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The 11th International Scientific Conference
Under the Title

“The role of humanities, social and natural sciences in supporting
sustainable development”

المؤتمر العلمي الدولي الحادي عشر

تحت عنوان "دور العلوم الانسانية والاجتماعية والطبيعية في دعم التنمية المستدامة"

10-9 ديسمبر 2020 - اسطنبول-تركيا

<http://kmshare.net/isac2020/>

The Influence of Ideology in the Interpretation of Ambiguous Sentences

Prof. Dr. Shifaa H. Hussein, Asst. Lecturer Afrah Abdul-Qadir

Tikrit University, Al-Shuhada'a St., Tikrit, Iraq

shifaahissein@gmail.com

Mosul University, Al-Baladiyyat Seq., Mosul, Iraq

Afrah.abd@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper aims at finding out the effect of ideology and social identity in trying to disambiguate ambiguous sentences. Also, it aims at finding out how subjects of different social gender find out suitable interpretations of ambiguous sentences and the effect of that gender on discourse interpretation.

The current paper hypothesizes that when interpreting an ambiguous sentence, people rely heavily on their ideologies and differences of gender and social identity affect such interpretation.

To fulfill the above aims and to verify the preceding hypotheses, the following procedures are conducted : first, ten subjects are chosen , five males and five females. These subjects are exposed to interpret 13 English ambiguous sentences to find out whether there are differences in the interpretations proposed by those subjects, then the collected interpretations are analyzed and the results are discussed

The study concluded that there are differences between females and males' interpretations of the ambiguous sentences depending on their social identity.

Keywords : ideology, interpretation, lexical ambiguity, punctuation ambiguity, social gender identity, structural ambiguity.



1. Introduction

Ambiguity can be defined as an utterance which can be interpreted differently by receptors because it holds more than one meaning being related to its lexical items, its structure or simply its punctuation. This phenomenon usually violates the principle of successful communication where both the speaker and the hearer understand the intended meaning almost in the same way and thus, stands as an obstacle in successful communication.

In communication, ambiguity is represented either intentionally or unintentionally. Intentional ambiguity is intended for sake of humor (specifically in literature), or for sake of avoiding words' obligation commitment and responsibility. Politicians, for instance, use ambiguity to run away from their promises and obligations.

Three linguistic types of ambiguity can be realized, the semantic ambiguity (where lexicon creates ambiguity because a single lexical item holds more than one meaning) and the structural ambiguity (where the ambiguous sentence admits more than one structural patterning admitting, thus, more than one interpretation and the punctuation ambiguity (where deletion or changing of punctuation marks affects the interpretation of ambiguous sentences).

In this paper, ambiguity is studied according to the subjects' perception of some ambiguous sentences to see what affects such interpretations. Is it a matter of linguistic knowledge or is it something else? This something else could be related to ideology, identity, experiences, psychological or even emotional status. Of course, the interpretation of ambiguous sentences is far away from being a linguistic issue since when such sentences are checked out, all the possible different meanings those sentences hold are appropriate. But, subjects prefer only one single interpretation rather than another. Accordingly, this study tackles the question of why this specific interpretation is proposed by this specific subject and not any other interpretations?

This paper, thus, aims at finding the effect of ideology in trying to disambiguate ambiguous sentences. Also, it aims at finding out how subjects try to find out suitable interpretations of ambiguous sentences and which type of ambiguity is more difficult to figure out.

To fulfill the above aims, the study hypothesizes that when interpreting an ambiguous sentence, people rely heavily on their ideologies and differences of gender and social identity affect such interpretation. Also, it is hypothesized that people find the structural ambiguity more difficult to figure out than semantic and punctuation ambiguities.

The current study is proposed to answer the following questions :

1. What does affect people in the interpretation of ambiguous sentences?
2. Do people reflect their ideological identity in their interpretation ?
3. What is the most difficult type of ambiguity do people face when interpreting ambiguous sentences?

2. The Term of Ambiguity

Ambiguity is defined as "an idea or situation that can be understood in more than one way" (Ambiguity, 2015:1). Empson, (1965 :1) defines ambiguity as " any verbal nuance , however , which adds some nuance to the direct statement of the prose". It is the idea which "gives room for alternative reactions to the piece of language" (Ibid: 5).

According to Crystal (2003: 22) (whose model is going to be followed here with some minor modification), ambiguity is " a word or a sentence which expresses more than one meaning". Piaget (1930 : 7) views ambiguity in the following way " each root word is naturally liable to bear many different meanings",



concentrating , thus, on one specific type of ambiguity which is lexical ambiguity (for the term ambiguity , see Clare, 2003 : 1 and Awwad, 2017 : 186).

2.1. Ambiguity and Some Related Terms

The term ambiguity is sometimes wrongly interpreted in association with some other related terms. Sometimes, ambiguity is taken to have the same meaning of 'equivocation'. Equivocation or doubles peaking is " the use of vague language to hide one's meaning or to avoid committing to a point of view" (Equivocation, 2015 :1). In this last use of language, speakers denied the most close interpretation of their texts and rely on other interpretations which seem somehow far from the reach of the interpreters. Equivocation is usually conducted to avoid a firm commitment. A word like ' torture' can be interpreted differently because of its large scope. So, speakers can avoid those threatening arguments by denying specific interpretations.

Ambiguity , further, can be interpreted in association with the term 'pun' or double entendre which is the use of a " polysemic word or phrase" (Ambiguity, 2015 :2) , to give different meanings for sake of fun or humor. Another related term is circumlocution which can be defined as a " phrase that circle around a specific idea with multiple words rather than directly evoking it with fewer and apter words" (Worden, 20016: 1 and also see Hirst, 1987).

2.2. Types of Ambiguity

Generally speaking , there are two main kinds of ambiguity; semantic ambiguity and structural ambiguity (see Crystal, 2003, Clare, 2003 and Awwad, 2017). Lexical ambiguity refers to the existence of a lexical item which has more than one meaning causing ambiguity in the sentence. So, if ambiguity exists because of the misinterpretation of a single word, then it is lexical ambiguity. Consider the following example:

1. *He gave her a note.* (= musical note, or a piece of paper having something written on). So, two interpretations can be considered here:

a. *He gave her a musical note.*

b. *He gave her a piece of paper with something written in.*

Semantic ambiguity is related to two semantic relations; polysemy and homonymy (see Clare, 2003 : 2 and Crystal, 2003 : 22). When the word has a wide range of meanings, it is polysemous. Consider the following example:

2. *Paper = writing material*

3. *Paper= document*

4. *Paper = scientific research*

But , when two different words in meaning are pronounced or spelled similarly, then they are homonomous.

Consider the following example:

5. *Bank = an institution where you keep money*

6. *Bank= the side of the river.*

In Arabic , these two relations are studied (in rhetoric) under the title of ' Al-Jinnas' (pun). Consider the following examples taken from books of Arabic :

7. اللقمة تكفيني الى يوم تكفيني . (The bite (my food) is enough for me till I put in shroud; died). The two words are identical in spelling and in pronunciation, but the first means 'enough' and the second 'put in shroud'.

8. اصحابك دارهم مادمت في دارهم . (Take care of your friends since you are in their house). The two words are identical in their pronunciation and spelling, but the first means 'take care' and the second means ' their house'.



Structural ambiguity refers to the existence of more than one possible pattern for the same sentence. Included here are phrase structure ambiguity and clause structure ambiguity. Consider the following examples about structural phrase ambiguity and structural clausal ambiguity respectively :

9. *Old men and women.* (This sentence may mean " old men and old women " or " old men and all women; young and old).

10. *He hates the girl more than anyone else.* (This sentence may mean " He hates the girl more than anyone else who hates her" or " He hates the girl more than anyone else who he hates). The structure of this sentence is either (SVOO (svo), or SVO (sv)) respectively. Accordingly, the substitution may include substitution of the phrasal elements, and then we may have structural phrasal ambiguity, or it may include substitution of clausal elements (like S,V,and etc.), then we have structural clausal ambiguity.

A third type of ambiguity can be detected here which may appear as a consequence of omitting the punctuation marks; in other words , when punctuation marks are omitted or changed deliberately, ambiguity can appear. Look at the following sentence:

11. الافراج عنه مستحيل يحال الى السجن ويعدم .

When the full stop is inserted after the word مستحيل (impossible) or before it. Two different interpretations can be detected in these two cases as shown below:

12. . الافراج عنه مستحيل . يحال الى السجن ويعدم . (To be released is impossible, he should go to jail and executed).

13. . الافراج عنه . مستحيل يحال الى السجن ويعدم . (He should be released, it is impossible to send him to jail and execute him).

3. Gender Identity, Ideology, and Discourse

There is a close connection between ideology, identity and discourse and in this section , we will shed light on this relation. Ideology is defined as " a body of ideas characteristics of a particular group or class" (Eagleton, 1991:1). It is the " assumptions , beliefs, value systems which are shared collectively by social groups" (Simpson,1993: 5). Then, ideology is the "shared beliefs and doctrines among a particular social groups" (Ghadcrinezhad, 2015: 880).

So, whatever written or comprehended is initiated on a specific ideological stand " anything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a a particular ideological position" (Fowler, 1991: 10). And although people perceive differently, they tend to share their perception in accordance with the social group (of whatever type) they engage in.

As noted by Ghadcrinezhad (2015 : 881) , when people write or interpret something, they tend to leave their ideological prints of different types on the original text, " individuals tend to make changes to the original texts so as to make it in line with the culture of that society [or with the ideologies of the specific group they belong to]". These different ideological prints could be related to gender (where participants show their prejudice, religion, or their social identity ; i.e. their masculine, feminine or neutral identity). The last point is adopted here in the current paper to show how participants reflect their social gender identity in their interpretation of ambiguous sentences.

Differences of ideological stands, further, do not assure always the existence of conflict among the groups holding these different ideological stand points, an opinion which contradict modern studies on ideology (e.g. Van Dijk, 2006, Eagleton, 1991, Irvine, 1998 and Leudar et al, 2004) who define ideology in relation to power, domination, racism and discrimination. Accordingly, these different ideological stand points may give a chance for the groups to specify their social identity without necessarily to create a conflict among them as we are going to find in the current study. Groups may exhibit relations of US/THEM in their



discourse but it is not necessarily to find conflicts in these relations. And thus, ideologies can be created as a consequence of identity membership (cf Van Dijk, 1998 : 139).

The relation between discourse and identity, we believe, is indirect. It is mediated through cognition and mental models, " the link between discourse and ideology is indirect and mediated by cognition" (see ibid : 140 and also see Hussein and Saleh , 2019). Accordingly, many mental issues may affect discourse production and comprehension included here, for instance, the personal experiences participants hold in their mind (see Van Dijk, 1998: 142 and see also Van Dijk,1997).

People fight discursively to get their own social identity through a process of 'social categorization' consciously or unconsciously for some social and psychological purposes; e.g. boosting self- esteem (cf Brown, 2000). According to Tajfel (1982 and 1986) , social identity is defined in accordance with the group membership. In other words, identity is established in association with the group membership and this membership can be expressed discursively. If identity , then, is expressed discursively, definitely it can be traced back in interpretation as a level of discursiveness. In this sense, identity travels with us and can be captured in discourse production, comprehension and interpretation, an aim which we try to approach in this study (for the study of identity in Arabic discourse, see Hussein, 2019). Identity, as "self consciousness" (Benwell and Stockoe, 2006:20) can never exist by itself, but in accordance with others, " an individual's self consciousness does not exist in isolation, it always exists in relation to an 'other' or ' others' who validate its existence" (Hall, 2004:5). This gives rise to the notion of social identity. So, social identity is the definition of self " by virtue of its membership of, or identification with a particular group or groups "(Benwell and Stockoe, 2006 : 24 and ,also ,see Bucholtz and Hall, 2005 , Bucholtz et al, 1999, Weedon, 1997 and Hussein, 2019).

4. Data Collection and Methodology

In this study, thirteen sentences are collected from resources available including : Zelta, 2014, Hirst, 1987, Cruse, 1986, , Ferreira, 1996, Dayal, 2004, Crystal, 1998, Cann, 1993, Pehar, 2001, and Kent, 1997. These sentences show a sense of ambiguity due to the existence of more than one possible interpretation for each. Sometimes, punctuation marks are deleted intentionally to create ambiguity in the sentence and to see how subjects react to them.

Six MA students from Translation Department, College of Arts, University of Tikrit are chosen to be the subjects of this study. These subjects are asked to interpret these sentences through paraphrasing or through providing the deleted materials to disambiguate the sentences and to express the meaning captured. They constitute of four males and four females. The variant of gender is established here to see whether gender identity can be expressed in the interpreted sentences. Then, results are collected and analyzed statistically and conclusions are drawn.

The following is a list of these sentences as well as the cause of ambiguity:

1. Lexical Ambiguity :

1. *The cops arrested the women because they were violent.*

Sentence (1) is ambiguous because the pronoun "they" anaphorically may refer to "the women" or to " the cop".

2. *There was not a single woman at the party.*

Sentence (2) is ambiguous due to the lexical meaning of the adjective ' Single".

3. *John asked Peter because he likes him.*

Sentence (3) is again ambiguous because of the anaphoric reference of the pronouns "he" and " him" , which refers to whom?



4. *Her brother told Tom that a present was waiting for him.*

Sentence (4) is ambiguous because also of the anaphoric referent of "him".

5. *She looks more like her mother than her brother.*

Sentence (5) is ambiguous due to the lexical meaning of the verb "like" (i.e. either to mean "as" or "adore").

2. Structural Ambiguity:

a. Phrasal Structural Ambiguity

6. *He kissed his wife with beautiful lips.*

Sentence (6) is ambiguous because the prepositional phrase "with beautiful lips " may belong to he or to the wife.

7. *He invited old men and women.*

Sentences (7) is ambiguous because of the premodifier adjective 'old' which may modify men and women or only men.

8. *The black bird man is shouting.*

Sentence (8) is ambiguous because of the noun phrase 's (black bird) function whether it is a premodifier of the noun or holds the sense of possession .

9. *Marry and Jack are married.*

Sentence (9) is ambiguous because of possible missing prepositional phrase " to each other" or the premodifier " both".

(b) Clausal Structural Ambiguity:

10. *John loves her more than anyone else.*

Sentence (10) is ambiguous because of the deleted clause after 'anyone else' (whether loves her, or he loves).

11. *He greeted his beloved while wearing only a nightshirt.*

Sentence (11) is ambiguous because of the omitted clausal elements after "while" (she is, or he is).

12. *He cooked her birds.*

Sentence (12) is ambiguous because of the different structures the sentence has (either SVOO , or SVO) and thus the birds either hers or not.

(c) Punctuation Ambiguity

13. *Woman without her man is nothing.*

Sentence (2) is ambiguous because of the deleted punctuation marks (whether to put the comma after her or after man).

5. Data Analysis

In this section, ten subjects, who are MA students in Translation Department, College of Arts, University of Tikrit, have been chosen to interpret thirteen English ambiguous sentences and also to justify their interpretations. The context of these sentences is left for the subjects to consider; i.e. the subjects were free to assign the appropriate context which they believe it fits these sentences. Each sentence is represented below with its interpretations and a discussion is followed. The subjects are referred to by numbers (1-10) and their gender is referred to as male (1-5) and female (6-10).

1. Lexical Ambiguity

1. *The cops arrested the women because they were violent.*

As stated above this sentence is semantically ambiguous because of the anaphoric reference of the pronoun "they" which may refer to the cops or the women. Accordingly, two possible interpretations can be deduced;

1. *The cops arrested the women because those women are violent.*

2. *The cops arrested the women because the cops are violent.*



Of course, assigning the suitable context is also determined by the interpretation proposed, because this context is going to be changed when the interpretation is proposed and vice versa. Subjects (1,2,3, and 5) choose interpretation (1) and subjects (6,7,8,9, and 10) choose interpretation (2), while subject (4) decides to be neutral and transfer the ambiguity as it is and interpret it as (The cops arrested the women because of violence.) attaching, thus, violence to none. Subjects (1,2,3,5) reflect their masculine social identity when they assign violence to women rather than the cops (who they think that they are all men). They believe that men cannot show violence (a conclusion which they themselves affirm through the test conducted). In this sense, these subjects assign the bad behavior to the other group (here women) and good behaviors to our group (here men). In the opposite side, subjects (6,7,8,9,10) assign the bad behaviors to the cops (as they believe that the men and not the women are violent). For them, women cannot show violence and, thus, they attached bad behaviors to the other group (here men). In this way, both of these groups of men and women show their social and ideological identity in their interpretation.

2. *There was not a single woman at the party.*

Sentence (2) is semantically ambiguous because of the lexical item "single" which has two meanings; one, unmarried. Thus, two interpretations can be established:

1. *There was no unmarried women in the party.*

2. *There was not any woman in the party.*

Subjects (1,2,3,4,5, 7) choose the first interpretation and subjects (6,8,9,19) choose the second interpretation. As confirmed by subjects (1,2,3,4,5,7) they believe that in parties, women usually attend with somebody (a man) because it is difficult for women as they are weak to attend parties and leave alone late at night. So, they have to come with a man to protect them. As realize, those participants show their masculine social identity to show women (the other group) as being weak in contrast with our group (here men) who can offer protection, with the exception of subject (7) who confirms that she does not realize the other meaning of the lexical item 'single'. Subjects (6,8,9,10), on the other hand, choose the second interpretation dismissing, thus, the idea presented in the first interpretation and argue against the first group of subjects' interpretation during the test. Accordingly, these two groups show their social identity throughout their interpretations.

3. *John asked Peter because he likes him.*

This sentence is semantically ambiguous because of the anaphoric reference of the two pronouns "he" and "him". Accordingly, two interpretations can be proposed:

1. *John asked Peter because Peter likes John.*

2. *John asked Peter because John likes Peter.*

All the subjects except subjects (7,8,9) in the test choose the second interpretation as they confirm that if Peter likes John and John does not like Peter, he would not ask him, but because John likes Peter, although he is not sure whether Peter likes him, John asked him. Accordingly, those subjects (specifically the male ones) show their masculine identity in their interpretation showing John (as a man) to be powerful and sure of himself that what matters is John's feeling towards Peter and not the opposite. Those subjects concentrate on John rather than Peter because they believe that they are concentrating on the theme of the sentence which seems informatively more important since the sentence is about John, not Peter. Subjects (7,8,9) choose the first interpretation because as they said in the test follow the concord rule of English language and assign "he" to Peter rather than John, because the referent "Peter" is closer to the pronoun "he" than "John". Those subjects, further, rejected the explanation presented by the first group of the subjects accusing them to violate the principle of concord for sake of other unveiled meanings.



4. *Her brother told Tom that a present was waiting for him.*

Also, this sentence is semantically ambiguous because of the referent of the pronoun "him" which could be "her brother" or "him". Accordingly, two interpretations can be realized :

1. *Her brother told Tom that a present was waiting for the speaker (her brother).*
2. *Her brother told Tom that a present was waiting for Tom.*

Subjects (6,8, 10) choose the first interpretation of the sentence , while subjects (1,2,3,4,5,7,9) choose the second interpretation. Subjects (6,8, 10) justify their interpretation by saying that they were influenced by the possessive pronoun "her". The present is more likely to be related to the absent feminine who may be hinted to by the pronoun "her". They say that " her brother" is more likely to have the present which belongs to his sister (as women are more likely to have present than men because they are more delicate), otherwise what is the benefit of the existence of the possessive pronoun "her" in the sentence. Accordingly, those subjects show their social feministic identity through their interpretation. Subjects (1,2,3,4,5,7, 9) justify their interpretation by following concord principle which attaches the reference of the pronoun to the closest noun, here Tom. Also, in the test, this group argue against the first group (i.e. subjects 6, 8, 10) in violating the principle of concord for sake of discrimination.

5. *She looks more like her mother than her brother.*

This sentence is both semantically and structurally ambiguous. It is semantically ambiguous due to the existence of the lexical verb which permits two meaning; similar to and adore or love. It is structurally ambiguous because of the possible omission clausal elements after " her brother". In this sense this sentence may have the following interpretation:

1. *She looks more love her mother than her brother (loves his mother).*
2. *She looks more love her mother than loves her brother.*
3. *She looks more similar to her mother than her brother.(She is not similar to her brother).*
4. *She looks more similar to her mother than her brother looks similar to his mother.*

Interestingly, the subjects could only grasp the second and the third interpretations; none of them could grasp the first or the fourth interpretation. If this proves something it proves that subjects are unaware of the hidden structures which could radically change the meaning.

Subjects (1,2,3,4,5) choose the fourth interpretation. While subjects (6,7,8,9,10) choose the second interpretation. The first group justifies their interpretation by saying that the sentence talks about the manner of the girl because usually a girl is similar to her mother (because both are females) rather than her brother or even her father (because they are masculine, and the son should look like his brother or even father) , showing thus their masculine identity. The second group chooses the second interpretation justifying their interpretation by saying that the sentence talks about the sense of usual emotional state of love between the girl and her mother, a scene which can only be found between the girl and her mother and not between a girl and her brother if to consider her a good girl showing her mother deep love. In this way, this group of subjects ,also, shows their feminine identity through their interpretation.

2. Structural Ambiguity:

a. Phrasal Structural Ambiguity

6. *He kissed his wife with beautiful lips.*

This sentence is structurally ambiguous due to the existence of the prepositional phrase " with beautiful lips" which may post-modify "his wife" or be an adverb of manner modifying thus the man's action of kissing. Two interpretations can be found here:

1. *He kissed his wife who has beautiful lips.*
2. *With beautiful and passion , he kissed his wife.*



Subjects (1,2,3,4) choose the second interpretation and subjects (6,8,9, 10) choose the first interpretation. Subjects (5 and 7) transfer the sentence as it is ignoring any sense of ambiguity. Subjects (1,2,3,4) justify their interpretation by saying that if the man is noble enough, he should show his wife passion and sincerity when kissing her which is the common sense among men, showing thus their masculine identity. Subjects (6,8,9,10) realize that since the woman is married definitely, she is beautiful and has beautiful lips which obliges the man to love and kiss her, showing thus their feminine identity.

7. *He invited old men and women.*

Sentence (7) is ambiguous because of the existence of the adjective which may modify only "men" but not women, or it may modify both men and women. Accordingly, this sentence can be interpreted in two ways:

1. *He invited old men and old women.*

2. *He invited old men and all women; young and old.*

Subjects (1,2,3,4,5) choose to interpret the sentence as in the first interpretation justifying their interpretation by saying that old men (who are always rational) would seek wisdom if they intend to be with women, so they more prefer to sit with old women rather than young ones (who are definitely have no wisdom). Those subjects reflect their masculine identity through their interpretation showing their old fellows (their group) to be wise and the young women (the other group) to show no wisdom. Subjects (6,7,8,9, 10) choose the second interpretation justifying their interpretation by saying that women in general whether young or old add flavor to any place they go to unlike young men who are dismissed from the invitation because they always cause troubles if they are gathered in a specific place. Those subjects reflect their feminine identity because they show the other group (young men rather than old men who are tired enough to be naughty) and thus describing them negatively to be trouble makers unlike women (young and old) who seem to be peaceful and add flavor anywhere describing them positively.

8. *The black bird man is shouting.*

This sentence is structurally ambiguous due to the existence of the noun phrase "black bird" which can function as a pre-modification of "man" or as possession of the man. The possessive "s" is deliberately omitted here to find if the subjects are affected by this procedure. Accordingly, two interpretation are grasped by the subjects:

1. *The black bird of the man is shouting.*

2. *The man who looks like the black bird is shouting.*

Subjects (1,2,5) give the first interpretation and subjects (6,7,9,10) gives the second interpretation. Subjects (3,4,8) could not give any interpretation because they said that the sentence makes no sense for them. Subjects (6,7,9,10) justify their interpretation by saying that men are just like crows always shout and the sentence is describing the real state of the man because men (rather than women) are always shouting. Those subjects reflect their feminine identity describing the other group (here men) badly. Subjects (1,2,5) give the first interpretation because they believe that men can never be like black birds and shout, reflecting thus the in group they belong to (men) positively and, thus, showing their masculine identity.

9. *Marry and Jack are married.*

This sentence is ambiguous because of the possible omission of the adverbs "both and to each other". Accordingly, the sentence could mean either of the following interpretations:

1. *Both Marry and Jack are married. (Marry has a husband, but not Jack, and Jack has a wife but not Marry).*

2. *Marry and Jack are married to each other.*

Interestingly, all the subjects in the test choose the second interpretation and none of them think of the first interpretation. They said if they are not married to each other, the two names would not be close to each



other in the sentence. None of them is able to figure out that Marry and Jack may have other husband and wife. If this proves something , it proves that the subjects are weak structurally to provide any structural materials that may change the sentence's meaning.

(b) Clausal Structural Ambiguity:

10. *John loves her more than anyone else.*

This sentence is structurally ambiguous because of the deleted clausal elements after anyone else. Accordingly, the sentence could have the following interpretations:

1. *John loves her more than anyone else loves her.*

2. *John loves her more than anyone else he loves.*

Subjects (1,2,3,4) choose the second interpretation saying that the man is honest and loves only one woman in his life. He is not playful nor naughty so, this interpretation is the closest one. Those subjects reflect their masculine identity when they try to describe their in group (the man) positively. Subjects (6,8,10) choose the first interpretation saying that because the woman is beautiful and lovable , there are so many admirers, but John loves her more than anybody loves her, reflecting thus, their feminine identity by describing their in group (the woman) positively. Subjects (5,7,9) render the sentence as it is because they could not realize any kind of ambiguity.

11. *He greeted his beloved while wearing only a nightshirt.*

Sentence (11) is structurally ambiguous because of the deleted clausal elements after "while" which may be " he is" or " she is". Accordingly, this sentence admits two interpretations:

1. *He greeted her while she was wearing only a nightshirt.*

2. *He greeted her while he was wearing only a nightshirt.*

Subjects (1,2,3,4,5,7) interpret the sentence just like in the first interpretation. Subjects (2,3,4,5) justify their interpretation by saying a man would not in any case greet others by wearing a nightshirt; this could not be the manner of a good man but a woman could do that because sometimes women are careless. They ,thus, describe their in group (men) positively and their out group (women) negatively. Subjects (1,7) justify their interpretation by saying that they follow the concord principle of closeness because providing the clausal elements "she is" depends on the pronoun "her" in the sentence and thus the provided pronoun should be "she" rather than "he". Subjects (6,8,9,10), on the other hand , choose the second interpretation because ,as they said, the situation seems to be formal due to the existence of the word "greeted" and women usually preserve etiquettes in formal situations and they would not, in such a case, wear nightshirts , unlike men who mostly did not preserve principles of etiquettes. Thus, they describe other group (men)negatively and in group positively showing thus, their social feminine identity.

12. *He cooked her birds.*

This sentence is ambiguous due to the existence of two different structures; SVOO, or SVO causing ,thus, two different interpretations:

1. *He cooked her some birds.*

2. *He cooked her own birds.*

Subjects (1,2,3,4,5) choose the first interpretations saying that it is impossible for a rational and civilized man to cook his lady's bird describing their in group positively and showing their masculine identity. Subjects (6 ,8, 9, 10) , choose the first interpretation saying that men (unlike women) sometimes behave vulgarly to prove their strength and dominance towards women, and it is possible that "he cooked the lady her own birds". They represent the out group (men) negatively. Subject (7) represents the sentence as it is denying that there is any ambiguity in the sentence.



(c) Punctuation Ambiguity

13. *Woman without her man is nothing.*

Sentence (13) is ambiguous because of the missing punctuation marks , specifically the comma which may be put after "her" or after " woman" causing thus two different interpretations:

1. *Woman, without her man is nothing (i.e. the woman is nothing without her man).*

2. *Woman without her, man is nothing(i.e. The man without the woman is nothing).*

Interestingly, subjects (1,2,3,4,5) choose the first interpretation. They justify their interpretation by saying that the woman cannot take care of herself because she is weak and ,thus, she is nothing without the strong man who takes care of and protect her. These subjects describe their group (men) positively and the other group (women) negatively showing ,thus, their social masculine identity. Subjects (6,8,9,10) choose the second interpretation saying that the man (unlike the woman) is always in need of the woman to take care of him and when the wife died , always the man seeks for another woman and gets marry soon because he cannot live without a woman to take of him. While the woman ,mostly, does not seek for another man when her husband died because she can take care of herself without the man. Those subjects , thus, describe their in group (women) positively and the out group (men) negatively showing , thus, their social feminine identity. Subject (7) could not interpret the sentence saying that it makes no sense to her.

6.Findings

According to the analyses conducted above, the followings can be deducted. Some of the subjects failed in finding suitable interpretations for the sentences. In the lexical ambiguity, two subjects failed to identify a suitable interpretation with the average (32,5%) , with the structural phrasal ambiguity, fifteen subjects failed to find the interpretation with the average (48,75%), with the structural clausal ambiguity, fourteen subjects failed with the average (45,5%), with the punctuation ambiguity, one subject failed with the average (13%). So, this proves that subjects are not aware of the structural ambiguity (and specifically structural phrasal) ambiguity than lexical or punctuation ones (see table 1 below).

Also, it seems that forty four subjects (35,7%) show social feminism identity. And fifty one subjects with the average (41,4 %) show their social masculine identity. The percentage of neutrality which is due to the following the linguistic and grammatical rules is (22,7%) with twenty eight subjects. This proves that men are more likely to show their identity than women in their interpretations (see table 2 below).

Table (1) : The Percentage of Successful and Unsuccessful Interpretations among the Three Types of Ambiguity.

Ambiguous Sentences	Types of Ambiguity	Successful Interpretations	Percentage	Failed Interpretations	Percentage
1	Lexical	1,2,3,5,6,7,8, 9,10		4	
2	Lexical	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10		7	
3	Lexical	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10			
4	Lexical	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10			
5	Lexical	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	67,5%		32,5%



5	Structural Clausal			1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	
6	Structural Phrasal	1,2,3,4,6,8,9,10		5,7	
7	Structural Phrasal	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10			
8	Structural Phrasal	1,2,5,6,7,9,10		3,4,8	
9	Structural Phrasal		51,25%	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	48,75%
10	Structural Clausal	1,2,3,4,6,8,10		5,7,9	
10	Structural Clausal	1,2,3,4,6,8,10		5,7,9	
11	Structural Clausal	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10			
12	Structural Clausal	1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,10	54,5%	7	45,5%
13	Punctuation	1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,10	87%	7	13%

Table (2) : The Percentage of Showing Neutral, Masculine and Feminine Social Identity in the Ambiguous Sentences.

Ambiguous Sentences	Neutral 22,7%	Masculine Identity	Percentage 41,4%	Feminine Identity	Percentage 35,7%
1		1,2,3,5		6,7,8,9,10	
2		1,2,3,4,5		6,9,10	
3	7,8,9	1,2,3,4,5,6,10			
4	1,2,3,4,5,7,9			6,8,10	
5		1,2,3,4,5		6,7,8,9,10	
6		1,2,3,4		6,8,9,10	
7		1,2,3,4,5		6,7,8,9,10	
8		1,2,5		6,7,9,10	
9	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10			6,7,9,10	
10		1,2,3,4		6,8,10	
11	1,7	2,3,4,5		6,8,9,10	
12		1,2,3,4,5		6,8,9,10	
13		1,2,3,4,5		6,8,9,10	



7. Conclusions

As noted in the previous sections, participants try their best to reflect their social gender identity in their interpretations of ambiguous sentences. Structural ambiguity seems to be more difficult than the other two types of ambiguity; semantic and punctuation ambiguity. This is due to the fact that English is a second language for the participants and they face structural difficulty more than semantic or punctuational. Furthermore, it appears that participants do show their ideological stand points and their social identity in their interpretations of ambiguous sentences but male participants were more successful than female participants in showing their social identity. However, those two groups of participants do not always exhibit ideological conflicts in their interpretations, though sometimes they show a conflict between them. Also, it appears that deleting punctuation marks create ambiguity and participants are affected by this deletion which causes differences in interpretations which are ideologically oriented.

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