
Module for Bachelor of Education Programme (Primary and JHS)

EBS280SW: INTRODUCTION TO SEMANTICS

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UNIT 1: LEECH'S TYPES OF MEANING

OVERVIEW

Dear student, welcome to Unit 1 of Introduction to Semantics. In this unit, we shall learn about Geoffrey Leech's seven types of meaning. The word 'meaning' is very common in our everyday speech but it is very difficult to define. This is because linguists necessarily have to use words to discuss the meaning of words. Though different scholars have attempted to define 'meaning' from various perspectives, they have not succeeded in getting one single definition for it due to the complex nature of meaning. The best way to understand the concept of meaning is therefore not to define it but to describe it from various perspectives and this will help resolve the problem associated with finding definition for meaning. One of the two main approaches for defining meaning is Leech's (1985) Seven Types of Meaning.

In the light of the above, Session One of this Unit will discuss Conceptual meaning of texts while the second session will expose you to connotative meaning. Session three will throw light on social meaning whereas Session four will be devoted to the study of affective meaning. While Session five will deal with reflected meaning of texts, the sixth session, which is the final session, will examine both collocative and thematic meanings of discourse.

Unit Objectives

After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

1. discuss conceptual meaning as one of the ways for defining the concept of meaning
2. explain connotative meaning as one way by which the concept of meaning can be defined.
3. examine what social meaning is
4. discuss affective meaning as one of Leech's approaches to defining meaning.
5. explain reflected meaning of a text
6. identify and describe collocative and thematic meanings.

The British scholar, Geoffrey Leech, in his book *Semantics: The Study of Meaning* published by Cambridge University Press in 1985 identifies seven types of meaning and his identification and description of meanings is used as one of the approaches for defining the concept of meaning. Leech's Seven Types of Meaning are as follows:

SESSION 1: CONCEPTUAL MEANING

Dear student, welcome to the first session of unit two of this course. In this session, we shall explain what conceptual meaning is and try to identify examples in given utterances. We shall again describe the features of conceptual meaning using down-to-earth explanation. We believe if you diligently follow the concepts discussed in this session, you will benefit immensely because the concepts are easy to absorb. Let's begin our navigation through this session.

Objectives

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- a. discuss conceptual meaning as one of the ways for defining the concept of meaning
- b. identify features of conceptual meaning.

Now read on

1.1 Conceptual meaning

The word ‘concept’ means a notion; an abstract or general idea. Conceptual meaning, therefore, refers to the basic meaning of a word before it is used in a linguistic context. It can also mean what a word stands for in the world of cognition. It is, in fact, the dictionary meaning of the word which is unmarked. Conceptual meaning is also called logical or denotative or cognitive meaning and it is widely assumed to be the central factor in linguistic communication. It is denotative because it becomes a sign, mark or an indication of an existing entity.

In other words, it is the natural meaning a word has before it is used in a given concept. For example, as soon as the word ‘woman’ is mentioned, an entity with the following elements: + human, - male, + adult, come into our mind. This explanation adds to the fact that conceptual meaning does not include the feelings and ideas that people may associate with a given word.

1.2 Features of conceptual/denotative meaning

- a. The conceptual meaning of a word can be identified using componential analysis. Componential analysis is a way of finding meaning of a word by breaking it into its semantic components or features. It makes use of the + and – signs to show the presence or absence of semantic feature. For example, the following words can be represented semantically as follows:

Cat	man	boy	idea	doe	rock
+ noun	+ noun	+ noun	+ noun	+ noun	+ noun
+ concrete	+ concrete	+ concrete	- concrete	+ concrete	+ concrete
+ animate	+ animate	+ animate	.....	+ animate	- animate
- human	+ human	+ human	.....	- human	- human
+ feline	.....	.....	- feline	.....	.....
.....	+ male	+ male	.....	- male	.....
.....	+ old	- old	.....	.....	.....

Source: Akpanglo-Nartey (2002)

From the examples above, it can be observed the meaning of a word consists of both what the word possesses (the [+] features) and what the word does not possess (the [-] features). For instance, for us to be able to distinguish between the word *girl* and *woman*, we need to specify that one is old whereas the other is young.

- b. Conceptual/denotative meaning is relatively stable, i.e., it is relatively static and does not change easily. E.g., The denotative meaning of ‘girl’, ‘tree’, ‘human’ has been stable for quite a long time.
- c. It is codifiable, i.e., it is the meaning that is usually entered in the dictionary and serves as a reference point for language study in the society.

- d. It is more determinate, closed ended and objective. This means that conceptual meaning has a definite fixed meaning and once a certain entity is mentioned, no other meaning comes to mind except the sense that particular entity evokes.
- e. It is general and cannot be seen as cultural-specific. Every culture assigns names and meanings to different entities. Though the entities may have different names, they point to the same meaning. For example, pen is called ‘stylo’ in French, ‘stift’ in German, ‘caneta’ in Portuguese and ‘boligrafo’ in Spanish; however, all these names point to an object with ink for writing.

Leech (1981:9) observes that conceptual meaning plays an enormous role in linguistic communication for it “has a complex and sophisticated organization which may be compared with, and cross-related to, a similar organization on the syntactic and phonological levels of language.”

Summary

This session has been looking at conceptual meaning. We have learnt that conceptual meaning refers to the basic meaning of a word before it is used in a linguistic context. It is, in fact, the denotative meaning of a given word. We also learnt that conceptual meaning is relatively stable, codifiable, determinate, general and objective, and the sense in it can be determined using componential analysis.

Self-Assessment Questions

Exercise 2.1

1. What is conceptual meaning?
2. Identify four features of conceptual meaning.
3. With examples, explain componential analysis.
4. What other names can be given to conceptual meaning?

SESSION 2: CONNOTATIVE MEANING

Dear student, welcome to the second session of unit two of this course. In this session, we shall explain what connotative meaning is and try to identify examples in given utterances. We shall again identify some features of connotative and try to compare them with the features of denotative meaning in order to see where the two concepts converge or diverge. The session will also highlight some of the importance of connotative meaning as far as language usage is concerned. Let’s begin our navigation through this session.

Objectives

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

1. Explain what connotative meaning is and identify examples from given utterances.
2. Identify features of connotative meaning.
3. State why connotative meaning is useful to writers and language users.

Now read on

2.1 Connotative meaning

Connotation is the use of an expression to mean a different thing other than the literal meaning. So connotative meaning can roughly be defined as the associative or deeper meaning a word or an expression acquires when it is used in a given context. Leech (1981) defines connotative meaning as the communicative value that an expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual content. In simple terms, it refers to the additional meaning a word acquires as a result of the way it has been used in a given context or circumstance.

From the definition, it can be observed that connotative meaning intersects with some parts of conceptual meaning or denotative meaning. This means that when the contrastive features of conceptual meaning become attributes of the “real world” referent, connotative meaning is realised. It should be noted that certain factors such as the speaker’s intent, age and the society may impose an additional attribute on a referent and this may result in the realization of connotative meaning.

For example, while *Mercedes Benz* connotes affluence, comfort, wealth etc., *angel* connotes kindness, compassion, lover. For instance, “You’re my angel.” Here, ‘angel’ refers to a lover or a saviour. In this example, “The lady is a snake.”, ‘snake’ connotes ‘deceit, danger or treachery.’ It must be noted that connotative meaning does not deal with the linguistic composition of a word; rather, it deals more with the sense or reference of that word. The additional meaning that a word acquires according to Leech (1981) depends on various other factors, such as age, society and the individual.

Writers use connotation for several reasons. They often use it to create emotional associations that can be either positive, negative or neutral. They also use it to create complex ideas and deeper meanings through the use of literary devices.

2.2 Features of connotative meaning

Connotative meaning has the following as features:

- a. It is less determinate. This means that connotative meaning does not have a definite fixed meaning. Limitless shades of meaning can be expressed depending on the context and the intent of the speaker. Once an expression is used, several meanings come to mind.
- b. It is open-ended. This means that additional features, attributes, meanings can be added. Connotative meaning is opened to several interpretations.
- c. It is cultural-specific. This means that a meaning assigned to an entity or an expression differs from culture to culture.
- d. It is subjective. Connotative meaning depends on individual’s own perception of the entity. The meaning is not objective as individual’s perception, feelings influence the kind of meaning they want to convey.
- e. Connotative meaning changes from time to time and from place to place.

We can liken the relationship between conceptual and connotative meanings to language and our world of experience. While language denotes the different concepts and experiences, these concepts get deeper associated meanings when we used them for connotative purposes. Leech (1981) admits that connotative meaning can be seen as an open-ended and unstable category in comparison to conceptual meaning.

Summary

This session has been looking at connotative meaning. We have learnt that connotative meaning is the additional or associative meaning that a word or an expression acquires from its usage in a given context. This type of meaning is less determinate and open-ended. It is cultural-specific, subjective and keeps on changing from time to time and from place to place.

Self-Assessment Questions

Exercise 2.1

1. With examples, explain connotative meaning?
2. Identify four features of conceptual meaning.
3. Identify four differences between denotative and connotative meanings of a word.

SESSION 3: SOCIAL MEANING

Dear student, welcome to the third session of unit two of this course. In this session, we shall discuss Leech's type of meaning known as social meaning. We shall also identify some words which are used stylistically to evoke social meaning. The session promises to be insightful and informative so don't be left out. Be with us as we walk through this session.

Objectives

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

1. explain social meaning
2. identify some factors that can influence social meaning.

3.1 What is social meaning?

Leech stresses that the social type of meaning includes all the social circumstances regarding the use of a piece of language. It is the set of inferences that can be drawn on the basis of how language is used in a particular social context. It is also known as stylistic meaning and it refers to the meaning acquired when we talk of the use of language in social context. The social context refers to the setting or the milieu in which people live and work. It includes the relationships among the different groups within a given societies, the values, norms and beliefs and practices that govern a particular society. What is deemed acceptable in one society may be frowned on in a different linguistic society.

Social meaning describes how appropriate a word is according to formality. For example, although the following words: assassination, murder, killing, massacre, butchering, beheading, extermination, homicide, genocide etc. all have the meaning of 'death', they are different in stylistic meaning. For instance, if a top politician is killed, the appropriate word to use will be 'murder' whereas a mass killing of members of an ethnic group will not be appropriately referred to as 'murder' but a 'genocide'. Another example is when we want to refer to a person's place of living: domicile (very formal and official), residence (formal), abode (poetic) and home (general).

3.2 Factors that influence social meaning

Social meaning also puts into consideration other circumstances and factors into perspective. These factors include the individual who is speaking and the position they occupy. The position will determine whether or not the speaker will sound polite or colloquial in their usage of language in a given social context. It also deals with the language or dialect of a particular geographical region or social class which the speaker is using to communicate. Aside from the status of the individual and the dialect, the medium used by the speaker or writer may differ. The medium talks about how the message is delivered: is it through a written or spoken mode? Another important factor which influences social meaning is time. Time influences the contemporariness or archaicness of a language used. Meaning of words in the early and middle periods of English may not be the same as we use them in the modern era of English. Even within the modern period, the language of the 18th century is not the same as the 21st century language though both periods refer to contemporary period of English.

Similarly, the kind of genre one is engaged in any given society determines the linguistic conventions to use. The language of newspaper is different from the courtroom discourse whereas language of memoranda, lectures, comedy or tragedy differs from one genre to another. The kind of interaction, interacting alone or with someone and the central idea being discussed determine the social meaning evoked in a given expression.

Leech (1981) posits that social meaning can also include what is called *the illocutionary force of an utterance*, which can then be interpreted as a request, an apology, a threat, a petition etc.

Summary

In this session, we looked at what social meaning was all about. We learnt that social meaning refers to the set of inferences that can be drawn on the basis of how language is used in a particular social context. The session also highlighted some factors that influence social meaning and these include individuality, dialect, time, genre, medium among others.

Self-Assessment Questions

Exercise 3.1

1. What social meaning?
2. Identify four factors which influence social meaning.

SESSION 4: AFFECTIVE MEANING

Dear student, welcome to the fourth session of unit two of this course. In this session, we shall discuss Leech's type of meaning referred to as affected meaning. We shall also identify some words which are used stylistically to evoke social meaning. The session promises to be insightful and informative so don't be left out. Be with us as we walk through this session.

Objectives

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

1. explain affective meaning.
2. Illustrate affective meaning.

4.1 What is affective meaning?

Another type of meaning which is closely related to the social meaning is affective meaning which is also called emotive meaning. Leech considers affective meaning to be what is conveyed about the feeling and attitude of the speaker through the use of language to the listener. In other words, it deals with the way language can evoke personal feelings of the speaker and that may include his/her attitude towards their listener or something he is talking about. It is an expression which communicates the feelings of the speaker, his perception or attitude to the subject and the listener. It can be positive or negative. Furthermore, affective meaning can be expressed directly and indirectly, and each case, it is dependent on the context.

Summary

In this session, we have looked at what constitute an emotive meaning. We learnt that it deals with the way language can evoke personal feelings of the speaker and that may include his/her attitude towards their listener or something he is talking about. We also learnt that emotive meaning is usually conveyed through the conceptual and connotative content of the words used in a particular context.

Self-Assessment Questions

Exercise 4.1

1. What social meaning?
2. Identify four factors which influence social meaning.
3. Write down for sentences that depict emotive meaning.

SESSION 5: REFLECTED MEANING

Dear student, welcome to session five of unit two of this course. In this session, we shall discuss what is meant by reflected meaning. We shall also identify some words which are used stylistically to evoke social meaning. The session promises to be insightful and informative so don't be left out. Be with us as we walk through this session.

Objectives

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

1. explain reflected meaning.
2. Illustrate reflected meaning.

5.1 Reflected meaning explained

Reflected meaning is the kind of meaning that comes up when the use of a word calls up an image or sense other than its own in our mind. When we use a word in one sense, one of its other senses which is more sensual is reflected on it. The evoked meaning normally has a stronger sensual power and usually dominates the intended meaning the speaker wants to convey.

In a similar vein, reflected meaning occurs when a word has multiple meanings. In such situations, when a listener is responding to one sense of the word, they usually respond to another sense of the same word. Interestingly, the new sense seems to overshadow the other senses as a result of its relative frequency and familiarity.

Leech exemplifies this in the cases of *The Comforter* and *The Holy Ghost* where, although both terms in the religious circle refer to the third element in the Holy Trinity, there are certain semantic differences between those two expressions. For instance, while *The Comforter* is described by Leech as something “warm and comforting”, *the Ghost* is described as “awesome” or “dreadful.” Again, when the word ‘juice’ is mentioned, ‘semen’ readily comes to our mind though the speaker may be talking about orange or pineapple juice. Again, as soon as a speaker mentions the word ‘sex’ which refers to our state of being male or female, the meaning that is evoked is ‘copulation or sexual gratification.’ This sexual meaning associated with the word intercourse overshadows the innocent sense of communication. In recent times, speakers are more comfortable using the word ‘rooster’ instead of ‘cock’ because of the reflected meaning the word ‘cock’ has acquired.

Reflected meaning can also be realized in poetry. For instance, in the following lines of Owen’s ‘Futility’:

‘Are limbs so dear achieved, are sides,

Full nerved still warm - too hard to stir’

In the above lines, the poet uses ‘dear’ to express the sense of something which is expensive. Similarly, in William Wordsworth’s *Daffodils*, the word ‘gay’ is used more often to indicate the state of being happy: “They could not but be gay in such jocund company” but in recent times, the word ‘gay’ is used to construe homosexuality and this superimposed meaning of homosexuality has pushed the other meanings of the word to the background due to the dominant and frequent use of the ‘homosexual’ sense.

Other words such as erection, intercourse, ejaculation, penetration etc. when used in a given context draw away the innocent senses the words possess to assume strong reflected meanings which are usually filled with a sense of taboo.

Look at the following utterances below. Can you find reflected meanings in them?

1. Obama and Zuma had an **intercourse** on the diplomatic relations between USA and South Africa.
2. The chain-saw operators **penetrated** the forest.
3. After we negotiated the curve, a huge building **erected** before us.
4. The heavy weight boxer **kissed** the canvass.
5. Fiifi **slept** with Efua in the bedroom.
6. This is the way to be cheerful and **gay**.

Summary

In this session, we have discussed the concept of reflected meaning. We learnt that reflected meaning is the kind of meaning that arises when the use of a word evokes an image or sense other than its own in our mind. We also learnt that in such cases, if a listener is responding to one sense of the word, they usually respond to another sense of the same word and the new sense usually

overshadows the other senses as a result of its relative frequency and familiarity. Words like intercourse, penetrate, gay, ejaculation, erection are used to express reflected meaning.

Self-Assessment Questions

Exercise 5.1

1. Explain the concept of reflected meaning?
2. How different is reflected meaning from connotative meaning?
3. Write down for sentences that depict reflected meaning.

SESSION 6: COLLOCATIVE AND THEMATIC MEANINGS

Dear student, welcome to the last session of unit two of this course. In this session, we shall discuss what collocative meaning is. We shall also look at thematic meaning and how it is realised in a given context stylistically to evoke social meaning. The session promises to be insightful and educative so don't be left out. Be with us we walk through this final session.

Objectives

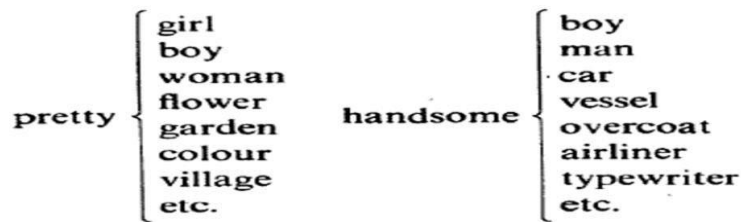
By the end of this session, you should be able to:

1. explain collocative meaning.
2. discuss and illustrate thematic meaning.

6.1 Collocative meaning

According to Leech, collocative meaning is the type of meaning which a word acquires in the company of other words. Words usually collocate or co-occur with certain words. For instance, the word 'business' co-occur with the word 'big' more than 'large' or 'great' so we can have talk of 'big business' and not 'larger business'. So, collocative meaning, simply, refers to the association a word forms as it co-occurs with certain types of words in an adjacent linguistic environment.

To clarify this definition, let us use the examples of the adjectives "pretty" and "handsome" and the words which usually find themselves in their vicinity. Both words indicate 'good looking' however, while the word 'pretty' collocates with 'girl', 'woman' or 'lady', the word 'handsome' co-occur very well with 'boy' or 'man'. In a similar vein, whereas "cows may wander, humans may stroll". Besides that, a person can only "tremble" with fear but "quiver" with excitement. Collocative meaning normally deals with modulation and selection of senses. A word, thus, is restricted in the choice of words to move within a given structure. For example, 'Ghanaian' can collocate to have the following structures: Ghanaian passport, Ghanaian dance, Ghanaian citizen, Ghanaian food, Ghanaian teacher etc. The illustration below shows how collocative meaning is formed with the words 'pretty' and 'handsome'.



Source: Leech (198:17)

Leech further maintains that collocative meaning is usually expressed when a language user selects a word which co-occurs appropriately with a given word in a given context. For example, in using “to wander” and “to stroll”, one is likely to say: cows or stray animals wander whereas human beings stroll. Also, while a person can “tremble” with fear, they can only “quiver” with excitement. These are clear illustrations of collocative meaning as posited by Leech.

6.2 Thematic meaning

The last type of meaning espoused by Leech is the thematic meaning. This type of meaning is realized based on the focus of an utterance. We are looking at what is salient or relevant to the speaker. It involves how a speaker organizes his/her message in terms of ordering his/her focus and emphasis. The thematic type of meaning provides an answer to the question: What is communicated by the way the author formed and organized the message? Basically, thematic meaning can be realized through focusing, fronting, emotive emphasis and passivisation.

In using passivisation, the writer tries to thematize the predicate of the sentence through fronting and sometimes the agent acting on the verb is completely deleted. In using active or passive voice to communicate the same message, we can have examples as follows: (a.) *Bingo won the first prize* b). *The first prize was won by Bingo* or better still (c) *The first prize was won*.

Sometimes, intonation or stress is a medium for expressing emotive emphasis. It identifies a word or a structure which is more important to the speaker and gives it prominence. That becomes the focus of the speaker. E.g. ‘I brought the boy **home**.’ In this sentence, the focus of the speaker is ‘home’ and not any other place.

At times too, loose sentences can be used to express thematic meaning. For instance, in the period sentence: When men begin to work and start getting money, **they are easily deceived by slay queens**, the main them of the sentence is pushed to the backyard so to front it, the speaker will have to adopt the loose sentence so that the salient part of the meaning comes first as follows: **Men are easily deceived by slay queens** when they begin to work and start getting money. Thematic meaning, actually, is a matter of choice between alternative grammatical construction. For instance, in the sentences: “A man is here to see you.” and “There is a man here to see you”, we have the same idea expressed in two different ways based on the focus of the speaker.

A critical look at Leech’s seven types of meaning reveals that words have their basic meaning and this is what is called denotative or conceptual meaning; however, there are additional meanings that are associated with every word and this is called **associative meaning**. This includes connotative, affective, reflected, thematic, collocative and social meanings. Leech illustrates this with the diagram below:

SEVEN TYPES OF MEANING

	1. CONCEPTUAL MEANING <i>or Sense</i>	Logical, cognitive, or denotative content.
ASSOCIATIVE MEANING	2. CONNOTATIVE MEANING	What is communicated by virtue of what language refers to.
	3. SOCIAL MEANING	What is communicated of the social circumstances of language use.
	4. AFFECTIVE MEANING	What is communicated of the feelings and attitudes of the speaker/writer.
	5. REFLECTED MEANING	What is communicated through association with another sense of the same expression.
	6. COLLOCATIVE MEANING	What is communicated through association with words which tend to occur in the environment of another word.
	7. THEMATIC MEANING	What is communicated by the way in which the message is organized in terms of order and emphasis.

SOURCE: (Leech 1981:23)

Summary

In this session, we have discussed the concepts of collocative and thematic meanings. We learnt that collocative meaning is the type of meaning which a word acquires in the company of other words. Words usually collocate or co-exist with certain words. We also learnt that the thematic type of meaning is realized based on the focus of an utterance. In this case, we are looking at what is relevant to the speaker and this involves how a speaker organizes his/her message in terms of ordering his/her focus and emphasis. We also learnt that thematic meaning can be realized through focusing, fronting, emotive emphasis and passivisation.

Self-Assessment Questions

Exercise 6.1

1. Explain the term collocative meaning?
2. What is thematic meaning?
3. Briefly explain how thematic meaning is realised
4. State three differences between collocative and thematic meaning.

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UNIT 2: CONTEXT AND MEANING

Welcome to Unit 2. In the previous units, we have discussed the meaning of both words and sentences. In this unit, we will move on to another level of meaning, pragmatic or contextual meaning. The unit of analysis here is the utterance and text rather than words and sentences.

Unit Objectives

By the end of the unit, you should be able to:

1. define the term 'context'.
2. explain various approaches to the study of context.
3. discuss the contributions of context to meaning.
4. analyse reference phenomena in text using the notion of context.

SESSION 1: DEFINING CONTEXT

Welcome to the first session of the unit. As mentioned above, this unit shifts focus from word and sentence meaning to contextual or pragmatic meaning. In this first session, we will define the notion of context and types of context.

Objectives

By the end of the session, you should be able to:

- (a) define context.
- (b) Identify three kinds of contexts.

1.1 What is Context?

When we listen to any speech, we certainly do not make meaning out of only the small utterance. Ideas of the past, our values and already-acquired knowledge spring to mind and help us to interpret each new utterance. "Context is any set of linguistic and non-linguistic resources by which any utterance [or text] is produced or interpreted." Sekyi-Baidoo (2000: 169). In other words, context refers to what is with the text.

This notion of what is with the text goes beyond what is said and written: it includes other non-verbal goings-on – the total environment in which a text unfolds or an utterance is made. So it serves to make a bridge between the text or utterance and the situation in which texts actually occur. Within our general topic, we shall be focusing on the context in which texts unfold and in which they are to be interpreted.

Let us try then to explain this notion a little further. What do we mean by context?

1.2 Aspects of Contexts

We can identify three kinds of context from the literature on language studies. These are linguistic or textual context, context of situation and context of culture.

1.2.1 **Textual context** refers to the verbal elements which surround any given utterance or linguistic item. When we speak, the meanings of the utterances we make and even the choice of the utterances themselves depend on we or the other interactants we are communicating with have said earlier. In the same way, when

we write, what we write depends on what we have written before including the words and sentences immediately preceding what we write next. Also, when we speak or write, we anticipate what we are going to say or write next. From the readers and listeners point of view, we interpret the meaning of utterances or words based on the surrounding text: i.e. the preceding and the following text. This surrounding text, before and after the utterance is what we refer to as textual context. Another name for textual context is **co-text**, i.e. text that accompanies the text.

1.2.2 **Context of situation**, sometimes simply referred to as situation, is the physical or situational context surrounding the text or utterance. It includes everything else in the situation which is relevant to the utterance apart from the text. It includes the speaker, the other interactants, their relative positions, their roles and relationship, gestures, the activity going on and their surrounding environment in its totality.

1.2.3 **Context of culture** refers to the cultural background, experiences, and conceptual knowledge of the interactants in discourse. We engage in making meaning in our daily communication, the language we use and the interpretation we make of our utterances are shaped by our culture. Culture can be defined broadly to include the culture of a family, an institution, a community, etc.

SESSION 2: MALINOWSKI AND THE NOTION OF CONTEXT

Welcome to the second session of the unit. In the previous unit we defined context and identified three aspects/kinds of context. The notion of context, especially context of situation and context of culture, as we use it now in language studies was introduced by the British anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski. Several other scholars contributed to and developed on his issues. In this session, we discuss how Malinowski conceptualized context.

Objectives

By the end of the lesson, you should be able to:

- (a) tell the reasons that motivated Malinowski to introduce the notion of context.
- (b) Identify the contributions of Malinowski to the the study of context.
- (c) explain the importance of context of situation and context of culture in meaning.

2.1 The origins of the notion of context in the study of meaning

It could be argued in fact that there was a theory of context before there was a theory of text. We have in mind here the work of the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1923, 1935) and in particular his theory of the context of situation.

Much of Malinowski's research was undertaken in a group of islands of South Pacific known as the Trobriand Islands, whose inhabitants lived mainly by fishing and gardening. Their language is referred to as Kiriwinian. Malinowski, who as well as being a great anthropologist was also a natural linguist, found himself at an early stage able to converse freely in this language, and he did all his fieldwork among the island people using their language. He then came to the problem of how to interpret and expound his ideas on the culture to English-speaking readers. He had many texts in Kiriwinian, texts that he had taken down in discussion with the Trobrianders; and the problem was how to render these in English in such a way as to make them intelligible. The culture that he was studying was, naturally, as different as it was possible to be from the culture that is familiar to Westerners.

In presenting the texts, Malinowski adopted various methods. He gave a free translation, which was intelligible, but conveyed nothing of the language or culture; and a literal translation, which mimicked the original, but was unintelligible to an English reader. His principal technique, however, was to provide a rather extended commentary, the kind of commentary that placed the text in its living environment. Up to that time the word 'context' in English had meant only 'co-text', the words and the sentences before and after the particular sentence that one was looking at. Malinowski needed a term that expressed the total environment, including the verbal environment, but also including the situation in which the text was uttered. In an article written in 1923, he coined the term **context of situation**. By context of situation, he meant the environment of the text.

2.2 Context of situation and context of culture

For example, Malinowski studied the language used in a fishing expedition when the islanders went in their canoes outside the lagoon into the open sea to fish. When they had caught a cargo of fish, they had the problem of navigating a rather difficult course through the reefs and back into the lagoon. As they came in, they were constantly in communication with those on the shore. Furthermore, there was an element of competition, a race between the different canoes.

This kind of language was very much pragmatic language. It was language in action, in which it was possible to understand the message unless you knew what was going on, unless you had some sort of audio-video record of what was actually happening at the time. So Malinowski provided this account in his work. He described the fishing expedition. He described the return of the canoes and the way in which the people in the boats and the people on the shore were interacting with each other.

But he also saw that it was necessary to give more than the immediate environment. He saw that in any adequate description, it was necessary to provide information not only about what was happening at the time but also about the total cultural background, because involved in any kind of linguistic interaction, in any kind of conversational exchange, were not only the immediate sights and sounds surrounding the event but also the whole cultural history behind the participants, and behind the kind of practices that they were engaging in, determining their significance for the culture, whether practical or ritual. All these played a part in the interpretation of the meaning. So Malinowski introduced the two notions of context of situation and the context of culture; both of these, he considered, were necessary for the adequate understanding of the text.

In some instances, his texts were severely pragmatic. That is to say, they were language used for the purpose of facilitating and furthering a particular form of activity, something that people are doing, exactly in the same way as we use language ourselves if we are engaged in some co-operative effort: suppose for example, that the car has broken down and we are trying to repair it, and there are two or three people involved and they are shouting instructions to each other and giving advice and probably getting angry as well – the language is all part of the immediate situation.

But there were other types of text in which the reference was not so immediate, and the function was not so directly pragmatic. For example, Malinowski observed many occasions when in the evenings the members of the group would gather around and listen to stories. Like most narratives, these stories were not related directly to the immediate situations in which they were told. As far as the subject matter was concerned, it was irrelevant whether they were being told in the morning or in the evening, outside or inside or what the particular surrounding were. The context in one sense was created by the stories themselves.

And yet in another sense, as Malinowski saw, even these narrative texts were very clearly functional. They had a creative purpose in the society; they had their own pragmatic context, and could be related to the situation in a slightly less direct manner. Often the telling of a story was related in some way or the other to the continuing solidarity and well-being of the group. For example, during the season of the year when food was scarce, and famine was always a threat, they would tell stories about great famines in the past and how the people had united to overcome them. So the setting was not irrelevant; a story might be associated with a particular accredited story teller or a particular place or a set of circumstances. In other words, there was still a context of situation, although it was not to be seen as a direct relation between the narrative line and the immediate surroundings in which the text was unfolding.

When Malinowski first developed these notions, he had the idea that you needed the concept of context of situation only if you were studying a 'primitive' language, the language of an unwritten culture, but that you would not need such concepts for the description of a language of a great civilization. But over the next ten years or so, he came to the conclusion the general notion of context of situation is as necessary for the understanding of English or any other major language as it is for the understanding of Kiriwinian. It is simply that the specific contexts of the culture are different. The activities that people are engaging in may differ from one place or one time to another; but the general principle that all languages must be understood in its context of situation is just as valid for every community in every stage of development.

SESSION 3: EARLY MODELS OF CONTEXT IN LINGUISTIC THEORY

Welcome to the third session of the unit. In the previous session, we discussed the contributions of Malinowski to the study of context. Remember that Malinowski was an anthropologist who was interested in language but not a linguist per se.

In this session we discuss, how Malinowski's ideas influenced a couple of linguists who subsequently developed linguistic frameworks for analysing context and contextual meaning.

Objectives

By the end of the lesson, you should be able to:

- (a) tell the contributions of J.R. Firth and Dell Hymes to the study of context.
- (b) distinguish between Firth's and Hymes's notions of context.
- (c) use Firth's and Hymes's frameworks of context in analysing texts.

3.1 J. R. Firth's Description of Context of Situation

Firth was interested in the cultural background of language, and he took over Malinowski's notion of the context of situation and built it in to his own linguistic theory. In Firth's view, all linguistics was the study of meaning and all meaning was function in a context (Firth 1935).

In one sense, however, Firth found that Malinowski's conception of context was not adequate for the purposes of a linguistic theory, because it was not yet general enough. Malinowski has been concerned with the study of specific texts, and therefore his notion of context of situation was designed to elucidate and expound the meaning of particular instances of language use. Firth needed a concept of the context that could be built into a general linguistic theory: one which was more abstract than that, not simply an audio-video representation of the insights and sounds that surround the linguistic event. He therefore set up a framework for the description of the context of situation that could be used for the study of texts as part of a general linguistic theory.

The key concepts on Firth's theory of context were as follows:

- **The Participants in the situation:** what Firth referred to as persons and personalities, corresponding more or less to what sociologists would regard as the statuses and roles of the participants;
- **The Action of the participants:** what they are doing, including both their Verbal Action and their Non-verbal Action;
- **Other Relevant Features of the Situation:** the surrounding objects and events, in so far as they have some bearing on what is going on;
- **The Effects of the verbal action:** what changes were brought about by what the participants in the situation had to say.

Firth outlined this framework in 1950, and perhaps the best application of it is in a study done by Firth's former colleague Professor T.F. Mitchell who studied the 'language of buying and selling', the language of transactions in shops and markets and auctions, which he observed in North Africa.

3.2 Dell Hymes' Ethnography of Speaking

In his work in the ethnography of communication, Dell Hymes (1967) proposed a set of concepts for describing the context of situation, which were in many ways similar to those of Firth. Hymes description of context is often called the SPEAKING model, using the acronym of the concepts in his framework. We define these concepts below:

Setting

Participants

End/intent and the effect of the communication

Acts: The form and content of the message

Key

Instrument: the medium

Norms of interaction

Genre

Hymes work led to a renewal of interest in the different ways in which language is used in different cultures – the value placed on speech, the various rhetorical modes that are recognized, and so on.

SESSION 4: A CONTEMPORARY APPROACH TO CONTEXT IN LINGUISTIC THEORY

Welcome to the fourth session of this unit. In the preceding section, we considered two linguistic frameworks of context developed by J.R. Firth and Dell Hymes.

In this session, we will discuss one more linguistic framework for the study of context, a theory of context developed M.A.K Halliday.

Objectives

By the end of the lesson, you should be able to:

- (a) identify the contribution of M.A.K. Halliday to the study of context.
- (b) identify three phases of context.
- (c) explain three parametres of context according to M.A.K. Halliday

4.1 Phases of Context

M.A.K Halliday was a student of J.R. Firth and he took over the idea of his teacher and developed them into a comprehensive theory of context. According to M.A.K. Halliday, context has phases all of which affect our production and interpretation of texts. These phases are: context of culture > cultural institution > context of situation.

According to him all use of language has a context. The context of situation is the immediate environment in which a text is actually functioning. Because of the close link between text and context readers and listeners make predictions; they read and listen, with expectations for what is coming next. The whole point of a passage may be missed if the reader or listener does not bring to it appropriate assumptions derived from the context of situation.

There is also a broad background against which the text has to be interpreted: its context of culture. Any actual context of situation is not just a jumble of features but a totality – a package, so to speak, of things that typically go together in the culture. People do these things on these occasions and attach these meanings and values to them; this is what a culture is. For any text in the school – teacher talk in the classroom, pupils notes or essay, passage from a textbook – there is always a context of situation: the lesson, with its concept of what is to be achieved; the relationship of teacher to pupil, or textbook writer to reader; the mode of question and answer, expository writing, etc. But all these in turn are instances of and derive their meaning from the school as an institution in the culture: the concept of education.

4.2 Parametres or Variables of Context

M.A.K. Halliday identifies three variables of context, namely *field of discourse*, *tenor of discourse*, and *mode of discourse*. These concepts serve to interpret the social context of a text, the environment in which meanings are being exchanged:

1. The Field of Discourse refers to what is happening, to the nature of the social action that is taking place: what is it that the participants are engaged in, in which the language figures as some essential component?
2. The Tenor of Discourse refers to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles: what kinds of role relationship obtain among the participants, including permanent and temporary relationship obtain among the participants, including permanent and temporary relationships of one kind or another, both the types of speech role that they are taking on in the dialogue and the whole cluster of socially significant relationships in which they are involved?
3. The Mode of Discourse refers to what part the language to do for them in that situation: the symbolic organization of the text, the channel (is it spoken, written or some combination of the two?) and also the rhetorical mode, what is being achieved by the text in terms of such categories as persuasive, expository, didactic and the like.

SESSION 5: THE CONTRIBUTION OF CONTEXT TO MEANING

Welcome to the fifth session of the unit. The preceding sessions discussed different approaches that have been developed for the description of context. The approaches are related in the sense that each one develops on the preceding one. We discussed that before Malinowski, the term ‘context’ was only used in English to refer to co-text, the surrounding text. Malinowski however introduced the terms ‘context of situation’ and ‘context of culture’. J.R. developed Malinowski’s notion of context of situation as part of his theory of language. M.A.K. Halliday, Firth’s student, developed Firth’s ideas further but this time added Malinowski notion of context of culture as well.

In this session, we will discuss the contribution of context to meaning.

Objectives

By the end of the lesson, you should be able to:

- (a) explain how context helps people to communicate successfully.
- (b) identify the functions of context in determining meaning.

5.1 Importance of Context

The importance of context lies in the fact that it helps people to understand each other. We are always hearing about failures in communication. And indeed, failures do occur. But what is remarkable is how often people do understand each other despite the noise with which we are continually surrounded. How do we explain the success with which people communicate?

The short answer is that we know what the other person is going to say. We always have a good idea of what is coming next, so that we are seldom totally surprised. We may be partly surprised; but the surprise will always be within the framework of something that we knew was going to happen. And this is the most important phenomenon in human communication. We make predictions – not consciously – about what the other person is going to say next; and that’s how we understand what he or she does say.

How do we make these predictions? We make them from the context of situation. The situation in which linguistic interaction takes place gives the participants a great deal of information about the meanings that are being exchanged, and the meanings that are likely to be exchanged.

5.2 Functions of Context

To understand the importance of context to communication better in terms of how it helps us make predictions, let’s look at the following more specific functions of context. Context helps people to:

- disambiguate structures, i.e. it helps us to clarify the meaning of words and expressions that tend to have two or more meanings.
- supply the meaning of elliptical constructions, i.e. it helps us to recover certain words and expressions that speakers omit in their utterances.
- supply the referents of deictic items, i.e. it helps us to identify the meaning of pointing words such as *this*, *that*, *here*, *there*, *he*, *you*, *tomorrow*, and *yesterday*.
- determine the definiteness of referring expressions
- determine class and function of language items in sentences.

- determine the locution/force of utterances, i.e. context helps us to identify whether a sentence is making a statement, asking a question, giving a command, etc.

Please provide examples for each of these for face-to-face discussion with your tutor. You can use the internet to serve as a guide.

SESSION 6: CONTEXT AND REFERENCE

Welcome to the final session of this unit. In the preceding session, we discussed the importance and functions of context in determining meaning. We identified that context helps people to predict meanings for an effective communication. This session pursues the function of context in aiding communication, focusing on the notion of reference.

Objectives

By the end of the session, you should be able to:

- define reference.
- distinguish between exophora and endophora
- illustrate the difference between anaphora and cataphora

6.1 Reference

Reference has to do with the identity of the particular thing or class of things that is being referred to by a linguistic item. The information to be retrieved is called **referential meaning**. For example, if we use the words, *this*, *that*, *here* or *there* in a sentence, their reference is the entity they actually point to. There are two main types of reference, namely **exophora** and **endophora**. Exophora or exophoric reference means outward reference, i.e. to point a referent outside the text or within the context of situation. Endophora or endophoric reference means reference inside the text. i.e. pointing to a referent in the textual context. Exophoric and endophoric reference constitute a system of instruction to retrieve important information that helps in interpreting a linguistic item.

6.2 Two types of Endophora

Endophora as indicated above is a textual reference which connects main parts of the text together. There are two kinds of endophora: anaphora and cataphora.

Anaphora means backward reference. It has to do with the use of reference items to point to a part of a text or something in a text that has been mentioned earlier. For example, in sentence (1) below, *another* anaphorically refers to parrots in the preceding sentence.

(1) There were parrots on the tree. Then *another* came, and they were three.

Cataphora or cataphoric reference means forward reference. It is a situation where we need to refer forward to another word or expression to make sense of a reference item. For example, in sentence (2), the pronoun *his* refers to president. We need to read on to be able to identify the referent of *his*.

(2) In *his* speech, the President advised everyone to stay indoors.

This process of looking forward in order to retrieve the referent of *his* is what is referred to as cataphora.

Figure 4.1 summarises the types of reference discussed here.

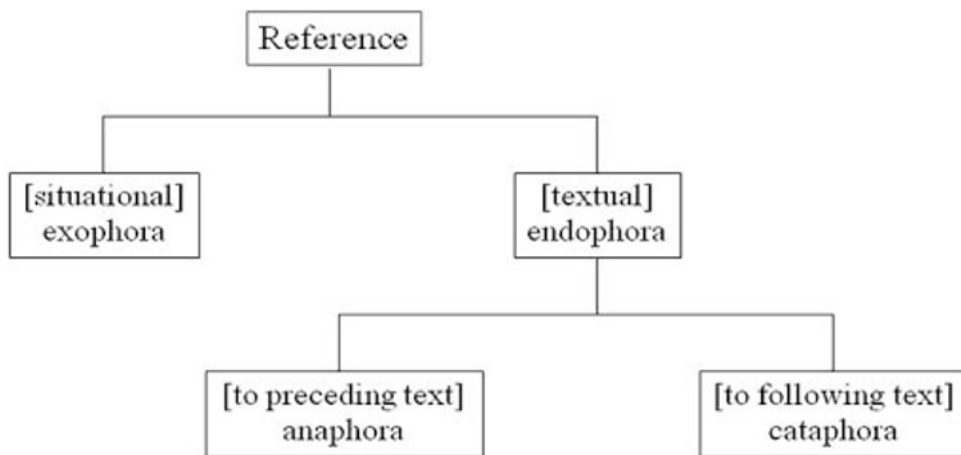


Figure 4.1 Types of Reference (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 33).

UNIT 3: MEANING CHANGE

Welcome to Unit 3. In the previous unit, we discussed how the senses or meanings of words related to each other. In this unit, we will focus on changes in the meaning of words. Attention will be given to the definition of meaning change, processes of meaning change, factors that lead to changes in word meaning and different kinds of meaning change.

Unit Objectives

By the end of the unit, you should be able to:

1. Define 'meaning change'
2. Explain different stages of semantic change
3. Discuss the factors that contribute to semantic change in words
4. Discuss different kinds of semantic change using examples

SESSION 1: DEFINING SEMANTIC CHANGE

Welcome to the first session of the unit. As indicated already, this unit focuses on how senses or meanings of words have changed over time. In the first session, we will define semantic change and the stages involved in changes in meanings of words.

Objectives

By the end of the session, you should be able to:

- (a) Define semantic change
- (b) Discuss the three stages of semantic change.

1.1 What is semantic change?

We are already aware that semantics deals with what meaning is and ways of constructing meaning, through the relationship that exists between the senses of linguistic expressions to achieve total meaning. There is an aspect of semantics that is interested in studying the changes that occur in the meaning of words and expressions across time, due to the fact that meaning can change over time. Studying a language from the historical perspective is commonly referred to as *diachronic study* of language. This branch of semantics is known as *historical semantics* (Sekyi-Baidoo, 2000). It implies that historical semantics is a comparative study that compares information obtained from two different points in time. It compares the meaning associated with a particular linguistic expression a time ago and present time. This kind of study can reveal a conceptual change or stability of the meanings of words or expressions. It is possible that the original meaning of a particular word, for instance, can change over time. It means that the users of such meaning may change how they conceive the words in the present time. For instance, the footnotes or endnotes of Shakespearean plays reveal that there are some explanations provided which are different from modern or current understanding of usage. The implication is that, at the time of Shakespeare writing, such meanings were in use, but there has been a shift in change in use in current time.

Semantic change generally deals with the change of concepts associated with words. It implies that semantic change is more concerned with changes in the senses of words. Semantic change can be seen as a systemic change because it takes global attitude to change or the determinants and processes involved in the change of meaning. Here, the interest is not necessarily on the lexical items or words but on how the change comes about. The other aspect of change deals specifically with the words (lexis). *Lexical historical semantics* traces the changes in the meaning of particular words over time. It means that the *systematic* and *lexical* semantics work together to explain the change in particular words in order to make generalisations.

1.2 Stages of Semantic Change

From the literature, semantic change goes through three different processes, namely observation, description, and explanation.

1.2.1 Observation stage

At the observation level, the meaning of a particular word is observed over time A and time B. We observe how the meaning of a word in time A have changed in relation to time B. We observe the totality of lexical and conceptual fields.

1.2.2 Description stage

The description level tries to answer the kind of changes that have occurred between time A and time B. It addresses the nature of changes that have taken place between times A and B. The description level looks at a word or lexical field vis-à-vis the concept or conceptual field. It describes the nature of the deviation between the meaning of a word in time A and B.

1.2.3 Explanation stage

Two things are involved in the explanation stage: explaining the methods, and explaining the causes of the change. The explanation stage tries to explain the causes of such change which focuses more on the cultural, social, economic and historical factors.

SESSION 2: FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SEMANTIC CHANGE

Welcome to the second session of the unit. In the previous session, we tried to define semantic change. Remember that we have already identified the stages involved in the changes in the meanings of words. In this session, we will focus on factors that determine semantic change in words.

Objectives

By the end of the lesson, you should be able to:

- (a) Identify the factors that influence changes in the meanings of words
- (b) Explain how the determinant factors influence meaning change.

2.1 Factors that determine semantic change

Semantic change may be caused by different factors. The determinants of change in meanings of words can consider the *social, cultural environment* or *geographical happenings of the change*.

For instance, the reference to *tea* in English is *a drink made from hot water and dried leaves or buds of a tea plant*. However, in Ghana, *tea* refers to any beverage of such kind. It means that there is an informal change of meaning of *tea* in this geographical or cultural space. It simply means that semantic change can be influenced by non-linguistic factors.

2.1.1 Cultural factors/linguistic diversity

Changes in people's ideas may affect the meaning of the words they have in their language. Changes of this sort come as a result of the differences between the culture of origin of the word, and the culture of the destination of the word. For instance, different dialects that show variation in culture may use different meanings for a specific word. In this way, the same word that is mentioned in one community may mean a different thing in the other community.

2.1.2 Historical change

Another factor that may cause change in meanings of words is history. There may be a variation in the meaning of a particular word based on historical change. Some words mean different from their meanings available to us in current daily use as compared to their use some years past.

2.1.3 Influence of personality

Sometimes, meanings of words can change due to how certain individuals use language. The individual's novel way of using language to create a special or new meaning may attract the attention of the linguistic community in which the language is used. In the space of media or literature, for instance, a lot of new meanings are created by celebrities or renowned writers. An individual can create many words in literature. For example, Shakespeare created a lot of words and used them.

2.1.4 Business/occupation

Businesses or occupations of people may influence meaning change. The work place provides the meanings of certain words appropriate for use in that environment. The ordinary or primary meanings of certain words in everyday language may be altered due to workplace environment. In business for instance, some words are used to mean things which are different from their original meanings e.g., *demand*, *appreciate* or *sentence*.

SESSION 3: TYPES OF SEMANTIC CHANGE 1

Welcome to the session three of the unit. In the previous session, we tried to discuss the various factors that contribute to semantic change. Semantic change comes along with different notions or ideas. Some of these ideas may range from positive to negative, or in some case, a complete shift in the meaning assigned. Such different changes culminate into different kinds of meaning change. In this session, we will discuss three of such meaning change.

Objectives

By the end of the lesson, you should be able to:

- (a) Identify three types of meaning change.

- (b) Explain the types of meaning change identified.
- (c) Use examples to illustrate the types of meaning change.

2. Types of meaning change

As mentioned before, we can consider different kinds of semantic change based on the fact that some words only shift their meaning over time; some assume entirely a new meaning; some with a single change; while others go through a number of changes. The various forms or kinds include the following:

- Specialisation, narrowing or restriction
- Broadening or extension
- Amelioration
- Radiation, polysemia, multiplication
- Concretisation
- Pejoration, deterioration, Catachresis
- Metaphorical change
- Semantic shift
- Weakening
- Derivation

2.1.1 Specialisation, Narrowing or Restriction

Semantic change by *specialisation, narrowing or restriction* refers to a situation where an aspect of the sense of the totality of a word is adopted. This situation usually occurs when an aspect of the meaning of a word is restricted to part of its meaning which comes as a result of time, either by word creation or loaning. It means that the new meaning restricts or narrows itself to some meaning of the original word. Examples taken from Sekyi-Baidoo (2000) include:

<i>Word</i>	<i>Old meaning</i>	<i>New meaning</i>
Law	laid down (e.g., law of nature)	regulation of artificial state
Bread	any kind of food or need	a baked confectionary
Meat	any kind of food	edible flesh of an animal
Doctrine	teachings in general	teachings associated with beliefs
Science	knowledge in general	knowledge into nature of physical things
Fowl	all birds	domestic birds, esp. chick, hen or cock
Wed	any pledge	marriage vows
Wife	any woman	woman in a marital bond

2.1.2 Broadening or Extension

The two terms *broadening* and *extension* denote the idea of expansion of territory or something to cover a large area or idea. Therefore, semantic change by broadening or extension occurs when there is a larger expansion of the sense of a particular word. It can also occur when a word within similar conception or senses swallows up the senses of the other words. For example, in Ghana, the notion of *tea* to cover all beverages has come about as a result of broadening or extension. Similar *Omo* has been broadened to cover all detergents, as well as using *Pepsodent* to cover different brands of tooth paste. The situation in Ghana can be traced to the first experience with such brand names. Some English examples are demonstrated below:

Words	Old meaning	New meaning
Acrobat	one who walks on tip-toe	one using any body movement
Aunt	father's sister	any parent's sister
Pig	a young swine	all ages of swine
Place	a broad way or area	any physical /psychological area

2.1.3 Concretisation

Concretisation comes from the word *concrete*, which is seen as the opposite of abstract. It implies that some abstract words attain the level of concrete over time. It suggests that an abstract description comes to be constantly associated with a concrete entity, which later transfers the abstract semantic features to the concrete entity. Concretisation also involves other semantic change such as restriction, or radiation. Instances of concretisation are demonstrated below:

Words	Old meaning	New meaning
Beauty	quality of being attractive/pleasant	beautiful girl/woman
Congregation	flocking together	assembly of people
Youth	the quality of youngness	young men/woman

SESSION 4: TYPES OF SEMANTIC CHANGE II

Welcome to the fourth session of the unit. In the previous session, we discussed three types of semantic change. The three types of semantic change discussed included extension, narrowing, and concretisation. In this session, we will continue discussing types of meaning change.

Objectives

By the end of the lesson, you should be able to:

- (d) Identify three types of meaning change.
- (e) Explain the types of meaning change identified.
- (f) Use examples to illustrate the types of meaning change.

4.1 Types of semantic change II

The three other types of semantic change we will be discussing are:

- ✓ Amelioration
- ✓ Pejoration
- ✓ Radiation

4.1.1 Amelioration

The etymology of the word *amelioration* is *melio*, which means to get better. Amelioration semantic change occurs when a word acquires a favourable or positive meaning. It means that the

old use of such words called up an unfavourable, negative or disrespectful sense. However, the use or meaning gets better sense than before. Examples include:

Words	Old meaning	New meaning
Annoy	to injure	to cause anger
Imaginative	suspicious	practical and creative
Luxury	a lust or sensuality	a rare or expensive
Madam	female head of a brothel/prost	polite address for a woman
Purchase	to seize	to buy
Prestige	imposture	credit, honour, renown

4. 1. 2 Pejoration, Deterioration, Degeneration or Catachresis

This kind of semantic change can be seen as the opposite of *amelioration*. Semantic change by *pejoration, deterioration, degeneration* or *catachresis* refers to a situation where words acquire unfavourable or native sense as they are used over time. It is when the perception of society changes the meaning or sense of a positive word to a negative or unfavourable sense due to circumstances of use. *Propaganda*, for instance, originally means the *multiplier* or *dissemination of information*. However, its current use, especially in Ghana, means *distortion of facts with bad intention*. It then appears that many people do not want to be associated with such a word. More examples of pejoration, deterioration, degeneration or catachresis include:

Words	Old meaning	New meaning
Silly	holy, happy, defenceless	foolish, stupid
Counterfeit	a near-real reproduction	a deceiving, fraudulent copy
Cunning	knowing, skilful	sly, deceitful
Slave	glorious	a person in bondage
Wench	girl	immoral prostitute

4. 1. 3 Radiation, Polysemia, Metaphorical Change or Multiplication

Metaphorical or *polysemia* change occurs when basic or original meaning of a word is differently applied to multiple metaphorical contexts. For instance, originally, *head* was used to refer to the rounded-like part of the body which consists of the face, ear, eyes, nose, brain and other vital organs. This means that the head controls many parts or activities of the body. Now, the multiple senses of head are associated with the different contextual use of head. Due to this, different words or meanings are formed, such as headmaster, head teacher, head prefect, etc. Other meanings of *head* can be seen in *nail head, screw head, chapter head, church head/leader*, etc. This means that there are additional meanings which emanate from the original meaning of *head*. It also means that meaning is multiple. Its associative or metaphorical meaning also comes to mind. More examples can be seen in:

Words	Old meaning	New meaning
Bright	sparkling, bright light	promising, hopeful, intelligent
Grasp	hold firm an object	to fully understand
High	further from the ground	to be highly exalted
Land	ship or aircraft touching the ground	to conclude an argument

SESSION 5: TYPES OF SEMANTIC CHANGE III

Welcome to the session five of the unit. In the previous session, we discussed three other types of semantic change, including amelioration, pejoration, and concretisation. In this session, we will continue discussing three additional types of meaning change.

Objectives

By the end of the lesson, you should be able to:

- (g) Identify three types of meaning change.
- (h) Explain the types of meaning change identified.
- (i) Use examples to illustrate the types of meaning change.

5.1 Types of semantic change III

The three other types of semantic change we will be discussing are:

- ✓ Weakening
- ✓ Semantic shift
- ✓ Derivation

4. 1. 1 Weakening

Semantic change by *weakening* refers to a situation where a word loses its original strength and it is not used as its previous sense. *Weakening* is different from *pejoration* because, in *weakening*, a word which has social unacceptability continues to acquire more social unacceptability. It is also different from *amelioration* because the sense of word change continues to get a more social acceptability. The following instances provide examples of semantic weakening:

Words	Old meaning	New meaning
Soon	at once, immediately	at a future time not distant
Will	to want, desire	future marker
Presently	at once	after a little time, soon

4. 1. 2 Semantic Shift

As a result of the many semantic change processes discussed so far, a word may have a meaning which is entirely different from the original meaning. It normally occurs from a change in culture. It means that there is a shift in the use of the original meaning of a word. Sometimes, the shift in meaning may operate within the same semantic field. A typical example in Ghana is the meaning of the word *brutal*. *Brutal* means *cruel, merciless or savage* but most Ghanaians use it to mean something which is *extraordinary, or full of excitement*. Examples of semantic shift include:

Words	Old meaning	New meaning
Doom	that which is done	a terrible and inevitable fate
Marshal	horse servant	high rank in the military or police

Fellow	business partner	companion, mate
Enormous	out of norm, abnormal	very large, immense
Encyclopaedia	child in training, educ in circle	book, set of books of detailed inf

4. 1. 3 Derivation

Derivation comes from the word derive. It is a process used to arrive at a new word or sense. It implies that a new sense comes out of an existing word or meaning. *Sandwich*, for example, refers to *delicious confectionery which involves putting meat and vegetables between slices of toast*. It was derived from the action of the Earl of Sandwich. It implies that, this word was derived from the observation or activity performed by the Earl of Sandwich. This makes the word a referential derivation. Now, *sandwich* has various metaphorical applications. Currently, *sandwich* is used to refer to a *course or programme which is organised between two main semesters*. More examples are:

Word	Meaning	Source
Champagne	a brand of wine	champagne, where drinks were organised
Guinea	old British gold coin (20 shillings)	from Guinea coast
Lynch	to beat to death violently, by mob	associated with Charles lynch (1780)
Mausoleum	large, finely built tomb	from Mausoleum, tomb for his queen

UNIT 4: AMBIGUITY

Welcome to Unit 4. In the previous unit, we have discussed changes in the meaning of a word, focusing on the meaning of semantic change and kinds of semantic change. After knowing the various changes that a word can undergo, we will in this unit, move on to look at some semantic problems like ambiguity. Here, attention is paid to the various types of ambiguity and what causes them.

Unit Objectives

By the end of the unit, you should be able to:

1. Define ambiguity
2. Distinguish between lexical ambiguity and structural ambiguity
3. Discuss causes of ambiguity under the following:
 - a. lexical,
 - b. structural, and
 - c. referential.
4. Explain causes of intentional ambiguity
5. Distinguish between intentional and unintentional ambiguity

SESSION 1: DEFINING AMBIGUITY

Welcome to the first session of the unit. As earlier mentioned, this unit focuses on ambiguity by looking at the types of ambiguity and what causes ambiguity. In this first session, we will define ambiguity and identify some functions that ambiguity performs in the society.

Objectives

By the end of the session, you should be able to:

- (c) define ambiguity.
- (d) Identify three functions of ambiguity in the society.

1.2 What is Ambiguity?

There are instances when we speak and our listeners misinterpret us or we listen to people and get confused as to what they actually mean because we can interpret what they have said in different ways. There are certain structures and pronunciations that pose problems to listeners in terms of interpretation when they are used. "Ambiguity refers to a semantic situation by which an item (word, phrase, sentence) is assigned multiple meanings or interpretations" (Sekyi-Baidoo, 2002:129). In other words, ambiguity refers to a situation in which one form has two or more interpretation. That it to say, it is a case of semantic profusion or plurality.

It should be noted that ambiguity is different from vagueness. From the explanation of ambiguity so far, it is very clear that it is simply open to more than one interpretation but vagueness implies stating in very general terms. A vague construction has no meaning, more of semantic emptiness.

Consider examples 1 and 2 below.

1. Colourless green ideas sleep furiously

2. The lady wanted to marry a man in a city with a lot of respect for ladies.

In the first construction, the structure can be said to be vague because it does not really give any clear-cut meaning. How can something that is colourless, at the same time be green? And ideas also sleep furiously. A careful look at the second construction shows that it has meaning but the meaning is more than one. It may mean that “It is the man that should have a lot of respect for ladies” or “the city should have a lot of respect ladies”.

1.2 Functions of Ambiguity in the Society

In as much as ambiguity is seen to cause a lot of confusion, it should not be thought of as something negative because it can as well serve a number of functions in the society. Let us look at a few of the functions of ambiguity below.

- a. Ambiguity is used by speakers/musicians as a way of escape. By this, the speaker chooses a construction which could have two or more meanings – one acceptable and the other (s) unacceptable. When confronted however, he would be able to refer to any as though that is what he intended.

Example:

The law is not an ass but the House of Lords.

Two interpretations are possible:

- i) The law is not an ass but the law is the House of Lords
- ii) The law is not an ass, but the House of Lords is an ass.

In the example above, let us assume the speaker actually meant the second one (ii), which is an insult to the House of Lords but was circumspect for fear of the charge of contempt of Parliament, the first (i) meaning can help the speaker to escape the wrath of Parliament.

- b. Ambiguity brings popularity. Public utterances that are ambiguous generate argument which help to make the subject of the argument popular. As people argue about an issue, more get to know of it. Example: Daddy Lumba’s “Aben wo ha” (It’s already cooked and ready) Song. The argument surrounding this song made people buy the cassette to listen to it carefully. By so doing, the song became popular and people even discovered other beauties which were hitherto unknown to many listeners.
- c. To the applied linguist, ambiguity functions as an index for measuring proficiency. One’s ability to detect ambiguous constructions, interpret them, correct them, and perhaps ability to avoid them marks one’s proficiency in a language.

SESSION 2: LEXICAL AMBIGUITY

Welcome to the second session of this unit. In the previous session, we defined ambiguity and identified some functions of ambiguity. In this session, we want move to the types of ambiguity by looking at the first type which is lexical ambiguity.

Objectives

By the end of the session, you should be able to:

- a) explain lexical ambiguity
- b) identify and explain four sources/causes of lexical ambiguity.

Before discussing lexical ambiguity, we have to first distinguish between linguistic and non-linguistic ambiguity even though our focus is on linguistic ambiguity. By linguistic ambiguity, we refer to all instances of semantic plurality which depend on the structure of the language system. The ambiguities associated with the reference of common nouns are considered non-linguistic. Sekyi-Baidoo (2002) has classified linguistic ambiguity into three types namely:

- A. Lexical Ambiguity
- B. Structural/Grammatical/ Syntactic Ambiguity
- C. Referential Ambiguity

One should note that the types of ambiguity mentioned above are also the causes of ambiguity.

This session discusses the first type which is lexical ambiguity.

Sekyi-Baidoo (2002) defines lexical ambiguity as the semantic condition in which a word has more than one meaning or interpretation. It is important to note that:

- i) Lexical ambiguity is natural to words. Examples: bank, head, table, oil, service etc.
- ii) Lexical ambiguity results from the words themselves but not from the way the words are used.
- iii) A lexical item (word) is invested with two or more meanings naturally.

2.1 Sources/Causes of Lexical Ambiguity

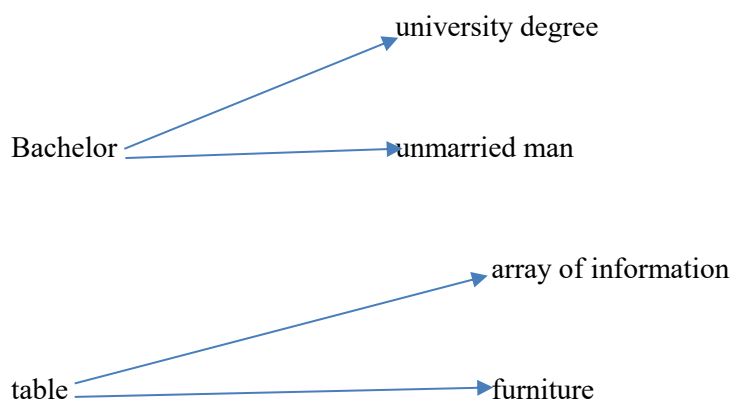
The discussion of the lexical ambiguity is done under the following sources or causes

- i) Homonymy
- ii) multiple connotative meaning
- iii) Polysemy
- iv) Confusion between Connotation and Denotation
- v) Confusion of idiomatic and non-idiomatic use
- vi) Confusion of Number

2.1.1 Homonymy

This is a situation in which words have sameness of form (pronunciation and spelling) but different meaning.

Examples:



Looking at the examples above, it can be seen that the words “bachelor” and “table” can be interpreted in different ways but whichever meaning they carry, the pronunciation and the spelling are the same. In this

way, it becomes difficult for a listener to tell which of the meanings a speaker is referring to if it not used well.

To disambiguate this ambiguity, we must introduce a co-text to indicate exactly what we want to say as shown below:

- i) I have made a *dining* table.
- ii) I have made a *multiplication* table.
- iii) I have made a table *of contents*.

2.1.2 Multiple connotative meaning

We have already learnt that connotative meaning is the additional meaning of a word which has been superimposed over and above its basic conceptual meaning. When a word or an expression has many connotations (more than one), it can result in ambiguity. For example, “Dora is a **snake**.” It is not clear whether the speaker means Dora is cunning/crafty, poisonous, dangerous or clever. To disambiguate this ambiguity, we need to introduce co-text to make it clearer.

2.1.3 Polysemy

This source of lexical ambiguity revolves around the basic or central sense of a word. Polysemy deals with different related senses of a lexical unit or a word. It basically has to do with a lexical item that has multiple meaning. *For instance*, when I say, “John is a **big** boy.”, it is not clear whether I mean John is *‘large in size’*; *‘a mature grown-up boy’*; *‘an important boy’* or *‘popular’ boy*. This may lead to your listener choosing any of the interpretations, which may not necessarily be the one you intended to put across. To disambiguate this ambiguity, we need to introduce co-text to make it clearer. Example, “John is a big boy. He has grown tall.

2.1.4 Confusion between Connotation and Denotation

Ambiguity may also arise because we are not sure whether the meaning intended by a speaker is denotative or connotative. That is whether the listener should take its basic meaning(denotative) or its additional meaning (connotative). For example, when one says, “Daniel is a **dog**.” It is difficult to determine whether he/she means Daniel is a dog actually (denotatively) or Daniel is a human being who is connotatively (metaphorically) described as 'a womaniser' or 'a shameless person'.

2.1.5 Confusion between idiomatic and non-idiomatic use

Sometimes, ambiguity occurs because it is unclear whether meaning is assigned to an expression as a single lexeme (an idiom) or as an ordinary combination of lexical units. For example, in the sentence: ‘Andy has kicked the bucket.’, the expression, ‘kicked the bucket’ could be interpreted

plainly as ‘Andy has hit a bucket with his leg’ or idiomatically as ‘Andy is dead’.

2.1.6 Confusion of Number

Ambiguity sometimes occurs because some nouns have the same form for both singular and plural

numbers. For example, it is not clear whether the nouns, “**equipment**” and “**sheep**” as used in the sentences: ‘We have new equipment.’ and ‘I saw my sheep coming home.’ are singular or plural.

Let us note that irrespective of the cause/source, and depending on what one intends to communicate, one needs to introduce a co-text in order to remove the ambiguity embedded in lexical items.

SESSION 3: STRUCTURAL AMBIGUITY

Welcome to the third session of this unit. In the previous session, we discussed one type of ambiguity which is lexical ambiguity. In the discussion, we realized that lexical ambiguity is based on the word and results from different sources or causes. This session discusses the second type of ambiguity which is structural ambiguity.

Objectives

By the end of the session, you should be able to:

- c) explain structural ambiguity
- d) identify and explain three sources/causes of structural ambiguity.
- e) disambiguate structurally ambiguous constructions

According to Sekyi-Baidoo (2002), structural ambiguity is a semantic condition in which multiple meanings arise from the arrangement of words/lexical units, a phrase, clause or sentence. Structural ambiguity results from the multiplicity or confusion of grammatical roles/functions and relationships. Structural ambiguity is also known as **Syntactic Ambiguity** or **Grammatical Ambiguity**. One effective way to explain structural ambiguity is the use of Structural Grammar/Phrase Structure Grammar.

3.1 Sources/Causes of Structural Ambiguity

The structural ambiguity is discussed under the following sources or causes

1. Span of Modification
2. Confusion of head
3. Dangling modifiers
4. Misplaced restrictors
5. Squint modifiers
6. Confusion of grammatical form/function, etc.
7. Ambiguity as arising from punctuation

3.1.1 Span of Modification

There are certain instances where there is confusion or uncertainty regarding the scope of the use of a modifier in the noun group. When this happens, ambiguity may occur. That is to say, if there is a confusion as to which noun a modifier affects in a compound noun; especially, when the modifier precedes the two nouns, it may lead to ambiguity. Let us consider this example:

*I like **young** men and women.*

In this sentence above, it is not clear whether it is both **men and women** who are young or it is **only men** who are young. 'Young' as a modifier creates the ambiguity. The sentence can be disambiguated as **I like young men and young women.**

3.1.2 Confusion of Head

Structural ambiguity also arises from confusion of the head of a noun group comprising a noun and two adjectives (one being a natural adjective whilst the other is a possessive adjective).

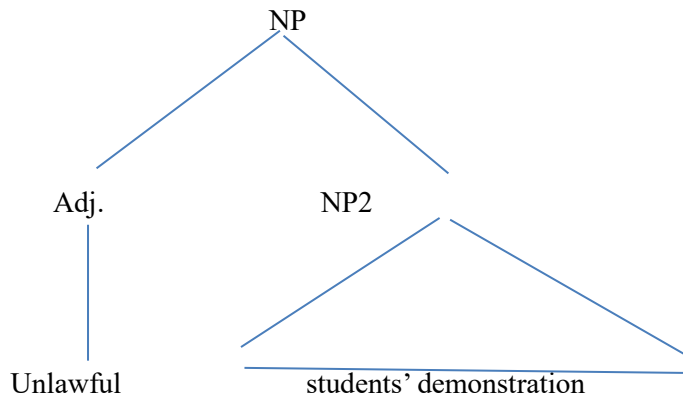
Example:

Isaac didn't partake in the unlawful students' demonstration.

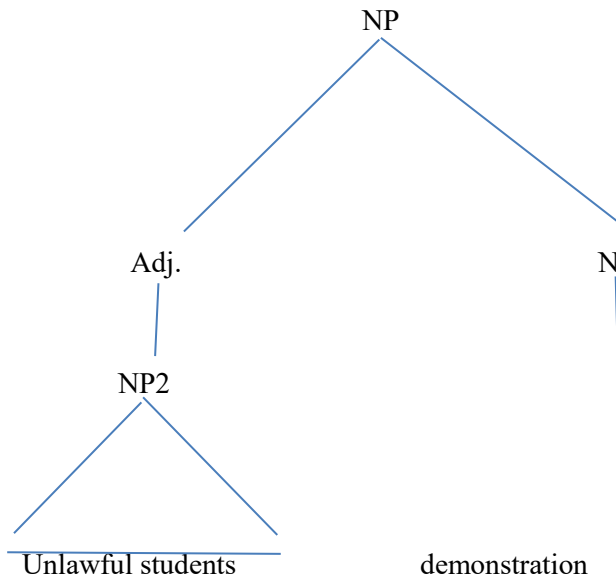
It is not clear whether it is the **students** who are unlawful or it is the **students' demonstration**

which was unlawful. This confusion leads to two possible interpretations as illustrated by the tree diagrams below:

INTERPRETATION A



INTERPRETATION B



Another example is:

‘The husband of the woman who stole the money’.

It is not clear whether it was **the husband** who stole the money or it was **the woman**. Hence, more than one interpretation can be assigned to the above noun phrase.

3.1.3 Dangling Modifier

A *dangling modifier* refers to a modifier attached to a noun head which it does not belong to.

The ambiguity from a dangling modifier occurs between meaning as it appears from the syntactic arrangement (which might be an absurdity) and meaning as we think is normal but not realised by the sentence. Consider the example below:

Peter saw a lion driving to Ho.

Two interpretations:

1. Peter was driving to Ho and saw a lion.
2. A lion was driving to Ho and Peter it

3.1.4 Misplaced restrictors

Misplaced restrictors also result in ambiguity. They cause semantic confusion because they are placed between the subject and the predication and can be seen as modifying in any of the two syntactic sections.

Example: Dora only swims on Saturdays.

The modifier, “**only**” as used in the above sentence renders the sentence to more than one interpretation: if it serves as a determiner and modifies “Dora”, the meaning of the sentence will be: *Only Dora swims on Saturdays.*

But if “only” serves as an adverb (a down-toner) and part of the predication, the sentence can be interpreted as: *Dora does nothing apart from swimming on Saturdays.* Moreover, if “only” modifies **Saturdays**, the sentence can be interpreted as: *Dora swims on Saturdays only.*

We can therefore disambiguate the sentence in any of the following ways:

- a) Only Dora swims on Saturdays.
- b) Dora does nothing apart from swimming on Saturdays.
- c) Dora swims on Saturdays only.

3.1.5 Squint modifier

Squint modifiers are usually time, frequency, and manner adverbs (such as tomorrow, always, occasionally, slowly). When a *squint modifier* is placed between two verbs in the predication, it results in ambiguity because the squint modifier can be said to be modifying each of the verbs. See the example below:

Students who read always perform well.

Here, we can interpret the sentence as *Students read always* or *Students perform well always.*

We can therefore disambiguate the sentence in any of the following ways:

- a) *Students who always read perform well.* **OR** *Students who perform well read always*
- b) *Students who always perform well read.* **OR** *Students who read perform well always.*

3.1.6 Confusion of Grammatical Form

Ambiguity may also arise because of our inability to distinguish between an ordinary noun phrase and a gerundial clause.

For example, ‘Flying aeroplanes can be dangerous.’

In the above sentence, it is not clear whether ‘Flying aeroplanes’ is an ordinary noun phrase (Adjective +Noun) or a gerundial clause (Verb + Object). This renders the sentence to more than one interpretation.

If “Flying aeroplanes” is considered as an ordinary noun phrase (Adjective + Noun), then the interpretation of the sentence will be: *aeroplanes (the flying ones) can be dangerous.*

But if “Flying aeroplanes” is considered as a gerundial clause (Verb + Object), the interpretation of the sentence will be that: *engaging in the activity of flying aeroplanes can be dangerous.*

To disambiguate the above sentence, we must remove the modal “can” and use an appropriate form of the verb ‘BE’, depending on what we intend to communicate as shown below:

- a) Flying aeroplanes **is** dangerous. (“Flying” is a gerund)
- b) Flying aeroplanes **are** dangerous. (“Flying” is an adjective)
- c) To fly aeroplanes **can be** dangerous. (“Flying” changed to an infinitive)

3.1.7 Ambiguity as arising from punctuation

The placement of punctuation is associated with some corresponding syntactic roles and relationships, which as we know is indispensable in the interpretation of the sentence.

Examples

- a) **Stop, men at work.**
- b) **Stop men at work.**
- c) **Stop men at work?**

SESSION 4: REFERENTIAL AMBIGUITY/ PRONOUN REFERENCE

Welcome to the fourth session of this unit. So far, we discussed two types of ambiguity in sessions two and three. We have explained lexical ambiguity and structural ambiguity and have also identified and explained some causes or sources of the types of ambiguity. In this session, we take a look at the last type of ambiguity which is referential ambiguity.

Objectives

By the end of the session, you should be able to:

- d) explain referential ambiguity
- e) disambiguate constructions that have instances of referential ambiguity.

Referential ambiguity is an instance where a reference or substitution item (pro-form/pronoun) is used in such a way that it could refer to two or more nouns within a sentence. In other words, it is sometimes difficult to determine the specific reference of a particular pronoun used in a sentence because it can refer to more than one noun in the context. Let us consider the example below:

*The girl told her mother about the promotion; **she** was very excited.*

The above sentence is ambiguous because the pronoun “**she**” can refer to both “*the girl*” and “*her mother*”. We don’t know whether the girl was excited or her mother was.

We can disambiguate the sentence by repeating either “the girl” or “her mother” at the beginning of the second clause as illustrated below:

- a) The girl told her mother about the promotion; **the girl** was very excited.
- b) The girl told her mother about the promotion; **her mother** was very excited.

SESSION 5: INTENTIONAL VS. UNINTENTIONAL AMBIGUITY

Welcome to the final session of this unit. We have, in the previous sessions, discussed the types of ambiguity. In this last session of this unit, we would like to distinguish between intentional and unintentional ambiguities. It is important to note that ambiguity can purposefully be constructed, especially in literary work and in some instances, it occurs unintentionally.

Objectives

By the end of the session, you should be able to:

- a) explain four causes of intentional ambiguity
- b) distinguish between intentional and unintentional ambiguity

5.1 INTENTIONAL AMBIGUITY

Ambiguity can occur consciously (usually in literature) or unconsciously (often in everyday

speech). Hence, Ying (2019) explains that ambiguity can be classified into *Intentional Ambiguity* and *Unintentional Ambiguity* according to the motivation and effects of the utterance. Again, Teodorescu (2012) believes that sometimes, ambiguity is used to exploit language deliberately

in order to convey messages loaded with overtones. This deliberate exploitation of language (intentional ambiguity), according to Ying (2019), is caused by the following:

5.1.1 Voice

In creating voice, creative writers often use homonyms for conscious clever arguments. Their use of the same or similar, but different meanings, makes their audience misunderstand things. Ying (2019) argues that the use of a pair of homonyms in the same sentence for instance, is a good way to create humour.

5.1.2 Vocabulary

Intentional ambiguity is caused not only in the same word with different pronunciations but also produced in the words with different meanings (the word polysemy). This implies that the exact meaning of a word must be judged based on context. Therefore, if context is different, unknown, or deliberately confused, it creates pun or a special communicative effect.

5.1.3 Syntactic Structure

Different interpretations of syntactic relations can also produce the effect of deliberate ambiguity

within the same sentence. In other words, the existence of different internal syntax within a sentence of a literary work can produce a different interpretation, resulting in deliberate ambiguity.

5.1.4 Context

In real life, we cannot only use context to eliminate negative ambiguity, but also, context can be used to deliberately create intentional ambiguity to achieve a specific communicative effect. In literature,

intentional ambiguity is used to create such effects as humour, satire and rhetoric (e.g., pun, euphemism etc.)

It should also be noted that authors of literary works use intentional ambiguity as a literary device/technique to allow readers understand their works in different ways, giving the works deep and complex qualities. Again, intentional ambiguity may develop in a character, or in an entire story. For example, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the eponymous character, Hamlet, is intentionally portrayed by William Shakespeare as a morally ambiguous character:

- a) He **kills** to avenge the murder of his father.
- b) He is **good** because he wants to protect his mother.
- c) He is **bad** because he is willing to kill whom he must to achieve this end.

The ambiguity in the character of Hamlet becomes evident when he is hurt by the death of Ophelia, which is his personal loss, but he does not realize the effect that his actions are going to have on others.

5.2 UNINTENTIONAL AMBIGUITY

Teodorescu (2012) says that there are contexts where ambiguity occurs inadvertently, and more

often than not escapes the notice of either the speaker/writer or both speaker/writer and listener/ reader. Unintentional ambiguity is therefore considered as a flaw of one's communication skills because it can be the cause of confusion (Awwad, 2017). Most of the causes of ambiguity discussed in sessions two, three and three can be said to also be the causes of unintentional ambiguity. For example, when a user wrongly places modifiers in a sentence. This is common with wrong use of adjectives, prepositional phrases and relative clauses.

Examples:

1. **Young** men and women were invited to the party. (an adjective "young" used for a coordinated construction)
2. I met the man with the books. (a prepositional phrase functioning as either an adverb of the verb "met" or an adjective qualifying the noun "man")
3. I saw the boy and girl who stole your bag. (a relative clause modifying either "girl" or both "boy" and "girl").

Clearly, unintentional ambiguity bothers on the user's competence and performance or misunderstanding of referring the intending pronoun. It also happens in the causative and negation which are combined in one sentence as in:

He was not in the hospital because he was sick.

The above sentence may be improved to give the required meaning as:

1. **He was not in the hospital for the reason of being ill but for something else.**

The subordinate clause "because he was sick" can also be paraphrased to mean:

2. **He was not coming to his job in the hospital because of illness.**

From the discussion so far, we can say that ambiguity is a linguistic phenomenon where a particular speech or writing has multiple interpretations. It can occur in every language; either in lexical, structural or referential/ pronoun reference. Lexical ambiguity is rooted in words themselves. But structural ambiguity results from inappropriate syntax: it often stems from either wrong modification or confusion of grammatical form/function. Also, apart from being lexical, structural or referential, ambiguity can also be intentional or unintentional. Intentional ambiguity is often used deliberately in literature to create special

communicative effects such as satire, humour, rhetoric etc.; it stems from voice, vocabulary, syntactic structure, or context. It indicates a mastery of one's communication skills. However, unintentional ambiguity occurs involuntarily in everyday, non-literary speech and writing; it often shows a flaw in one's language usage (competence and performance).