

Lexical and Structural Ambiguity by Jordanian Learners of English

ABSTRACT:

The present study aims chiefly at gaining a deep insight into the process of resolving lexical and structural ambiguity. As a secondary purpose, the study attempts to examine the impact of meaning-dominance and syntactic category of a word on resolving ambiguity. The research method of this study is descriptive qualitative in nature. For the purpose of collecting the deeded data, a translation test is utilized. The test is divided equally into two section, each of which is comprised of eight sentences. Section one is designed to examine lexical ambiguity, while section two to test structural ambiguity. The findings of the study depict that lexical and structural ambiguity pose a great challenge for the participants, in which the percentage of unresolved sentences surpassed by far that of resolved sentences. It is also found that the participants retrieve high-dominant meaning more readily than low-dominant meaning. In addition, the participants tend to activate nouns quicker than verbs when resolving ambiguous sentences. Those results can be ascribed to lack of proficiency at grammar and lexis. The results lend support to constraint-satisfaction model, which indicates that when processing a meaning, several candidates compete with each other and the winning candidate is the one satisfies all constraints. The results of this study raise the awareness of language learners as well as language teachers on the significance of building a good grammatical and lexical competence in order to well understand ambiguous sentences, which in turn helps have a good command of English. The study sheds extra light on the role of word syntactic class and dominance of meaning in disambiguating sentences, which is not deeply discussed by other studies.

Keywords: lexical ambiguity, structural ambiguity, translation test, syntactic category; meaning dominance

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