An Analysis of Structural Ambiguity in Students 's Writing

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INTRODUCTION

- English importance – Key for spoken and written communication.
- Written language challenge – Harder to understand due to lack of tone, pauses, and intonation, leading to ambiguity.
- Structural ambiguity – Occurs when sentence elements relate in different ways (Ullman, 1977; Hurford & Heasley, 1983).
- Research focus – Analyzes structural ambiguity in 35 argumentative essays from writing 1 students at STBA Teknokrat.
- Findings & aims – Many sentences have multiple interpretations; aims to identify possible and intended meanings, contribute to syntax studies, and help students avoid ambiguity for clearer writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Henny Andriani (2009): Used Yule (1985) & Ullman (1977) theories; found lexical & structural ambiguities in spoken/written texts, more frequent in writing due to punctuation & structure.
- Homsatun Nafiah (2013): Used Yule's theory & Radford's grammar; studied structural ambiguity in *The Jakarta Post* headlines; identified ambiguous sentences/phrases & their meanings.
- Wening bayu Irawanan (2009): Researched *The Jakarta Post* articles; identified ambiguous words, phrases, sentences; analyzed causes & interpretations from Dec 11, 2008 issue.
- This study: Similar to Nafiah's in focusing on structural ambiguity meanings, but emphasizes sentence forms, lexical classes, sentence types, and causal factors.

METHOD

- Research Design – Qualitative research (Djajasudarma, 1993) using words, phrases, and sentences from STBA Teknokrat students' writings (Writing 1 class SI 1AB).
- Data & Source – Sentences from 35 argumentative essays in Writing 1, chosen because it is a basic subject where many sentences contain ambiguity.
- Data Collection –
- Observing and collecting students' Writing 1 papers.
- Reading the papers.
- Retyping all data.
- Printing retyped data.
- Data Analysis –
- Interpreting intended meanings of ambiguous sentences/phrases.
- Evaluating interpretations based on theory and objectives.
- Concluding the analysis.

FINDING

- The research identified 21 cases of structural ambiguity in students' writings from STBA Teknokrat, particularly in the Writing One class.
- Ambiguity was found in two main categories:
- Noun phrase ambiguity – 18 cases.
- Verb phrase ambiguity – 3 cases.
- Tree diagrams (phrase markers) were used to show two possible interpretations for each ambiguous sentence and to determine the intended meaning.
- The most frequent type of structural ambiguity was noun phrase ambiguity.
- The study highlights that many students still face difficulties in constructing clear sentences, leading to multiple interpretations and potential misunderstanding by readers.

DISCUSSION

- The study analyzed 21 structurally ambiguous sentences taken from students' writings in a Writing 1 class at STBA Teknokrat. Using Hurford and Heasley's (2009) theory and tree diagrams (phrase markers) from Akmajian et al. (1998), the researcher identified two main types of ambiguity :
- Noun Phrase Ambiguity (18 cases) – where modifiers (e.g., adjectives like "smart," "good," or quantifiers like "some," "many") could apply to one part or the whole noun phrase, leading to multiple interpretations.
- Verb Phrase Ambiguity (3 cases) – where the verb phrase could be interpreted in different ways depending on attachment (e.g., "hit a student with a book" could mean using the book as a tool or hitting a student who has a book).
- For each sentence, the researcher :
- Showed two tree diagram versions to illustrate the different possible meanings.
- Determined the intended meaning based on the context of the students' essays.
- Explained why that meaning was chosen and linked it to the topic (e.g., avoiding violence in schools, protecting minors from harmful social media, addressing prostitution issues).

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed structural ambiguity in students' writings, identifying two main categories: noun phrases and verb phrases. Using tree diagrams (phrase markers), the researcher examined 21 ambiguous sentences to determine both their possible and intended meanings. The analysis revealed that 18 cases involved noun phrase ambiguity, while only 3 involved verb phrases, showing that noun phrase ambiguity was the most common. The tree diagrams helped explain the sources of ambiguity and guided the selection of intended meanings that best matched the students' writing context.

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