such as education, legal discourse, and cross-cultural communication. This analysis aims to highlight how ambiguity can lead to misinterpretations, confusion, delays in information processing, and even legal or interpersonal conflicts when not properly addressed.
3. To investigate the role of contextual clues and pragmatic competence in disambiguating language, examining how speakers and listeners use surrounding information, background knowledge, and social context to infer intended meaning. This objective also includes evaluating the limitations of contextual reliance, particularly for language learners and non-native speakers.
4. To develop and propose practical, evidence-based strategies for minimizing and resolving semantic ambiguity, which may include instructional techniques, communicative strategies, and linguistic tools that can be applied in educational settings, professional training, and intercultural communication programs. These strategies will be oriented toward enhancing clarity, precision, and mutual understanding in diverse linguistic interactions.
5. To contribute to the broader goals of communicative competence, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness, by promoting sensitivity to the nuances of meaning and the potential for misinterpretation in everyday language use. In doing so, the study aims to support the development of more effective language teaching methodologies and to empower speakers to navigate ambiguity with confidence in both academic and real-world communication.

1.4 Research Significance

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance in the fields of linguistics, education, law, and cross-cultural communication. Theoretically, it

contributes to a deeper understanding of semantic ambiguity as a complex and unavoidable phenomenon in natural language. The findings are expected to enrich linguistic literature, especially in the areas of semantics and pragmatics.

Practically, the results of this research are valuable for educators, language learners, legal professionals, and international communication practitioners in identifying and addressing ambiguity in everyday language use. By understanding how semantic ambiguity works and how to manage it effectively, individuals can enhance their communicative competence, avoid misunderstandings, and engage in clearer and more effective communication across a variety of professional and social contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Definition of Semantic Ambiguity

Semantic ambiguity can be understood as a linguistic phenomenon in which a particular unit of language—be it a single word, a phrase, or even a full sentence—permits more than one legitimate interpretation. This multiplicity of meaning can create significant challenges in decoding or comprehending a message, particularly when contextual cues are insufficient or absent. According to Lyons (1977), such ambiguity is not a marginal defect of language but rather a fundamental and unavoidable feature of natural human communication. This stems largely from the phenomenon of *polysemy*, where one lexical item carries a range of meanings that vary according to different contexts of use. In this sense, semantic ambiguity highlights the richness, flexibility, and intricate nature of language, reflecting its capacity to adapt across varied situations and cultural backgrounds. Rather than being seen as a linguistic shortcoming, it showcases how deeply nuanced and multi-dimensional language can be when employed in real-world interactions.

Building upon this understanding, Cruse (2000) elaborates that ambiguity becomes particularly evident when a linguistic expression is capable of supporting multiple semantic interpretations at once. This means that a single utterance may activate different readings, each of which is logically valid in the absence of precise disambiguating information. When communicative context is vague or incomplete, listeners or readers may find it difficult to accurately determine the speaker's or writer's intended meaning. This creates barriers not only in spoken discourse but also in written texts, especially in domains that require high precision such as legal, academic, or diplomatic communication. The presence of semantic ambiguity, therefore, underscores the importance of contextual awareness and interpretative skill in achieving effective and meaningful communication.

2.2 Types of Semantic Ambiguity

Linguists such as Palmer (1981) and Kroeger (2022) have extensively categorized semantic ambiguity into several principal types, each reflecting a different mechanism through which meaning becomes uncertain or open to multiple interpretations:

2.2.1 Lexical Ambiguity

This type arises when a single word holds more than one distinct meaning. It is typically the result of polysemy (a word with related meanings) or homonymy (a word with entirely different meanings). For example, the word *bank* can refer to a financial institution or the side of a river. Without sufficient context, the listener or reader may struggle to determine which meaning is intended, potentially leading to confusion in both casual and formal communication.

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2.2.2 Structural (Syntactic) Ambiguity

Structural ambiguity occurs when the grammatical structure of a sentence allows for more than one interpretation. For instance, in the sentence *He saw the man with the telescope*, the ambiguity lies in whether the telescope was used by the observer or is being held by the man being observed. This type of ambiguity is common in written texts, where lack of vocal intonation and emphasis can obscure the intended meaning.

2.2.3 Referential Ambiguity

This type involves uncertainty about what a pronoun or noun phrase is referring to within a sentence or discourse. A typical example would be: *John told his brother that he needed to leave*, where it is unclear whether "he" refers to John or his brother. Referential ambiguity can disrupt the coherence of a conversation or text, particularly when multiple subjects are involved.

2.2.4 Scope Ambiguity

Scope ambiguity arises when there is vagueness about how far a logical operator such as negation or a quantifier extends. Consider the sentence *All students didn't do the assignment*. This can be interpreted either as "none of the students did the assignment" or "not all students did it." Misunderstanding scope can lead to misinterpretation, especially in academic, legal, or policy-related contexts where precision is vital.

2.2.5 Pragmatic Considerations

Yule (1996) emphasizes that resolving semantic ambiguity requires pragmatic competence—the ability to infer intended meaning based on context, speaker intention, shared knowledge, and cultural norms. Especially in cross-cultural communication, where contextual and cultural frameworks differ, pragmatic skills are essential for interpreting meaning accurately and avoiding miscommunication.

2.3 Ambiguity and Language Comprehension

Semantic ambiguity plays a pivotal role in shaping how language is both processed and understood, influencing not just the decoding of words, but also the cognitive mechanisms involved in interpretation. According to Rayner et al. (2004), the presence of ambiguity in a sentence or discourse increases the cognitive load on the language user. This means that individuals are required to allocate additional mental resources to evaluate the possible meanings of a word, phrase, or sentence. As a result, reading speed tends to decrease, as the brain must pause or slow down to disambiguate competing interpretations. This process often involves constructing temporary mental representations for each plausible meaning and then using contextual clues to eliminate the inappropriate ones. Such constant shifting between interpretations can be mentally taxing and may reduce overall comprehension efficiency.

Moreover, semantic ambiguity does not only hinder speed but also increases the likelihood of misinterpretation. If the available contextual cues are vague, insufficient, or culturally unfamiliar, individuals may settle on an incorrect interpretation. This becomes especially problematic in situations that require precision, such as academic reading, professional correspondence, or legal analysis.

The complexity of semantic ambiguity is further amplified in cross-cultural communication, where linguistic structures, discourse conventions, and pragmatic norms differ widely across cultures. As Thomas (1983) highlights, meaning is not solely embedded in linguistic form, but also heavily mediated by cultural frameworks. Cultural assumptions—such as what is considered polite, assertive, humorous, or respectful—shape how utterances are produced and understood. For example, a phrase that appears neutral

in one culture might carry implicit sarcasm, criticism, or even offense in another. Even when interlocutors are using the same language (such as English), their interpretations may diverge due to different cognitive schemata or sociolinguistic expectations.

In such intercultural settings, semantic ambiguity is often less about grammar and more about pragmatic misalignment. The communicative intent of a speaker from one culture may not be accurately inferred by a listener from another culture if their underlying assumptions do not match. Therefore, semantic ambiguity in a cross-cultural context not only challenges the linguistic decoding process but also tests one's intercultural sensitivity, pragmatic flexibility, and contextual awareness.

Ultimately, both in monolingual and multilingual contexts, addressing semantic ambiguity requires more than just linguistic knowledge—it necessitates an integrated understanding of syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and cultural literacy.

2.4   Previous Research

A number of previous studies have explored how semantic ambiguity interacts with language comprehension, particularly in real-life communication scenarios. One such study by Andini et al. (2023) reveals that semantic ambiguity is not merely a phenomenon confined to academic texts or formal language use, but is routinely encountered in everyday conversations. This ambiguity often emerges when speakers do not provide sufficient contextual information to clarify the meaning of their utterances. In casual dialogue, where language tends to be less structured and more spontaneous, speakers frequently rely on shared background knowledge or situational context to convey meaning. However, when this shared context is lacking or assumed rather than explicitly communicated, multiple interpretations may arise, leading to confusion or miscommunication.

Although these misunderstandings may seem minor in nature, they can accumulate over time, especially in relationships where communication is frequent but clarity is not prioritized. For example, a statement like "I'll meet you after the meeting" could generate different interpretations if the time or place of the meeting is not clearly understood by both parties. Such recurrent ambiguity can erode mutual understanding and even contribute to interpersonal tension if left unchecked.

In a similar vein, Krismanti (2016) highlights the role of sentence structure in the emergence of semantic ambiguity during spontaneous or informal speech. According to her findings, speakers often use loose or incomplete sentence constructions in impromptu conversations, which increases the risk of structural ambiguity. Without clearly defined grammatical markers or syntactic clarity, listeners are left to infer meaning from intonation, gesture, or fragmented context—elements that are not always reliable. For instance, a sentence such as "She didn't call her mother because she was angry" can be interpreted in more than one way: Was *she* (the subject) angry, or was it *her mother*? In written or formal discourse, this kind of ambiguity would typically be avoided through careful editing or rephrasing, but in spoken language, especially in casual settings, such clarifications are often omitted.

The findings from both studies underscore the critical importance of context-aware communication and the deliberate use of clear and well-structured syntax, even in informal interactions. They suggest that achieving clarity in communication is not solely about choosing the right words, but also about anticipating potential ambiguities and resolving them through explicit contextual framing. Furthermore, these studies reinforce the idea that communicative competence involves not only linguistic knowledge but also an awareness of how meaning can shift depending on structure, context, and listener expectations.

RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Type and Approach of Research

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach combined with library research methodology to examine the phenomenon of semantic ambiguity and its effects on language comprehension. A qualitative approach is suitable because it focuses on meaning, interpretation, and contextual understanding rather than on statistical measurement. It enables the researcher to explore how different types of ambiguity function in real-world communication, particularly in educational, legal, and intercultural settings.

The use of library research allows the study to build on established linguistic theories, drawing from books, academic journals, and prior studies in semantics and pragmatics. The goal is to synthesize insights from various expert sources in order to classify types of ambiguity, analyze their impact on comprehension, and propose context-based strategies for resolving them. This conceptual analysis provides a strong theoretical foundation that contributes to language education and communicative competence.

3.2 Source of Data

The data in this study are drawn from secondary sources, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and prior research related to semantics, pragmatics, and language comprehension. These sources serve as the foundation for identifying and analyzing types of semantic ambiguity and understanding their theoretical and practical implications across different communication contexts.

In addition to theoretical references, this study also examines selected examples of ambiguous language found in academic texts, legal documents, and real-life conversations. These examples are used illustratively to demonstrate how ambiguity functions and how it can hinder comprehension if not interpreted correctly. All sources are selected based on their credibility, relevance, and contribution to the topic under investigation.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

This study applies two main data collection techniques: document analysis and literature review. Document analysis involves examining linguistic content in written texts—such as academic publications, legal clauses, and conversational excerpts—to identify expressions that demonstrate semantic ambiguity. The purpose is to extract real examples of ambiguous language that can be classified and analyzed based on type and function.

The literature review complements this by gathering theoretical insights from authoritative linguistic sources. The researcher selects relevant works in semantics and pragmatics to support the classification and interpretation of ambiguity. These two techniques work together to build a comprehensive understanding of how semantic ambiguity affects language comprehension and how it can be addressed through contextual and pragmatic strategies.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis techniques used in this study involve several stages to ensure thorough understanding and resolution of semantic ambiguity in language comprehension. These techniques combine both qualitative analysis and theoretical insights to provide an in-depth evaluation of how semantic ambiguity operates and its effects on communication. The stages of analysis are as follows:

3.4.1 Identification of Ambiguous Expressions

The first step in data analysis is identifying all instances of semantic ambiguity within the data set. This includes reviewing written and spoken texts, such as academic articles, legal documents, and conversation transcripts, for words, phrases, or sentences that exhibit potential ambiguity. The goal is to pinpoint linguistic expressions that have multiple interpretations based on their context. During this phase, particular attention is given to lexical ambiguity (e.g., polysemy or homonymy), structural ambiguity (e.g., syntactic confusion), and other forms of ambiguity such as referential and scope ambiguities.

3.4.2 Categorization and Classification

Once ambiguous expressions are identified, they are systematically categorized based on the type of semantic ambiguity they represent. This classification follows the types discussed earlier in the literature review: lexical ambiguity, structural ambiguity, referential ambiguity, and scope ambiguity. Each instance is categorized according to its nature and the linguistic features involved. For example, lexical ambiguity is analyzed based on the multiple meanings of a word in different contexts, while structural ambiguity is explored by examining sentence structures that may lead to different interpretations. This step provides a clear framework for understanding how different types of ambiguity emerge in communication.

3.4.3 Contextual Analysis

The next stage involves analyzing the context surrounding each ambiguous expression. Since semantic ambiguity often arises from a lack of contextual clarity, it is essential to consider how the surrounding text or conversation influences the interpretation of ambiguous expressions. Contextual factors such as the speaker's intent, audience expectations, cultural norms, and situational factors are all taken into account. This step evaluates how context can either clarify or further complicate the understanding of ambiguous expressions. The analysis also involves determining how different interpretations of a particular expression could change depending on the communicative setting (e.g., academic, legal, or everyday interaction).

3.4.4 Impact on Comprehension

After categorizing and analyzing the contextual factors, the next step is to assess the impact of semantic ambiguity on language comprehension. This involves exploring how ambiguity can slow down the processing of information, lead to confusion, or cause misinterpretations. Special attention is paid to high-stakes contexts such as legal documents, where ambiguity can result in serious consequences, or in educational settings where misunderstanding can hinder learning. The analysis considers the cognitive load placed on the listener or reader as they work to resolve ambiguity and the potential for error or confusion when the context is insufficient or unclear.

3.4.5 Evaluating Pragmatic Approaches to Disambiguation

The study also evaluates pragmatic strategies that can be used to resolve semantic ambiguity. This includes examining how speakers or writers use contextual clues, such as tone of voice, gesture, and background knowledge, to disambiguate their meaning. Pragmatic competence is crucial in interpreting language accurately, especially in intercultural communication, where shared assumptions and cultural norms can influence how ambiguity is resolved. The study looks at different strategies employed in professional settings (e.g., legal and diplomatic

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communication) to manage ambiguity, such as clarifying questions, rephrasing, or providing additional information to narrow down possible interpretations.

3.4.6 Synthesizing Results and Proposing Strategies

Finally, the results from the previous stages are synthesized to provide a comprehensive understanding of how semantic ambiguity affects communication and how it can be mitigated. Based on the findings, the study proposes practical strategies that can be applied in educational, professional, and intercultural communication. These strategies may include instructional techniques for teaching language learners how to handle ambiguity, communication strategies for improving clarity in spoken or written language, and tools for legal professionals and diplomats to ensure precision in their communication.

By following these data analysis techniques, the study aims to provide a holistic understanding of semantic ambiguity and offer actionable insights for improving language comprehension in various communication settings. The findings will contribute to the broader fields of semantics, pragmatics, and language education by shedding light on how ambiguity operates and how it can be managed effectively.

3.5   Trustworthiness and Limitations of the Study

To ensure the trustworthiness of this research, only reputable, peer-reviewed, and scholarly sources were used as references. The study integrates multiple perspectives from established linguists and applies consistent criteria in selecting, classifying, and analyzing examples of semantic ambiguity. This strengthens the study's theoretical validity and ensures that the findings are grounded in academic discourse.

However, this study also has limitations. As a conceptual and literature-based research, it does not involve empirical data collection such as experiments, surveys, or interviews. Consequently, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization. Instead, they provide theoretical insights that can serve as a foundation for future empirical studies. Further research is recommended to test the conceptual findings through practical applications, such as classroom-based studies or experimental designs.

DATA ANALYSIS
4.1   Data Processing Stages

This section outlines the stages undertaken to process and analyze the data concerning semantic ambiguity and its effect on language comprehension. The analysis was carried out through the following four systematic steps:

1. Identification: Ambiguous linguistic elements—words, phrases, or sentences—were identified from a variety of textual sources, including academic texts, legal documents, and conversational transcripts.
2. Classification: Each ambiguous element was classified into one of the four main categories: lexical, structural, referential, or scope ambiguity.
3. Contextual Interpretation: The selected examples were interpreted within their communicative context to evaluate how ambiguity influences meaning-making.
4. Impact Evaluation: The extent to which each type of ambiguity hinders or complicates comprehension was assessed, focusing on cognitive load, processing speed, and potential for miscommunication.

This structured process ensured that the analysis remained aligned with the research objectives and provided clarity in understanding the relationship between ambiguity and comprehension.

4.2 The Impact of Lexical Ambiguity on Comprehension

Lexical ambiguity arises when a single word has multiple meanings. If the context does not specify which meaning is intended, readers or listeners must pause to interpret, which may lead to confusion or error.

No	Sentence	Ambiguous Word	Possible Meanings	Comprehension Impact
1	He went to the bank.	bank	(1) financial institution; (2) river edge	Reader may misinterpret
2	The crane flew away.	crane	(1) bird; (2) machine	Depends on context domain
3	The bug crashed the system.	bug	(1) insect; (2) software error	Misunderstood in general use

Interpretation:

Lexical ambiguity slows down comprehension and may lead to incorrect assumptions, especially among second-language learners or in technical contexts where multiple meanings are plausible.

4.3 The Impact of Structural Ambiguity on Comprehension

Structural ambiguity results from sentence structures that allow multiple grammatical interpretations, creating confusion about the intended relationship between elements.

No	Sentence	Source of Ambiguity	Interpretations
1	I saw the man with the telescope.	PP attachment	(1) I used telescope; (2) The man had it
2	The chicken is ready to eat.	VP ambiguity	(1) Chicken is food; (2) Chicken will eat
3	Flying planes can be dangerous.	Subject ambiguity	(1) The act; (2) The objects (planes)

Interpretation:

This type of ambiguity can distort the main idea of the sentence. In education or legal texts, structural ambiguity may result in significant misinterpretation.

4.4 The Impact of Referential Ambiguity on Comprehension

Referential ambiguity occurs when pronouns or noun phrases have unclear references. In writing, the absence of non-verbal cues exacerbates this issue.

No	Sentence	Ambiguous Referent	Possible Referents	Impact
1	Anna told Mary that she won.	she	(1) Anna; (2) Mary	Reader unsure of subject
2	He gave her the book after she left.	she	(1) recipient; (2) subject	Sequence confusion
3	Lisa helped Anna because she was tired.	she	(1) Lisa; (2) Anna	Attribution of condition unclear

Interpretation:

Unclear pronoun use increases cognitive effort in comprehension and often causes misunderstanding, especially in academic or narrative writing.

4.5 The Impact of Scope Ambiguity on Comprehension

Scope ambiguity involves unclear reach of negation or quantifiers. This often leads to two or more equally possible interpretations.

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No	Sentence	Scope Issue	Interpretations	Effect
1	All students didn't pass.	Negation + quantifier	(1) None passed; (2) Not all passed	Risk of miscommunication
2	She doesn't like everyone.	Negation scope	(1) Dislikes all; (2) Likes some	Emotional tone misread
3	Every teacher didn't attend.	Quantifier + negation	(1) None attended; (2) Some did	Decision-making affected

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
5.1 Findings
The analysis revealed that semantic ambiguity plays a significant role in influencing how meaning is processed and understood. Each type of ambiguity—lexical, structural, referential, and scope—was shown to create unique challenges in comprehension, especially when contextual or pragmatic cues are lacking.

- Lexical ambiguity often causes readers or listeners to hesitate, misinterpret, or rely heavily on background knowledge.
- Structural ambiguity misleads sentence parsing and affects grammatical clarity.
- Referential ambiguity produces uncertainty in identifying the referent of pronouns or phrases, especially in written texts.
- Scope ambiguity results in logical confusion and can drastically alter the meaning of a sentence, particularly in legal or instructional settings.

These findings confirm that ambiguity increases cognitive processing load and can obstruct effective communication, especially in situations that require high precision and clarity.

5.2 Discussion and Theoretical Reflection
These results align with the theoretical framework established by Lyons (1977), Cruse (2000), and Yule (1996), who argue that ambiguity is not merely a flaw in language but an intrinsic characteristic of human communication. However, this characteristic becomes problematic when listeners or readers lack the pragmatic tools to interpret intended meanings.

In practice:
- In education, semantic ambiguity in assignments or exam questions can confuse students.
- In law, structural or lexical ambiguity may lead to conflicting legal interpretations.
- In cross-cultural communication, referential and pragmatic differences often amplify miscommunication.

Therefore, semantic ambiguity must be managed through context awareness, syntactic clarity, and the development of pragmatic competence, especially for second-language learners.

5.3 Pragmatic and Contextual Implications
Semantic ambiguity poses not only linguistic but also pragmatic risks. When speakers fail to provide sufficient context, hearers may infer the wrong meaning. This is particularly dangerous in formal or intercultural interactions where shared assumptions may be limited.

To mitigate ambiguity:
- Speakers and writers should anticipate possible misinterpretations.

- Communication should be reinforced through clear structure, elaboration, or reformulation.
- Listeners and readers should be trained to identify ambiguity markers and resolve meaning using context.

These strategies are especially critical in fields such as education, legal discourse, media, and multilingual environments.

5.4   Integration with Language Learning

Semantic ambiguity must be addressed explicitly in language education. Teachers should:

- Introduce learners to common types of ambiguity and show how to disambiguate meaning.
- Use real-world texts (news articles, dialogues, contracts) as examples of ambiguous constructions.
- Employ task-based learning (e.g., disambiguating meaning in role-plays or reading tasks).

By incorporating ambiguity awareness into language teaching, learners can be equipped with critical reading and listening skills that are essential for academic success and effective real-world communication.

5.5   Theoretical and Practical Significance

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of semantics and pragmatics by reaffirming that ambiguity is an inevitable and structurally embedded part of natural language. It validates existing linguistic theories while also expanding the discussion into applied domains like legal writing and education.

Practically, the study highlights the importance of semantic clarity and pragmatic awareness in everyday communication. It emphasizes that language comprehension is not only about decoding words, but about understanding meaning in context, making semantic awareness a core competency in education, law, diplomacy, and media.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

6.1   Conclusion

This study concludes that semantic ambiguity is an inherent characteristic of natural language that significantly influences language comprehension. Through qualitative analysis, the study identifies four major types of ambiguity—lexical, structural, referential, and scope—each of which presents unique challenges for both native and non-native speakers.

The presence of ambiguity increases cognitive load, slows down comprehension, and can cause misunderstanding, especially in educational, legal, and cross-cultural communication contexts. Without sufficient contextual and pragmatic cues, language users may misinterpret messages, leading to ineffective or even problematic communication.

Semantic ambiguity must therefore be approached not merely as a linguistic obstacle but as a phenomenon that requires awareness, interpretation skills, and pragmatic sensitivity. Understanding how ambiguity works—and how to manage it—can improve communicative competence and enhance the clarity and effectiveness of discourse.

6.2 Suggestions

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are offered:

1. For Educators: Language teaching should integrate semantic and pragmatic instruction. Learners must be trained to recognize and resolve ambiguity through contextual reasoning and discourse analysis.
2. For Legal and Professional Writers: Precision in word choice and sentence structure should be prioritized. Legal, instructional, and formal documents must be carefully edited to minimize ambiguity.
3. For Language Learners: Exposure to authentic texts and ambiguous expressions in real contexts should be encouraged. Practice in resolving ambiguity will develop critical thinking and contextual awareness.
4. For Future Researchers: This study provides a theoretical foundation. Further research may explore semantic ambiguity using empirical methods—such as comprehension testing or discourse experiments—to examine real-time processing of ambiguity.

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