

Lexical and structural ambiguities in student writing: An assessment and evaluation of results

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ABSTRACT

Ambiguities are naturally found in languages and largely categorized into lexical and syntactical ambiguities. They are responsible for ambiguous expressions and may cause confusion in readers; therefore, accurate evaluation of them is critical for clear writing which is one of the prominent prerequisites for academic writing. The literature shows that novice writers such as students are those who suffer from ambiguity the most. Accordingly, the present study examined student writing to reveal students' lexical and syntactical ambiguities in their writing and evaluate the result accordingly. The aim of this study is to investigate whether lexical or syntactical ambiguities are more common in student writing, and also to suggest some pedagogical implications for the instructors at higher education to disambiguate expressions. This study collected data from four exams held in 2019-20 fall and spring terms. The results showed that student writing includes more lexical ambiguities than syntactical ambiguities and students are more prone to lexical ambiguities of verbs when compared to other grammatical items.

Keywords: Lexical, syntactical, ambiguity, ambiguous, structural.

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INTRODUCTION

Conversations occur between two interlocutors: the creator of the linguistic expressions and the recipient of the expressions. What is expected from this mutual speaker-listener relationship is an understanding of the utterances. However, there are situations in which dialogues do not end up with full comprehension due to the problems with linguistic structures. Lack of comprehension may be either because of insufficient output, lack of context knowledge, or simply confusion in language production because of ambiguous expressions which are commonplace observations that entail a lack of understanding as well as misunderstanding in daily communication.

Ambiguities can be described as linguistic expressions with no clear message due to multiple meanings. Such flexibility may hinder the listener from acquiring accurate content, and hence disrupt the conversation fluency. Ambiguity largely falls into three categories: lexical, structural, and pragmatics. To start with, lexical ambiguity (LA) is related to words with multiple meanings, which makes the listener confused to select the true meaning

while syntactical variations bring about structural ambiguity (SA). Pragmatic ambiguity, however, has no affair with words or structural differentiations, but the contextual circumstances, shared experiences, or background knowledge. On the other hand, pragmatic ambiguities generally occur during simultaneous conversations; therefore, they can be corrected immediately while LAs and SAs may not have a chance for immediate correction particularly if the language production is not in a spoken discourse but writing. In other words, speakers have the chance of correcting themselves immediately in case misunderstanding turns up in mutual conversations while a writer does not have such a chance, which is why they need to select their words and build their sentences carefully enough not to prompt confusion in the reader.

Lexical and grammatical encoding passes through a process in which the interlocutors are required a fixed amount of linguistic knowledge, and yet communications might not occur because of the possibility of drawing multiple meanings from a word or sentence. While

spoken discourse allows listeners to use speech cues to decipher lexical or syntactical ambiguities, written discourse does not provide readers with such cues to decode the intended meaning, and hence ambiguous expressions arise. To avoid this confusion led by ambiguous expressions is of importance for writers to convey the intended meaning, hence reach the audience to create the planned impression. This is particularly critical for students who largely depend on writing for their academic success. An ambiguous expression may obstruct the meaning from transmitting to the reader and lower the credibility of writing no matter how successful and rich the content is; therefore, clear sentences with understandable lexical and syntactical coverage is more than an option for students in the academe. Accordingly, this study aims to investigate LAs and SAs in student writing and pragmatically evaluate the results through pedagogical implications so that the awareness of students regarding the setbacks of ambiguous expressions can be increased. Also, students are expected to recover their ambiguous expressions disguised in their writing and the resolution of ambiguous expressions may contribute them to have better quality academic writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ambiguity

Early sources show that one reason of obscurity in student writing is ambiguity (Stageberg, 1966) and they also can lead to communication problems, from trivial misunderstanding to irrecoverable defects (Brooks, 1987), and are prevalent in linguistics, which was categorized in time under different titles such as Truth Conditional Pragmatic Ambiguity, Presuppositional Ambiguity, *Pros Hen* Ambiguity, Collective-Distributive Ambiguity, Ellipsis, and Complement Ambiguity (Sennet, 2016); however, the most common ones in student writing are lexical (Rector et al., 2013) and structural ambiguities (Prमितasih, 2012) as this study deals with.

Lexical ambiguity

Lexicon may have homophonous or homographic entries that differ substantially in meaning. Naturally, the polysemy (multiple meaning) may end up with comprehension problems, particularly when the speaker is not well-informed about the background of the conversation or does not have shared knowledge on the issue. Residual difficulties with LA largely stem from the extensive lexical ambiguity of languages (Laporte, 2001) because languages naturally are composed of words with multiple meanings. Accordingly, over 80% of frequent English words either homophonous or homographic and

this makes lexical ambiguity in English ubiquitous (Rodd et al., 2002); for example:

(1) I have visited my aunt.

This sentence may pose a problem due to the lexical ambiguity because of the word *aunt*. We call both the sister of father and mother 'aunt'; therefore, it is not an easy detection for the listener to decide on which one is referred to in the sentence. Different from homophonous words which may cause confusion in speaking; homographic words are a source of potential misunderstanding for readers. These kinds of lexical ambiguities in classrooms are experienced frequently by students who either do not know all dictionary entries of the word or simply are not aware of the ambiguity or misconceptions that it may pose.

Generally, two linguistic items are responsible for LA: Homonymy and Polysemy which were proposed for a clear distinction by Lyons (1977) for the first time. Both lexical items are words with multiple meanings; however, while homonymy is called for the words with two or more unrelated meanings, polysemic words carry the continuity of meaning within a semantic field; therefore, they have several related meanings. For example, the word *door* in the second and third examples is a homonym because both have unrelated meaning: *bear* in the second example refers to an action of carrying while in the third example it is an animal. On the other hand, *mouth* in the fourth example is the body organ and it is the upper side of an object in the fifth one. An important reminder here regarding polysemic words is that they are much more complex to detect when compared to homonym words because they can be completely in distinct lexical formats such as metonymy, metaphor, simile, and so on. For example, in the 6th example, it is a metaphor and in the 7th it is semantic meaning.

(2) We bear a heavy box.

(3) A bear attacked us while camping.

(4) The dentist asked me to open the mouth.

(5) I opened the mouth of the bottle.

(6) I cannot swallow the pain she gave me.

(7) Please swallow the pills only with water.

In concise, although words with multiple meanings are of huge benefit in terms of language and communicative richness for speakers (Rodd, 2018), they may pose a problem only for students but also for linguists who are overcome by many theoretical terms with similar descriptions. Therefore, students need particular attention on lexical ambiguities to avoid possible

confusion in their writing.

Structural ambiguity

Syntactic ambiguity, also called structural ambiguity or grammatical ambiguity, occurs when a reader can draw different meanings from an embedded phrase or clause inside a sentence and it was further divided into more subtiles; Kess (1992) investigated SAs in two levels; surface structure ambiguity and deep structure ambiguity (the terms were coined by Chomsky). Accordingly, surface structure can be equated with a linear arrangement of sounds, words, clauses, and phrases whereas deep structure deals with the notion of underlying meaning such as thoughts, feelings, ideas, and concepts, which is a cognitive issue and is investigated by psycholinguists. The literature shows that surface structural ambiguity can be due to scope, movement, or binding inside the sentence (Sennet, 2016) or selecting phrases that are inserted in a connotative context rather than denotative context (Eysenck and Keane, 2005); therefore, change of word order may help resolution of SAs. The 8th sentence below is an example of surface structural ambiguity. The ambiguity in this sentence lies in whether the time adverb of *Tuesday* should be attached to the main phrase or the clause following it. In other words, where to place the time adverb of Tuesday is not obvious: The teacher made the speech on Tuesday or he referred to the class participation.

(8) The teacher said on Tuesday he would not attend the class.

The problem in the 8th example could only be solved through the movement of the confusing word/phrase. This change of word order may simply solve the ambiguous expression in the sentence if the time adverb refers to the main phrase (9) or reported phrase (10).

(9) On Tuesday the teacher said he would not attend the class.

(10) The teacher said he would not attend the class on Tuesday.

Apart from problems of syntactical order, the SA in student writing can be caused by word combinations as shown in Figure 1.

As seen in Figure 1, word combinations (collocations) may be responsible for SAs; for example, the verb *watch* and the noun *binoculars* are associated unconsciously in the mind, thus the noun is hesitated to associate with the verb phrase or the noun phrase. However, a simple change with the PP in this example may remove the confusion as in Figure 2.

In Figure 2, the meaning is clear because the noun in

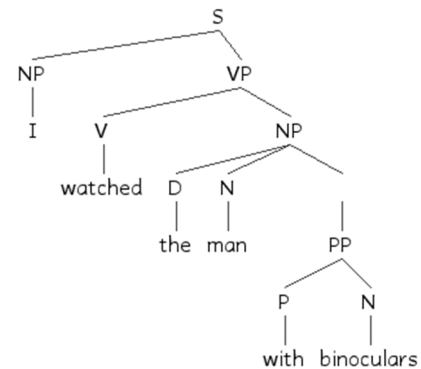


Figure 1. Collocation causing SA.

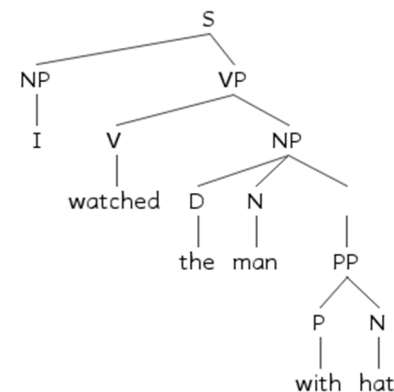


Figure 2. PP with a non-collocated word.

PP does not collocate with the verb in VP. To avoid SAs led by collocation, the writer needs to separate the sentence so that the words will not collocate (11) or apply word order movement (12).

(11) I used binoculars and watched the man.

(12) With binoculars, I watched the man.

In brief, compared to LA, the reasons for SA may be varied because of the involvement of word clusters.

Student writing and ambiguity

Instructors particularly at higher education seem caring clearness in writing. Lee (1999) investigated the degree of tolerance against ambiguity in writing and concluded that it affects students' writing performance if it is tolerated by the instructor, as there is a positive correlation between ambiguity and self-perceived achievement in language learning (Başöz, 2015). However, it does not mean that the texts should be filled with ambiguous expressions, which is still an issue to

avoid not perplexing the readers. One of the earliest researches on ambiguity is of Grice (1975, p.46) who further divided the maxim of manner which is the maxim concerning ambiguity:

- Avoid obscurity of expression
- Avoid ambiguity
- Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
- Be orderly

The subdivide of the maxim suggests to be clear in language production because the main motive behind producing language is to transmit the knowledge or intended message to another either in reciprocal or mass communication in a way that will not disrupt the meaning. To achieve this, students need to be aware of possible misconceptions that ambiguities may cause. In line with that, researchers aiming to increase student awareness regarding LA and SA conducted different studies but largely in terms of a comparison of bilinguals and monolinguals (Rataj, 2020; Whitford and Guedea, 2020). Different from the existing studies in the literature, the present study does not make a distinction between mono- or bilingual students and evaluates LA and SA examples in their writing and possible resolution ways through pedagogical implications.

Study purpose and research questions

This study examines LAs and SAs in student writing and aims to assess and evaluate results in consideration of the literature by revealing students' general tendencies towards LA and SA. The study also aims to suggest pedagogical implications for instructors at higher education regarding LA and SA. Accordingly, the research questions are as follows:

1. Are LAs or SAs more common in student writing?
2. Which subcategory of LAs (noun, verb, preposition, and adjective) is more common in student writing?

METHODOLOGY

Data

The corpus was composed of exam papers of students who study at the Department of Translation. In other words, students were not requested to fill any activities or to write on an issue. Exam papers of the students in 2019/20 fall and spring terms were collected for the study. The lesson name in the fall term was *freelance writing* and *occupational writing* in the spring term. Twenty-two students were registered for the lesson in the fall term while twenty-four in the spring term. Both terms

necessitate students to take a mid-term and a final exam, thus the study collected data from four exams in total. At the beginning of each term, student consent was sought and students granted their consent for their exam papers to be used as data for the present study. The exam questions for the *freelance writing* consisted of writing prompts that required students to write on; for example, three writing prompts -globalization, environment, a typical day of you- were provided and asked to write a text no fewer than 500 words. The exam of *occupational writing* asked students to define a profession in a detailed way (Table 1).

In total, this study assessed and evaluated four exams, 139 pages, and 52748 words. The number of words from students for each exam was in the range of 500-700 words. Because the second term was online education and students submitted their exams prepared through a word processing programme, the number of pages fell significantly compared to the first term in which they needed to write by hand. The class was multi-national, namely Turkish, Syrian, Afghani, Turkmen, and Egyptian. This study did not make a distinction based on nationality, age, or mother tongue because the main purpose was to make a common review of LAs and SAs in student writing; therefore, students were not eliminated according to a certain criterion.

Procedure and analyses

The data were obtained from four exams belonging to two lessons. First, the data from the lesson of Freelance Writing were collected on 14th November 2019 (Mid-term) and 8th January 2020 (Final), and then from the lesson of Occupational Writing on 1st April 2020 (Mid-term) and 3rd June 2020 (Final). Before the researcher analysed the whole data, to ensure the reliability of analysing, the researcher and a second-rater who has Ph.D. in ELT evaluated 10% of all data according to the taxonomy this study built and an inter-rater concordance of 0.80 (Cohen's kappa coefficient) was found, which shows the homogeneity and agreement between the two raters. For the analyses, LA was divided into four: noun, verb, preposition, and adjective while SA was not categorized. SA can be categorized into two as deep and surface structure ambiguity. Different from surface structure ambiguity that can be analysed and evaluated linguistically, deep structure ambiguity focuses on the underlying message which requires taking context, feelings, and situation into consideration. Because the researcher stably collected data from the fixed exams, the effects of context, feeling, and situation were ignored; therefore, any ambiguities regarding deep structure were excluded. Furthermore, the issue of deep structure ambiguity is not a pure applied linguistic issue, but an issue of cognitive or psycholinguistic. In concise, the analyses were made based on the taxonomy with five

Table 1. Summary of data.

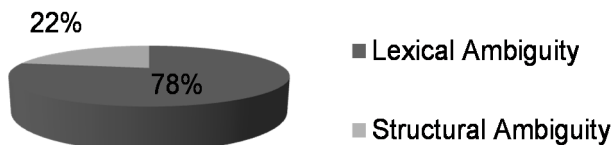
Lesson	Number of Students	Term	Exam	Data
Freelance Writing	22	Fall	Mid-term	12750 words
Freelance Writing			Final	13900 words
Occupational Writing	24	Spring	Mid-term	12030 words
Occupational Writing			Final	14068 words

categories, four of which belonged to LA (noun, verb, preposition, and adjective) and one of which was surface structure ambiguity. Having completed analysing the data, the researcher employed descriptive statistics to present and interpret the findings.

RESULTS

The results showed that student writing includes LA and SA moderately. The findings were titled in line with the taxonomy and accordingly presented. The results showed that student writing includes more LAs than SAs (Figure 3).

When compared to the SAs, the overall results showed that the number of LA is much higher than SA; 14 LAs were found in the data while only 4 SAs. Detailed results were provided in the following subtitles.

**Figure 3.** Number of ambiguities in data.

Findings of LA

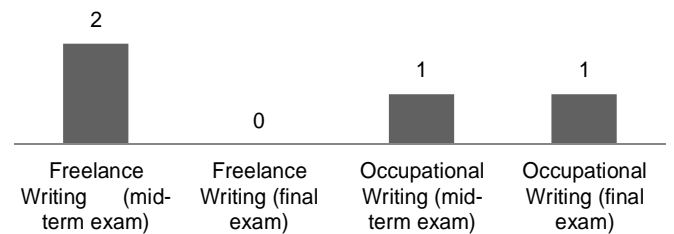
Noun

Four LAs caused by ambiguous nouns were detected in the data. The distribution was presented in Figure 4, and then the authentic examples from the data were provided.

In example 13, the ambiguous noun is *line* because two meanings can be attributed to it: a thin mark on the ground and a group of people arranged in a row. In concise, the reader is confused because whether everybody waited on the thin mark on the ground or in a row.

(13) Everybody waited on the *line*.

The problem with the example 14 is with the noun of

**Figure 4.** LAs of nouns.

object which has two meanings in this sentence: a solid substance and a purpose. Therefore, it is not obvious whether the speaker showed a physical object or the aim of the speaker was not understood.

(14) The *object* that I had was not seen in the meeting.

Similarly, a chair can be an object to sit on or a principal managing a meeting. Accordingly, it is not clear whether the chair that the speaker sat on or the chair who managed the meeting was good.

(15) The *chair* at the meeting was very good.

The 16th example is ambiguous because of the word of date which can mean a sweet fruit or a social meeting with someone. Therefore, the reader gets confused because what is perfect is not sure: the meeting or the date that the restaurant offered.

(16) We had met at a restaurant and the *date* there was perfect.

Verb

Five LAs caused by ambiguous verbs were found in the data. The distribution of them was presented in Figure 5, and then the authentic examples from the data were provided.

The verb *discount* can be used to reduce a price or to undermine the importance of something. In line with that, the reader wonders in example 17 that whether the speaker reduced the price of the fares or s/he did not care about the amount of money.

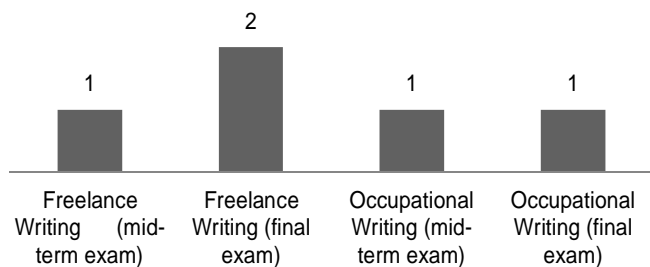


Figure 5. LAs of verbs.

(17) I *discounted* the fares

The verb *digest* can refer to two actions: to understand or to process food in the intestine. Therefore, the 18th sentence is oblique because we cannot pick from the sentence that whether it is the meal or his leaving immediately that the speaker did not digest.

(18) While eating my meal, he left immediately. I did not *digest* it.

The ambiguity in the 19th sentence stems from the verb *rely on*. The reader is not certain whether tourists have self-confidence thanks to having money or they depend on their money to buy what they want.

(19) Tourists *rely on* their money to buy what they want.

The verb *cool* can be used for calming down and getting cooler; therefore, the reader may get confused by the 20th sentence because it is not apparent whether the speaker calmed down or got cooler after a while.

(20) He *cooled* after a while.

The 21st example poses a problem due to the verb *survey* because two meanings can be drawn from this sentence: the police searched the environment in the neighbourhood and the police questioned the people in the neighbour.

(21) The police *surveyed* all neighbour.

Preposition

Two LAs caused by ambiguous preposition use were yielded in the data. The distribution of them was presented in Figure 6, and then the authentic examples from the data were provided.

Ambiguity in the 22nd example can be resolved through replacing *near* with *on* because the readers may have difficulty in grasping whether the speaker sat near the bank where you invest money or near the bank where you sit on.

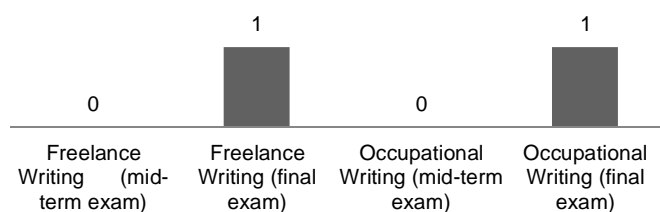


Figure 6. LAs of prepositions.

(22) I sat *near* the bank and thought what I would do.

Ambiguous expression in example 23 is led by both the verb and the preposition. The verb *capture* may have two meanings in this sentence: to possess by force and to succeed in getting something. However, when the preposition *through* was substituted for *thanks to*, the reader may be ensured that the speaker succeeded to obtain the award with hard work.

(23) I captured the award *through* hard work.

Adjective

Three LAs caused by ambiguous adjectives were found in the data. The distribution of them was presented in Figure 7, and then the authentic examples from the data were provided.

Most of the adjectives are with multiple meanings, which may cause ambiguities if not used carefully. For example, the *adjective* *light* in the 24th examples has two meanings there: easy to carry or the brightness that comes from an object, which hardens the reader to get the intended meaning of the author: Is the lampshade not heavy? or Is the lampshade working?

(24) The lampshade was *light*.

Similarly, *fine* in the example 25 can denote good and thin (delicate); in other words, the reader may not get the true message from the sentence because the glass could be both good and thin/delicate.

(25) The glass was *fine*.

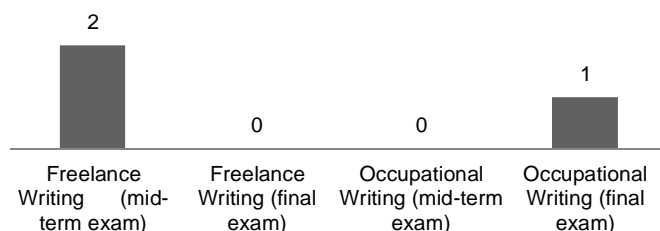


Figure 7. LAs of adjectives.

Compared to other LAs of adjective, the 26th example poses a much more problem for the readers because the adjective *left* is too ambiguous to comprehend; i.e., is the doctor your neighbour living on the left of your house? Or is s/he your neighbour who was left by his/her beloved one?

(26) My *left* neighbour was a doctor.

Findings of SA

The number of SA in the data is lower than LAs. Four authentic examples with SA were found in the study. to start with, the 27th example is ambiguous due to that the reader does not get a full grasp as to the position of the dishes and the act of washing; in other words, the speaker may have washed the dishes inside the sink but not in somewhere else, or the speaker may have washed the dishes that were inside the sink.

(27) In the evening, I washed *the dishes in the sink*.

Likewise, two possible meanings can be drawn from the 28th sentence because of the ambiguity that the prepositional phrase caused: They saw the car while they were on the street and they saw the car that was parked on the street.

(28) They saw the car *on the street*.

Similar to the 28th examples, the prepositional phrase in example 29 entails readers to get multiple meanings: Standing on the table, the speaker dropped the plant and the speaker dropped the plant that was standing on the table.

(29) I dropped the plant *on the table*.

The words of comparative in the last example confuse readers because it seems difficult to understand whether young people look at their mobile screens more than their parents do or your people look at their mobile screens more than looking at their parents.

(30) Young people look at their mobile screens *more than their parents*.

DISCUSSION

This study examined LAs and SAs in student writing and aimed to assess and evaluate results in consideration of the literature by revealing students' general tendencies towards LA and SA. Similar to Rector et al. (2013) the results showed that student writing includes LAs more than SAs (RQ1). Although the literature does not provide

research that directly compared LAs and SAs in student writing, we know that LAs are rather common in natural language (Klepousniotou, 2002). Most words are ambiguous not only in English but also in other languages; however, English language is more prone to be ambiguous due to the rich denotative meanings of words (Jackson and Amvela, 2007; Lipka, 2010). Therefore, student awareness concerning ambiguous words need to be raised to resolve LA because a lack of awareness of LA may cause communication problem (Kidd and Holler, 2009). Similarly, Zipke et al. (2009) concluded that metalinguistic awareness can be an important linguistic item in the detection of semantic ambiguities and improving students' comprehension of reading because understanding a sentence requires retrieving the words from the reader's internalized lexicons and constructing a structural representation of the sentence. It is a well-established fact that language comprehension and production is automatic processing that does not necessitate conscious attention; however, this automatic procession may not develop in second language learning because it is, to a great extent, considered that this ability of automatic processing develops in early ages. Accordingly, different from native speakers of a language, Vuong and Martin's study (2011) concluded that active attention control may have a remedial role in the elimination of certain LAs which are common in language. Proportionately, that students have LAs in their writing may be a result of insufficient attention. The other likely reason for LAs in student writing can be attributed to the insufficient competence of lexicons since the resolution of LA requires a certain amount of lexical knowledge; insufficient lexicon or lexical reservoir of polysemic words can be blamed for ambiguous expressions (Birdsong, 2012).

This study found that the most used subcategory of LAs is the verbs (RQ2). Verbs in English are broad with multiple meanings and function as either homonymy or polysemy; therefore, particularly novice writers like students with limited knowledge of the denotative meaning of words may end up with ambiguous sentences due to LA of verbs. Verbs are critical for the comprehension of ambiguous sentences (Garnsey et al., 1997); however, it seems that students have difficulty in using verbs syntactically accurate so that readers would not get confused. One crucial suggestion came from Traxler (2005) who studied the effect of verb subcategorization on syntactically disambiguating main verbs. According to Traxler, verbs' individual subcategorization is effective for full comprehension of sentences because it plays varied semantic and syntactic roles in language learning (Federmeier et al., 2000). The importance of verbs in eliminating ambiguity steered scholars to conduct experimental cognitive studies to track the traces of brain, and accordingly, it was found that readers do not access multiple meanings of verbs while reading but activates one underspecified sense of

the word and uses context to get the most possible meaning (Pickering and Frisson, 2001) because contextual information can influence language processing (MacDonald et al., 1994).

CONCLUSION

Ambiguity in a language is an important part of language and it is prevalent in English writing: over 80% of common English words have more than one dictionary entry, with some words having very many different definitions (Rodd et al., 2002; Sennet, 2016). The knowledge of processing ambiguous words and deciphering syntactic ambiguities is therefore critical for language comprehension. Although it is not guaranteed that every utterance of an ambiguous expression will end up with vagueness as to what was meant by the speaker, they broadly bear the potential of bringing about uncertainty with the reader. Therefore, students are advised that any linguistic items that may call obscurity should be avoided for the clarity of their writing. Accordingly, by compiling the literature and evaluating the results here, the present study proposed some pedagogical implications from which both instructors and students can benefit. This study collected data on the local level, though the sphere of influence of the suggestions is at international level.

Pedagogical implications

1. Shultz and Pilon (1973) revealed that students managed to detect lexical ambiguities with a steady, almost linear improvement across grades; in other words, saving writing from ambiguity is not an instant action but gradually grows with the writer. Similarly, studies conducted on children provide “evidence that awareness of linguistic ambiguity is a late developing capacity which progresses through the school years” (Durkin and Shire, 1991, p. 48). Therefore, students need to be allocated sufficient time to acquire the skill of writing clearly.
2. There is a positive correlation between ambiguity and self-perceived achievement in language learning (Başöz, 2015); therefore, the teaching of ambiguities should not be considered to be only as a linguistic purpose but also as a motivation source to increase students’ thought of self-efficacy.
3. Lack of attention on the denotative meaning of words can entail ambiguous expressions because English is rich in words with multiple meanings; therefore, active attention while selecting words on the course of writing may have a remedial role in elimination LAs (Vuong and Martin, 2011) in student writing. Instructors may steer students’ attention to polysemic words before initiating a task of writing.
4. Metalinguistic awareness has remedying effect on

ambiguity; therefore, instructors at higher education are suggested to shed light on the issue of LA and SA as a pre-writing activity (Watkin, 2016).

5. While polysemy may not lead to a significant problem in student writing thanks to its relatedness in meaning, homonymy comes with troubles due to its power in causing a full change in denotative meaning. Therefore, the instructors are advised to allocate a particular time for teaching the possible impacts of homonymy in writing.
6. An instruction programme regarding LAs and SAs need to be arranged in an empirical way that is sure to increase student awareness regarding the terms. A superficial overview may not be sufficient; the categorization of LAs and SAs as in this study may be of help to better create a schema in the student mind.
7. The ability of decoding words with multiple meaning does not only help to understand sentences but also improve cognitive flexibility of students (Zipke, 2008); therefore, activities to help students avoid LAs and SAs in writing may also help students increase their ability holistic linguistic capability.
8. Since contextual information can influence language processing (MacDonald et al., 1994) in the reader’s mind, students need to be advised to create an explanatory contextual structure if they think that the word or sentence may prompt ambiguity in readers, though it is difficult to use contextual knowledge in writing when compared to spoken discourse.
9. Academic writing classes at universities are largely lack of LAs and SAs either because they are regarded insignificant or instructors are not aware of their importance in scholarly writing that necessities a clear and understandable language, which is a prerequisite in English writing (Lea and Street, 1998).
10. L1 interference may play a negative role in students writing by creating LA and SA because of linguistic principles and parameters of native and target languages (Jouravlev and Jared, 2020). Therefore, instructors of writing should pay attention to teaching possible L1 interferences in L2 writing in terms of creating LA and SA.
11. The tolerance of ambiguity by instructors can be an important factor for the low proficient students in foreign language writing and instructors can take advantage of that explicit teaching to diminish the ambiguity in an EFL task-based writing class (Lee, 1999).

Suggestions for further studies

This study categorized LAs into four while it did not categorize SAs. Further studies can categorize LAs into more grammatical issues by adding adverbs, determiners, and so on. Accordingly, deep structure ambiguity was not taken into consideration because it would be difficult to take students’ feelings, ideas, and thought into consideration in a written discourse. Those who aim to measure the relationship between SA and

emotions are suggested to conduct a study on deep structure ambiguity in writing because this study only studies surface structure ambiguity in terms of SA. Finally, the researchers can examine the effect of gender on ambiguity in writing because there is a paucity of research as to gender-based studies on ambiguous expressions.

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