TITLE PAGE

THE PROCESSING OF SYNTACTIC AMBIGUITY IN ENGLISH: A STUDY OF FEDERAL COLLEGES OF EDUCATION, ZARIA AND KANO STUDENTS.

BY

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A thesis submitted to the post-graduate school, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Award of the Degree of Master of Arts in English Faculty of Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

DECEMBER, 2000.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been written by me and that it is a record of my own research.

To the best of my knowledge, it has not been presented in any previous application for a higher Degree. The sources of information are specifically acknowledged by means of bibliography.



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CERTIFICATION

This thesis: "The processing of syntactic Ambiguity in English: A study of Federal Colleges of Education, Zaria and Kano students" meets the regulations governing the award of the degree of Master of Arts in English of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated accordingly:

- To Almighty God
- To my loving and understanding husband; Mr. AbdulRasheed Shoyebi
- To my beautiful daughters:

  Jamila and Aisha.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To God be the glory!

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate the processing of syntactic ambiguity in students' writing.

The sample of 100 respondents were randomly selected from Federal Colleges of Education, Zaria and Kano.

Elicitation experiment is used as a technique for data gathering and within the technique used, various questions were asked. These test questions were divided into four (4) sections: Section A, B, C, and D.

The data analysis was based on seventy (70) questions spread across four different sections. This will be done in percentage. The result of the analysis revealed that majority of the students were poorly sensitive to ambiguity. Below is the summary of the information computed from the data analysis.

The result showed that majority of the students failed the test which in turn points to the fact that detecting ambiguity in written form poses a great challenge to both students and teachers of English.

Ambiguity or double meaning is a student's worst enemy when they write. This is so because it prevents a reader from

understanding students intended meaning. Students more often than not know what their intended messages are, but because of haste or inattention or for lack of knowledge they express them in such a way that the reader receives more than one meaning.

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1.0 CHAPTER ONE

1.1 THE PROBLEM AND ITS BACKGROUND

Meaning of sentences are not always as precise as they first appear to be. Sometimes, one thinks one knows what is meant but one may be a little vague. This vagueness, in most cases leads to all sorts of muddled thinking and different interpretations. It is important, to be able to define the meaning of sentences, that one uses to avoid misinterpretations.

The interpretation that leads to muddled thinking is what is referred to as ambiguity. Most sentences are ambiguous. They have many meanings when a line of thought is misdirected as a result of how the sentences feature in writing.

Many signals in sentences are responsible for such ambiguity; some of the signals are complementary while others are conflicting. Such ambiguous signals include: noun clusters, verb clusters, dangling modifiers/misplaced modifiers, faulty punctuation, ambiguous pronoun reference and wrong use of prepositions.

The present study therefore, is aimed at examining how sensitive students are to ambiguity in English language and how well they can give interpretations to sentences in their writings.

What then is ambiguity?

Ambiguity as seen by Alex (1992) is "the possibility of two or more meanings from a single word, a phrase or a sentence." He further explained that ambiguity is a sign of weakness in the structures of language.

Encyclopedia Britannica Vol. I defines it as "the use of words that allow alternative interpretation."

From the above, it can be rightly asserted that ambiguity is very prevalent in sentences that are used for communication, and that such ambiguity needs to be checked in order to aid effective communication.

Huddleston (1996) opines that many sentences are ambiguous and very often the ambiguity is attributable to the fact that the same sequence of words has two (or more) analyses. He gave this example:

(a) Liz attacked the men with a knife.

In (a), "with a knife" enters into construction with 'the' and men, so that the men with a knife forms a single constituent (an NP functioning object of 'attacked' under this analysis the meaning is:

(b) "Liz attacked the men who had a knife").

On the other hand, (b) by contrast, attacked the men with a knife has three immediate constituents, attacked (predicator), the men (object) and with a knife (adjunct);

there is here, a direct structural relation between 'with a knife' and 'attacked', so that with a knife specified the means of attack – hence the meaning: "Liz used a knife in her attack on the men".

It is worthy to note here that, although, there are two interpretations, we have a single sentence.

Ambiguity is a very common phenomenon in everyday utterances whether written or spoken. More often than not, students are not aware until when communication is frustrated. It is more detectable sometimes by the reader or the listener.

However, it must be made clear that ambiguity is an evil only when it results in frustration/or confusion in communication. In scientific discourse, where the objective is aimed at clear and precise reference ambiguity is an unmitigated evil. For example, a scientist cannot say liquid substance when he means to say H_2o(water). This is because liquid substance could mean water, tea or anything – liquid. So one has to be precise and straight to the point with no circumlocution. But there are other fields of thought in which ambiguity is so prevalent and desirable. This is the case of poetry where ambiguity may contribute to the beautiful poetic effect. For example, when Robert Herrick says in his Poem "Daffodils": - Fair daffodils, we weep to see you haste away so soon; As yet the early-rising sun has not attained its noon". He

is not only talking about the daffodils, beautiful, short-lived flowers that bloom briefly in springtime, but also about life – The flower which blooms, then quickly dies, becomes a symbol of life.

In the area of diplomacy ambiguity is commonly used in diplomatic language so that failure to agree would be marked by face-saving language. Sometimes ambiguity is deliberately used by authors to create artistic effect.

For instance, Thomas Hood, a nineteenth century writer made use of pun in most of his poems to make them humorous. A good example is seen in one of his poems titled "Faithless Nelly Gray". It is about a soldier who returned from the wars with two wooden legs:

> Ben Battle was a soldier bold
> And used to wars' alarms;
> But a cannon-ball took off his legs
> So he laid down his arms.

The pun is in the word 'arms' which means at the same time 'a person's two arms' and also 'weapons'.

Moreso, ambiguity has been exploited as a rich source of humour. Gangsters and punsters use double meanings of words in sentences. (above for example).

In the religious sphere, effective use of ambiguity is made manifest. In the Bible (the book of Mathew 27:VII) where for instance, Jesus was asked by His prosecutors: "Are you Jesus, the King of the Jews?"

He answered. "You have said so". The answer is deliberately ambiguous for if he said 'yes', he would be convicted as a Rebel, and if He said "No", he would be mocked as an Impostor. The best answer in the circumstance was therefore, "you have said so", meaning "you have admitted it yourself" or "I didn't say so, you did.

It should however, be noted that ambiguity is avoided in rules and regulations establishing an institution as well as orders to be carried out.

In summary, it has been noted that ambiguity is prevalent in almost all fields of discourse that it is desirable in certain circumstances and irrelevant in others.

Ambiguity similarly, signifies double meaning in utterances or sentences, and seriously affects understanding for alternative interpretations can be read into sentences.

There can be no effective communication if sentences are fraught with ambiguity. It is therefore, wise to steer clear of any sentence that is ambiguous.

Ambiguity in students' writing could lead to muddled thinking which may in turn lead to hasty fitting of words into writing inevitably resulting into failure in tests and examinations.

In addition, ambiguity leads to defects in students' communication ability. For instance, communication with friends

This brief mention of the subject is not sufficient considering the prevalence of ambiguity in students written communication.

It is against this background that the research intends to investigate how sensitive students are to ambiguity in written communication and how well they can give interpretations to sentences.

Suggestions would then be proffered on how to tackle the problem of ambiguity in students written communication.

The following questions would serve as the basis of this research, namely:

(1) What is ambiguity?

(2) What are the signals of ambiguity?

(3) What effects can ambiguity have on students writing?

(4) How sensitive are students to ambiguity?

1.3 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Language has always held a central place in man's everyday activity. Language is among the first forms of behaviour that we acquire as children and this has always been done through listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Language is communication, which utmost goal is to communicate but sometimes, language is used in such a way that two or more meanings could be read into a particular sentence,

thereby affecting communication. If communication is affected, understanding is surely affected.

Since writing is an important aspect of students exercise, this study aspires to investigate the effects of ambiguity in students writing. The research will concentrate on the effects of ambiguous signals in students written communication and see how sensitive students are to ambiguity.

Moreso, this topic has not been applied to the best of my knowledge to the N.C.E. III students in the Federal Colleges of Education, Zaria and Kano.

Furthermore, N.C.E. III is the terminal. If N.C.E. III students still have the problem of ambiguity in their writings, then, the problem is prevalent and needs to be tabled.

Above all, the research would aid curriculum developers/planners and teachers alike in tackling the problem of ambiguity amongst N.C.E students, it will be a further contribution to and complement others who would like to carry out further research on ambiguity.

Managers of Firms/Schools will also find this research useful for it would aid them in communicating (upward, downward, and horizontally) effectively with their subordinates.

Similarly, it will be useful to media houses (both print and electronic) in helping them to write and transmit clear concise

messages to readers, listeners and Viewers. Government spokesmen and diplomats will also benefit immensely from the study as it will help them make statements that would be devoid of any trace of ambiguity.

1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research has the following aims and objectives:

(a) To examine the effects of ambiguity on students writing.

(b) To determine how sensitive students are to ambiguity.

© To suggest ways by which ambiguity can be minimized in students written communication.

1.5 SCOPE AND DELIMITATIONS

The thesis of this research is to investigate the effects of syntactic ambiguity in students writing. There are four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. But it is only writing skill that will be considered. The other three language skills – listening, speaking and reading are not included.

Another delimitation of the research lies on the research methodology. The research will be carried out mainly through performance test: selection and forced choice selection test.

For obvious reasons, however, the researcher could not cover the whole of Nigeria in the process of carrying out the

2.0 CHAPTER TWO

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Language is a very important phenomenon in human existence. It is a non-instinctive way of communicating ideas, feelings and desires by means of a system of sounds and sound symbols. This is to say that, without language, there can be no communication and without communication there can be no effective existence.

John Locke (cited in Mazawaje (1993)) argued that: "Language is the great conduct whereby men convey their discoveries, reasonings and knowledge from one person to another".

Depending on how one uses them, words generally can either be helpful in effective communication or they can constitute an obstacle in one's efforts to communicate ideas, feelings or reasons to listeners/readers. Since language is very important in our lives, we need to know how to communicate effectively with no hindrance or misinterpretations of what is said or written.

Many studies have been carried out in the area of ambiguity generally but none has been specifically carried out on N.C.E. students in Federal Colleges of Education, Zaria and Kano.

This Chapter reviews accessible related literature on Ambiguity. The Literature review that follow is arrange under the

This Chapter reviews accessible related literature on Ambiguity. The literature review that follows is arranged under the following headings:

(a) The Concept of ambiguity

(b). Types of ambiguity

© The ambiguous signals

(d) The effects of ambiguity on students' writing

(e) The N.C.E III syllabus

2.2 AMBIGUITY AS A CONCEPT

Carver (1986:131) supports the idea that ambiguity means double meaning. He went further to explain that ambiguity prevents a reader from understanding the intended meaning of the writer.

Hans (1989:45), believes that:

> Ambiguous terms frustrate us because they do not tell us enough. They are often large abstractions – general terms too far removed from concrete reality. Sweeping terms like "social justice" or contemporary community standards" badly need definition: they leave too much room for subjective interpretation or personal reference.Ambiguous terms have a possible double meaning, they cause misunderstandings because they allow people to use the same words while talking about different things. A term like "liberal" has a confusing history, people with different agenda use it as a term of praise or condemnation.

More than any person else, students need an armoury of words which are their tools for articulating and selling their ideas and

passing their examinations. From the above however, one finds out that sentences often convey meanings inadequately which are usually open to different interpretations and misinterpretations. In schools, where students frequently write assignments, tests and examinations which depend upon the use of words, the danger of misinterpretation is more pronounced especially when sentences are not well constructed. Oguntuase (1998:20) sums ambiguity up as being result of "badly garbled ideas". Baker (1975:55) opines that when sentences do not say precisely what they are meant to say, such sentences are said to be vague or ambiguous. For instance, when asked, the question: "Is the water hot?" Here, the answer depends on what is meant by the word 'hot'. If it is agreed that say 70°C or above is hot we can then measure the temperature of the water and decide very precisely whether the water is hot or not. But if 'hot' is not defined, the answer to the question may be uncertain, thereby leading to ambiguity.

According to Hofmann (1993:225) ambiguity is when sentences have two or three meanings. He expressed the belief that most sentences are ambiguous. He further added that even syntactic structures are themselves ambiguous as in the following:

(1) a small girls' school

(2) the chicken is ready to eat

(3) the boy watched the girl in the park with a telescope.

Without looking at the ambiguities of words themselves, the first example may mean either (a small school for girls) or (a school for small girls) and the second is likely to mean (the chicken is ready for someone (us?) to eat), but it could also mean (the chicken is ready to eat something (us?)).

In the third example above, more than three meanings can be read to it depending partly on the context in which it is used. Is it that there are two parks, one with a telescope and the other without? That is, is 'with a telescope' being used to identify which park, or is it describing the instrument for watching, or again does it simply identify the girl who carries it? The phrase (in the park (with a telescope)' may identify the girl, or it may describe the location of the watching.

In any case, when we add the ambiguities of syntax to all the different meaning of each word in a sentence, it is difficult to see how one person can ever guess what another person means.

In agreement with the above, Lyons (1979:129), asserts that:

> "It is a universally recognized and demonstrable fact that many of the acceptable utterances of English and other languages are ambiguous: they can be interpreted in two or more different ways. Frequently, though not always, their ambiguity passes unnoticed in everyday

The word "Safeguard", is very flexible yet care should be taken in certain applications. The dictionary defines it as "a means of protection against something unwanted", like a bruise? The Thesaurus has a variety of synonyms for instance, preserve, secure.

So if safeguard is substituted with the aforementioned synonyms, one would have examples such as: "preserve that bruise' secure that bruise or how safe is your bruise? Preserve it.

She therefore counseled that it is ultimately wiser to steer clear of any statement fraught with ambiguity while writing.

Katz and Fodor (1963:174-9) gave the following example while trying to account for the number of readings a sentence can have:

The bill is large.

This sentence has two 'readings' resulting from the two meanings of 'bill.' The sentence can be disambiguated if it is extended with... but need not be paid. This extension according to Katz and Fodor is possible only with one of the meanings of 'bill'. Katz and Fodor accept that the ambiguity of the sentence and its disambiguation by this method are proper subjects for semantics.

In addition, Let us again consider this sentence by Palmer (1981:66), "John was looking for the glasses". This sentence is

ambiguous because it might refer to drinking glasses or spectacles. There could be a third meaning to the word 'glasses': because a scientist might have a third type. Does the sentence now have three meanings? If it does, it does so because of our knowledge of the word.

Similarly, in another example by Palmer; how many meanings has "I am looking for the Bible". The answer would depend on whether you know that one of the cow's stomachs is called the Bible.

Successful communication occurs only when the reader correctly interprets the symbols used by the writer. When the communication is successful then the communicator and the communicatee have their minds referred to the same referents; they have the same terms in mind. They have thus come to terms. But ambiguous words are obstacles to such happy consummations. Communication is thus frustrated. When such failures of communication occur, the writer and the reader have different referents in mind.

On the structure of vocabulary, Katz and Fodor point out that a dictionary would distinguish between four meanings of the word bachelor.

(1) A man who has never married,

(2) A young Knight serving under the banner of another,

(3) Someone with a first degree,

(4) A young male unmated furseal during the mating season.

It must be made clear however, that ambiguity is an evil only when it results in frustration in communication. In scientific discourse, where the aim is to achieve clear and precise reference, ambiguity is an unmitigated evil. But there are other fields of thought in which ambiguity possesses desirable effects. This is the case of poetry, where ambiguity may sometimes contribute to the poetic effect by suggesting a rich aura of implied meanings: "Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing". (Katz and Fodor (1963:178)).

Murphy (1972:74) asserts that ambiguity could be used deliberately. Alex (1992:26) supported this fact. He asserted that: "Sometimes a writer makes a deliberate use of the double meaning of words to create artistic effect or for other purposes". He can do this in two ways:-

(1) The poet can make deliberate use of a word or phrase that has an ambiguous meaning. For instance, in John Milton's Poem Samson Agonicles, Samson, talking about the secret of his strength which rested on his hair, called it 'my capital secret'. Now Milton is using the word 'capital' in two ways one meaning of 'capital' is 'chief' or 'most important' as in 'capital city'; the other meaning is to do with 'head' as in

'capital punishment' which involves the losing of one's life. So, by using the phrase 'capital secret' Samson was saying that, not only was this his most important secret, but also that it was connected with his head that is, his hair.

(2) The poet can make use of the same word, or words that sound the same, close together in different senses. For example:

> "But after all that's said and more
> The malice and spite of party are poor.
> To the malice and spite of a party
> To a party, not invited".

The first 'party' refers to a 'political party'. The second (party' means a 'person'.

The third 'party' means a 'celebration: e.g. a birthday party.

From all the discussions above, ambiguity is therefore a sign of weakness in structural language hence when detected by the writer, effort should be made to re-frame the sentence in a way that makes the meaning unmistakable and clear.

2.3 TYPES OF AMBIGUITY

According to Anderson (1962:98), there are four types of ambiguity: simple ambiguity, amphiboly, ambiguity of significance and ambiguity in emphasis Lyons (1977:112) on the other hand; identified only two types of ambiguity: Grammatical ambiguity and transformational ambiguity. Allan (1986:150) posits that: in

traditional semantics, it has been usual to distinguish two kinds of ambiguity: polysemy and homonymy". Alex (1992:26), however, identified three types of ambiguity, namely: lexical ambiguity, phonological ambiguity and syntactic ambiguity.

It is worthy to note however, that although different terms are used by different authors; Grammatical ambiguity by (Lyons :1977) is the same as syntactic ambiguity by (Alex :1992).

Polysemy and homonymy posited by Allan (1986) is similar to lexical and phonological ambiguity posited by Alex (1992).

Although different terms are used by different authors, the types mentioned by each of them are similar. In other words, there is an overlap as can be seen in the following explanations.

The above types of ambiguity will be discussed fully.

2.3.1 SIMPLE AMBIGUITY

By simple ambiguity, we mean the fact that single words or phrases may refer to more than one referent, even after we have examined their contexts. Verbal disagreements are based upon this type of ambiguity. Anderson (1962:175).

Any statement containing a word which is ambiguous in its context will exemplify this vice. Let us examine this example given by Anderson: "The early Christians were Communists". Since the word "Communists" has more than one referent in this

context, ambiguity exists. "Communist" means one who favours a system of social organization in which goods are held in common; "communist" also means an advocate of "the dictatorship of proletariat". Before we affirm or deny the truth of the statement, we should find out what the writer means. Questions may also involve simple ambiguity, as in "Do you believe in god?" 'god' means different things to different persons and yes – or – no answer is not appropriate until we learn what referent the questioner has in mind.

Spinoza, (as quoted by Anderson (1962:175), for example, defined God as "everything which exists". Spinoza was a deeply religious man whose pantheistic philosophy was permeated with devotion to God. The Catholic Church, however, condemned his pantheism as equivalent to atheism.

Huddleston (1996:10) asserts that simple ambiguity is closely related to "vagueness", but should be distinguished from it. An ambiguous word has several distinct referents; a vague word lacks precision and definiteness in its reference. Thus, the question, "Has there been any progress during the past 2,000 years?" involves the use of the vague word "progress". The reader spontaneously responds to such a question with his own questions. "progress, in what sense? In spiritual growth? In the advancement of the common man? In a material sense?". The

word progress is 'vague' rather than ambiguous, for each case it means advancement toward a definite goal", but the question does not specify the goal involved.

Vagueness, rather than ambiguity, will also be found in the following incident. In the summer of 1947, General Eisenhower was reported to have said that "the United State Army is a poor second" to that of Russia". Congressman Short asked, "In what sense?" in quantity? In quality? The United State Army has never been equal to the Russian Amy, in size either in war or peace. Here too, "poor second" is not ambiguous, since it means "far behind the first"', but its meaning is not precise.

Simple ambiguity has two forms according to Anderson. The written and oral. The phonetic sound 'tears' may stand for two different words: 'tiers' and 'tears'. An amusing example of oral ambiguity based on this sound is found in the following:

A reporter was describing a scene at the House of Common to another reporter. "There, on the floor of the house, stood the prime Minister speaking, he said, "back of him were the members of the opposition, and in tiers around him sat the other members of the House".

The second reporter was very young and very earnest, "Not really in tears, "he exclaimed. "Poor Chaps!"

Simple ambiguity lies on the basis of much humour especially in puns as in Wordsworth's remark, "If I had a mind to, I could write like Shakespeare"

2.3.2 A MBIGUITY OF AMPHIBOLY

"I shall lose no time in reading your manuscript", the noted critic wrote to the aspiring author. Should the author have been pleased with this message? Would the critic read his manuscript soon or never?.

The critic's remark is an example or an amphibolous sentence. Its meaning is ambiguous though no word in the sentence is ambiguous. The ambiguity results from the way in which the words are put together in the sentence.

According to Anderson, amphiboly refers to "the fact that the meaning of a sentence may be ambiguous not because any of its words are ambiguous, but because the grammatical construction of the sentence permits several interpretations of its meaning". The amphibolous sentence is capable of being understood in more than one sense. This may result in a failure of communication. A sentence combines words in order to express a thought.

The referents have a certain relationship in the mind of the speaker. The grammatical construction of the sentence may fail

to direct the reader's mind to the relationship referred to by the speaker. The logician calls attention to these factors. The grammarian seeks to teach writers how to make themselves clear (Huddleston 1966:95).

Grammarians have noted a type of error similar to amphiboly in the error called 'dangling participle' as in "Zooming along under her own power, Jane was fascinated by the spectacle of the glides before her". The participle "Zooming" seems to refer to Jane. The words are unambiguous but ambiguity results from the manner in which the words are put together (the position of the participal phrase).

A famous historical source of amphiboly is found in the Delphic oracle, in ancient Greece.

The oracle was certainly the most astute diplomat who ever lived and also the Nostredamus of its time, except that, unlike Nostrademus, the circular pronouncement are right 100% of the time. This success was due to the use of amphiboly. The oracle was consulted on the eve of great undertakings, in order to obtain its "inspired" predictions as to success or failure.

The oracle always retained its reputation for infallibility because of the manner in which it made its pronouncement: "Apollo says that Greeks the Persians shall subdue".

Cyrus the Persian King, sent messengers to the oracle for a prophecy concerning a projected war. The messengers were informed that "the King yet lives that Cyrus shall depose". The variant interpretations of these statements are obvious. Amphibolous sentence of the type just noted may be called completely amphibolous in that the reader does not know how to interpret them correctly.

It is impossible to state whether a sentence is true or false until we understand its meaning. An amphibolous sentence must be given a definite interpretation before we can judge it as true or false. For example, a man says "All women are not fickle". By this he may mean either that "some women are not fickle" or that "no women are fickle". If the writer is available we should question him to determine what he meant. If he is not available, how shall we interpret the statement?

2.3.3 AMBIGUITY IN EMPHASIS

Anderson asserts that ambiguity of emphasis occurs when a reader does not know which parts of a writing deserve chief emphasis. For instance, a unit of discourse may make different kinds of sense depending upon which of its parts the writer accents or emphasizes. When writing is ambiguous in respect of

emphasis, the reader may be unable to determine where the proper emphasis lies.

Troublesome cases of this sort occur when a writer presents somewhat conflicting points of view; as in Book V of Plato's Republic, concerning the nature and status of women in his ideal state. The reader will find remarks such as, "The only difference between men and women consists in the fact that women bear and that men beget children". "Women should be trained to qualify as rulers of the state". But elsewhere, Plato says that "women are inferior to men in all pursuits followed by each". Again, that "men and women possess the same qualities and differ only in their comparative strength and weakness".

Does Plato believe that women are essentially the same as men, or does he hold that the weaker sex is the inferior sex? No one can answer this question with certainty.

Another example is given by Allen (1986:86), "when the former U.S. President Ronald Reagan was giving his age. According to the U.S. President Ronald Reagan, "I am at the moment both 70 and 72 " In everyday world, it is anomalous to claim to be both 70 and 72 at the same time because only one of these is possible.

When summaries are made of writings, ambiguity of emphasis may create similar difficulties. The summaries should

emphasize the most important elements. When excerpts and quotes are given they should be truly representative of the author's meaning. Summaries, however, open the door to many errors of carelessness or deliberate misinterpretation. Book reviewers are often accused of "not having read the whole book" when the author thinks that his position has been misinterpreted. The reviewer's misinterpretation, however, may be due in whole or in part to the author's failure to make his points clear or the author may state somewhat conflicting positions as seen in the above examples.

This is also reflected in my research where students fail to make their points clear in their writings.

Another problem concerning emphasis is seen in problems of punctuation. For instance, literary scholars seek to interpret Shakespeare's meaning accurately, but there are variant readings of many of the plays. The Folio and the second Quarto editions, the oldest sources, differ in many respects. Consider the different possible readings of Shakespeare's hamlet's speech to Guilderstern (11, 2, 315). The Neilson and Hill version of the speech, based upon the Quarto version in Anderson (1962:125) is stated as follows:

> What a piece of work is a man!
> How noble in reason:
> How infinite in faculty!
> In form and moving!
> How express and admirable in action!

How like an angel in apprehension!
How like a God!

The everyman's edition, following the folio version, prints the lines as follow:

What a piece of work is man!
How noble in reason!
How infinite in faculty!
In form and moving how express and admirable!
In action like an angel!
In apprehension how like a god.

2.3.4 THE AMBIGUITY OF SIGNIFICANCE

The ambiguity of significance refers to statements whose semantic meaning may be clear, but whose factual significance is not. A statement may contain no ambiguous words, its sentence structure may convey unambiguous meaning, and it may contain no ambiguities of emphasis. But its significance may be ambiguous. Anderson (1962:128) gives this illustration:

"There were 454 deaths due to traffic accidents in the United States during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend last year".

The significance of such a statement is ambiguous in many respects. An isolated fact means something, of course, we all deplore the large number of deaths reported. But its full significance would require knowing whether the number was higher or lower than the number killed during the previous year's holiday weekend and whether the figure, for a non-holiday weekend are higher or lower.

It should be apparent that alertness to this kind of ambiguity is almost synonymous with the scientific attitude. Every statement whatsoever will have different kinds of significance depending upon its context or surrounding circumstances.

It should also be obvious that this kind of ambiguity is not a genuinely semantical problem. We deal with it here only because it concerns a kind of uncertainty to which readers should be alerted and because ambiguity in its broad sense refers to doubtfulness or uncertainty. Many examples of such ambiguous isolated statements come to mind.

"There are four million unemployed in Nigeria". Up or down since last month? In comparison with last year? Many statements are ambiguous to the uninitiated though not to the well informed. "you have 3 billion germs in your mouth". What is the significance of that fact to a non-physiologist? In all the examples cited, we find statements whose referential meaning is unambiguous but whose significance is subject to varying interpretations.

The significance of many statements is ambiguous until we answer the questions: "Who said it?", and under what circumstances?" In a Law Court great weight is given to statements which are called 'admissions' against one's own interest.

Another important distinction pointed out by Huddleston (1996:97) concerns the question as to whether a statement is being made in jest or in earnest. "Smile when you call me that" is a type of comment which emphasizes the ambiguity of significance. A person whose humour is 'dry' often makes ironical or sarcastic statements that should not be interpreted literally. For instance, "Go on! No cause for alarm."

This type of ambiguity is not found in students essay. As a result this type of ambiguity would not be treated in this research.

2.3.5 GRAMMATICAL AMBIGUITY

According to Lyons (1975:112) "One of the most cogent reasons for recognizing that sentences and part of sentences, have "a non linear constituent – structure is that, it enables us to handle a large class of ambiguities at the grammatical level of description".

He said that "If the following three examples are compared, we shall see that ambiguity may function either of the distributional classification of the elements or of the constituent structure, or of both together.

(a) They can fish

(b) Beautiful girl's dress

© Some more convincing evidence.

In the case of the first example, "They can fish" (if they could fish, They may fish on the one hand, and they canned fish, they eat fish on the other), the ambiguity is accounted for by the double classification of both 'can' (as a modal auxiliary or a transitive verb) and fish (as an intransitive verb or a noun). Since the verb-phrase in an English sentence may consist of a transitive verb and a noun or of an intransitive verb with a preceding auxiliary (this is of course an over-simplified account), it follows that "they can fish" is analyzable in two ways.

There is, however, no difference of bracketing, under both interpretations the sentence is to be bracketed as "They (can fish)". By contrast, the ambiguity of (b) "beautiful girl's dress" is to be accounted for, not in terms of distributional classification or the elements (beautiful, girl, dress); but in terms of a difference of constituent – structure; under the interpretation "girl's dress" which is beautiful, the word "girl's" and "dress" form a constituent; under the other, 'dress of (a) beautiful girl', it is 'beautiful' and 'girl' that are (bracketed together to form a constituent. The third example combines both factors: the phrase (c) some more convincing evidence may be para-phrased, unambiguously, as either

(i) Some evidence which is more convincing or

(ii) Some more evidence which is convincing;

in other words, it can be bracketed into constituents as either.

(i) Some (more convincing) evidence, or

(ii) (Some more) (convincing evidence). But correlated with this difference of constituent – structure there is also a difference in the distributional classification of the elements. This becomes clear, if we substitute 'less' for 'more' and 'good' (or bad, etc) for 'convincing;' "some less convincing evidence" is not ambiguous, nor is some good evidence', nor is 'some better evidence, nor is 'some more evidence.'

The word more: belongs to (at least) two distributional classes:

(1) Like less, it combines with objectives to form adjectival – phrase, however, its distribution is more restricted than that of less, since more is here in complementary distribution with the suffix – er e.g. nicer vs more nice, etc. and

(2) Unlike less, it combines with the preceding "some" to form a modifier of nouns and noun-phrases. Yule (1995:87) opines that structurally ambiguous sentences have two different underlying interpretations which would be represented differently in the deep structure. (that is, an abstract level of structural organization in which all the elements determining structural interpretation are represented). For instance, "Annie whacked a man with an umbrella."

This sentence is structurally ambiguous. It could either mean that Annie has an umbrella and she whacked a man with it; or could mean that 'Annie whacked a man and he happened to be carrying an umbrella.

He also said that phrases can also be structurally ambiguous as in expressions like "the hatred of the killers". This could either mean 'some one hated the killers', or 'the killers hated some one'.

This type of ambiguity is the main focus of this research – Grammatical ambiguity can be found in students writing and the researcher hopes to find out how sensitive student are to grammatical ambiguity.

2.3.6 TRANSFORMATIONAL AMBIGUITY

One of the reasons for introducing the notion of 'bracketing' (or constituent structure) into the theory of grammar is that it enables us to account systematically for various kinds of ambiguity Lyons (1977:127). But there are many other ambiguous constructions in different languages which depend upon the 'deeper' connexions we have decided to call transformational rather than upon a difference of 'bracketing'. Palmer (1981:80).

Let us begin by taking a well-known example from traditional grammar. The English phrase "the love of God" is related to two sentences in English:

(1) a sentence in which God is the subject of the verb 'love' (if. God loves mankind);

(2) a sentence in which God is the object of the verb love (if mankind loves God). The phrase might still be ambiguous in particular sentences. It is the love of God which inspires men to work for their fellows.

One of Chomsky's most famous examples, the phrase 'flying planes' (in a sentence such as 'Flying Planes can be dangerous'), is ambiguous for much the same reasons as the 'love of God' is ambiguous. Under one interpretation, 'Flying Planes' is related to a sentence in which 'Planes' is the subject of 'fly' or are 'Flying', under the other to a sentence in which 'Planes' is the object of fly (cf. Planes fly vs John flies planes).

In traditional grammar, there is a distinction drawn between the particle and the 'gerund'. In so far as this distinction applies in English (and there are situations in which it is unclear). It might be formulated as follows: (a) A participle is a word which is derived from a verb and used as an adjective.

(b) A gerund is a word which is derived from a verb and used as a noun.

This distinction is clearly relevant to the analysis of an ambiguous phrase like 'flying planes'. If we consider the following two sentences (in which the principles of subject-verb concord 'disambiguate' the phrase in question).

(1) Flying Planes are dangerous

(2) Flying Planes is dangerous

The difference between the "participle" and the "gerund" comes out quite clearly. The verb 'are' in (1) is "plural" because its subject is planes, a plural noun, which is the head of the endocentric phrase 'flying planes': Moreover in (1) 'flying' is distributionally equivalent to an adjective (e.g. supersonic). The recognition of a head and a modifier in 'flying planes' in (2) is more probational: but flying is nominal and the whole phrase is the subject (cf. flying is dangerous).

Traditional statements about the "participle" and the gerund are transformational in nature. We can interpret them, to mean that a particular word (in the sense of "lexeme" may be "verbal" in one sentence and "adjective" in a transformationally related phrase, or "verbal" in one sentence and "normal" in a transformationally – related phrase. Without for a moment, considering the nature of the rules which might account for these relationships, let us merely say that in (1) the phrase 'flying planes' is to be derived by a rule which "transforms" the structure underlying a sentence like

'planes are flying' and assigns to the resultant noun – phrase the derived structure of adjective + noun; and that in (2) the phrase flying planes is to be derived by transformational rule from the structure underlying a sentence like' John flies planes' and assigns to the resultant noun – phrase the derived structural description noun + noun (the first of the two nouns, if any, being the one that controls concord). If we now assume that the rules of grammar generate sentences like (1) and (2) with both underlying (deep') and a derived ('surface') structural description, we have in principle exploited the 'subjective' and 'objective' interpretations of noun – phrases like 'flying planes'.

Transformational ambiguity is related to this research. This type of ambiguity is related to grammar. At times students do not put words (noun) close to the object they modify thereby open to different interpretations.

2.3.7 POLYSEMY

Allan (1986:150), postulates that in traditional semantics, two kinds of ambiguity had been distinguished. One of them is Polysemy. According to him, "Polysemy is by tradition the property of an emic expression with more than one meaning". In traditional lexicography a polysemic word is entered once in the

dictionary with its multiple meanings. He gave example with the polysemic noun bachelor:

Bachelor: (1) an unmarried man of any age.

(2) a person who has taken the first or lowest degree at a university: Bachelor of Arts.

(3) a young feudal knight who followed the banner of another

(4) a young male fur seal kept from the breeding grounds by older males.

The assumption made here by the lexicographers is that the emic word 'bachelor' is four ways ambiguous, morphological relatedness to determine that 'bachelor' is four ways polysemous rather than a set of two, three or four homonymns.

But the question is, are these kinds of semantic relatedness appropriate criteria for deciding that there is only one, polysemous noun lexeme "bachelor" rather than a number of homonymns?

This form of ambiguity is not of much relevance to this research. This is because the researcher is looking at sentences and not words.

2.3.8 HOMONYMY

Homonymy is the relation between two or more expressions, which have the same form but different meanings (Allan: 1986; 150). Take for example this conversation culled from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland:

'Mine is a long and sad tale!' said the Mouse, turning to Alice and sighing.

"It is a long tail, certainly", said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse's tail; 'but why do you call it sad?' Here 'tale' and 'tail' have the same sound but different meaning.

Homonymy is therefore, a relation holding between two or more expressions that have the same form but a different meaning. Complete homonymns have the same pronounciation and the same spelling: Classic examples are the nouns bank (a) "institution for the custody of money" and bank (b) "raised body of earth". The sentence below is ambiguous, partly because of their homonymy:

'A bird flew into the bank'. Another ambiguous sentence is: ' Jide says he hates boring students.

Here, is it Jide or the students who is/are boring?

He further explains that Homonymy can be sub-divided into Homophony that is, same pronounciation but different meaning

(Pale, Pail) and Homography, same spelling but different meaning (Plain, Plain).

The noun phrase "the Nigerian leather boot" is homographously ambiguous, but the meanings are:

(a) "the boot made of Nigerian leather

(b) "the leather for Nigerian boot"

© Homonyms may arise from a change in pronounciation and of spelling. Example of homophones 'sea and see'.

Homonyms could arise through euphemisms for instance, bull is ambiguous between "male ox – animal" and "rubbish, nonsense" – the latter being a euphemistic elliptical form of the metaphorical perjorative, "bullshit".

In addition, Homonyms also arise across different dialects or varieties of a language. For example, the following words have or may have, different meanings in British as against American English: braces, corn, knock up, pavement, robin, suspender vest and host of others.

This research focuses its attention on sentences and not homonymous words in students written communication.

2.3.9 LEXICAL AMBIGUITY

Lexical ambiguity has to do with lexical items that could be interpreted in two or more ways. In other words, they are words that are subject to two or more interpretations. For example:

(a) Reader – the word Reader can mean a book or he who reads. A third meaning is, an associate professor in a university

(b) Plain - Plain may mean obvious or open level field.

© Present - Present may mean available or gift.

(d) Table – object of furniture or table of figures.

P2.3.10 PHONOLOGICAL AMBIGUITY

Phonological ambiguity according to Alex (1992) has to do with "two or more words that are pronounced in a similar way but with different meanings and spellings". For instance,

(a) seen could mean (past participle of see) and scene (a view of)

(b) Write and right

© allowed and aloud.

This type of ambiguity is more common in speech and not in writing. Therefore, this research did not dwell on lexical ambiguity.

2.3.10 SYNTACTIC AMBIGUITY

According to Alex (1992:26) "Syntactic ambiguity concerns grammar. Such an ambiguity renders the entire sentence construction into two or more meaning".

This type of ambiguity is the same as grammatical ambiguity posited by Lyons. This form of ambiguity is very much relevant to this research. The researcher analysed the data collected to see how sensitive students are to ambiguity in their writings.

For example:

(1) Finding a knife in that bag worries me". This might mean:

(a) the idea of finding a knife in that bag worries me (don't expect it)

(b) the task of searching for a knife in that bag worries me because the task is great.

(2) The choice of that lady was challenged.

This might mean:

a. The lady chose someone and that person was challenged.

b. The lady was chosen and she was challenged.

(3) I will drink the beverage on the table.

This may mean:

(a) I will drink the beverage that is on the table

(b) I will drink the beverage while sitting on the table.

The focus of this research is on syntactic or grammatical ambiguity. This becomes imperative because according to Crystal (1983:230) "The most widely discussed type of ambiguity in recent years is grammatical or structural ambiguity. He defines syntactic ambiguity as " a sentence with more than two structural interpretations; this he said, to be referred to as "multiply ambiguous".

Crystal gave this example:

> "He didn't hit the dog"

This sentence is vague. It is not possible to state specifically fixed number of different underlying structures involved in its interpretation. (What did he hit? Did he do something else to the dog?)

Bolinger (1975:612) sums grammatical ambiguity up as being :

> "*More treacherous because writers tend to pay* less attention to constructions than to words."

Bolinger went further to state that:

> "Syntactic ambiguity distracts. This is because of some clearly statable form to meaning duplicity in the language . The reader comes with many other expectations that are much harder to formulate and yet may bait him in to traps equally dangerous if the writer does not lay out a clear path."

2.4 AMBIGUOUS SIGNALS

Ambiguity or double meaning, is students worst enemy when they write. This is so because it prevents a reader from

understanding students intended meaning. Students more often than not know what their intended messages are, but because of haste or inattention or for lack of knowledge they have expressed it in such a way that the reader receives more than one meaning. Ambiguous signals are those signals that make sentences unclear. This research will pair up the sources of ambiguity and give clear version of unclear examples given.

2.4.1 UNCLEAR PRONOUN REFERENCE AND PREPOSITIONS

A writer should guard against ambiguity in the use of pronouns. Pronouns are words used to stand for or take the place of a noun. Pronouns could be personal (he, she, it, they and so on) and demonstrative pronouns (this, that, these, those).

Mittins (1970) opines that "personal – and demonstrative pronoun patterns are very much like proper noun (John, Sally, Germany) except in one respect: the pronouns have antecedents (first and second person pronouns – I, me, you, we – do not have antecedents, for they refer unmistakably to the speaker or the person spoken to). Care should however be taken while using pronouns to avoid misinterpretations of what is written.

To explain further, a word like "she" will not occur while writing unless words such as "Amina", "my sister" or "the girl" has

previously been used. Moreso, one cannot start a discussion with she but you can start a discussion with Amina, my sister or the girl. There can be an exception to this rule in writing novels; where you have anaphoric or cataphoric reference. Here, you can start the novel with "she".

In conversation, the antecedent may be unexpected in the physical context. For instance, if two people observe a girl walking on the street, one may remark, "she looks like Jane, doesn't she?" But there is no such exception in writing. 'She' occurs in writing only if an antecedent for 'she' occurs.

Difficulties arise when the pronoun used has more than one possible antecedent as in the following sentence:

'Mary told her daughter that she wasn't going to get a *microwave for Christmas*'.

It is possible that a larger context might make this sentence clear, but as it stands, it is ambiguous. She is preceded by two nouns, either of which might be the antecedent and we do not know whether it is Mary or her daughter that will miss out on the microwave.

There are several ways of eliminating this ambiguity. The 'crudest' according to Robert is the following:

Mary *told her daughter that she* (Mary) wasn't going to get a microwave oven for Christmas.

'When Mary heard that she wasn't going to get a microwave oven for Christmas, she told her daughter'. The situation might permit a subtler solution:

'Mary complained to her daughter about not getting a microwave oven for Christmas'. (Mary expected the microwave).

According to Robert (1962:226), the English system works naturally in many ways to prevent this type of ambiguity. For example, if words for a boy and girl or a person and a thing or animal lie ahead of the pronoun, there need be no trouble.

Mary told her son that he wasn't going to get a typewriter for Christmas.

Mary told the dog that it wasn't going to get any supper.

It is only when words for two males or two females or things or groups precede the pronoun that one must take care to avoid ambiguity.

Another signal of ambiguity that students should guard against is, ambiguity in the use of prepositions. For example:

After washing the dishes turn upside down.

This sentence is open to two interpretations: the person should turn the dishes upside down or the person should turn upside down.

Another example is:

Throw the water with the baby. The person should throw the water together with the baby, or carry the water and baby will assist you in throwing it away.

Another problem that could arise in the use of pronoun is when pronouns are omitted from a sentence, ambiguity could arise. For instance:

"Always keep close".

Keep what close? (him, her or it?).

2.4.2 AMBIGUITY IN NOUN CLUSTERS AND VERB CLUSTERS

Noun clusters offer various possibilities of ambiguities. Consider this:

The girl in the train that has moved. Was it the girl that has moved or the train? We can't tell because we can't feel what the immediate constituents are. They could be either of these:

The girl in the train who just moved

The girl in the train which had moved.

This difficulty arises because of a particular requirement of noun clusters. If a prepositional phrase and a relative clause are used to modify a noun head word, the prepositional phrase must come first and the clause second. This means that the clause will have two nouns in front of it – the first noun and the noun that is

object of the preposition – and there must be a signal to tell which noun it goes with. Roberts (1962).

Note that the following are ambiguous and could be cut into their IC'S.

The girl in the train who had moved ('who' links the clause to the person not the thing).

The girl in the train that was moving (was links to the clause to the singular, not the plural).

Often the meaning of individual words will be signal enough:

The girl in the train that was waving since we think of girls but not trains, as wavers, we would presumably take this structure only one way. Reliance on such a signal according to Robert is risky, though. He further said that sometimes the writer's intention is clear enough, but a ridiculous alternative teases the reader:

The following are all at least doubtful:

The girl in the car that needed water

The girl in the car that reminded me of Aunt Sally.

The girl in the car that has just broken down.

Notice that it is not simply a matter of putting the modifier next to what it is supposed to modify. Suppose that the writer means that the car, not the girl reminded him of Aunt Sally – perhaps because it was long and sleek and gaudy – still "the girl

in the car that reminded me of Aunt Sally" is ambiguous even though the clause is right next to its intended headword.

Furthermore, in some cases, nouns in apposition are made to do the work of Adjectives. This practice can lead to ambiguity. (Brook, 1979:97), gave this example:

The headline 'Help the Aged Head' looks at first like an appeal for help on behalf of an elderly Headmaster, but it simply describes the appointment of a new Secretary-General of the Charitable Organisation called 'Help the Aged'.

In the same vein, ambiguity can easily occur in verb cluster. For example:

"'defended the man she loved with all her heart'"

Did she defend him or loved him? With all her heart?

Sometimes a very slight change is the difference between an ambiguous construction and unambiguous one. The first member of the following pair is ambiguous, the second is not.

(1) (a) Washed the boat on the shore

(b) Washed the boat unto the shore

(2) (a) The chair in the room in which she eventually sat.

(b) The chair on the porch in which she usually sits.

Frequently ambiguity can be avoided only by a radical change in the structure. Sometimes such a change will correct

other faults besides ambiguity (Hoffman 1993:70). The following construction is not only ambiguous but wordy:

The book in the car that is red. Either meaning can be expressed unambiguously in a simple construction.

This could mean the book is red or the car is red:

The red book in the car.

The book in the red car.

2.4.3 FAULTY PUNCTUATION AND EMPTY SUPERLATIVES

Aliyu (1996:135), opined that "in some sentences, the omission of comma could render the meaning of the statement absurd or akward or completely out of tune with the original intention of the writer". For instance:

The Director says the institute Journal has been guilty of picking the right man for the wrong assignment.

Here, comma after Director and journal would indicate it is the learned publication that is being quoted and not the Director. Note however, that we might avoid the clumsy interpretation by changing the entire word arrangement in the sentence into this:

The Institute journal, says the Director, has been guilty of picking the right men for the wrong assignment.

Bolinger (1975:606), advised that "the writer should put commas wherever an intonational break is needed to avoid ambiguity".

In addition, ambiguity can also occur when punctuation is misplaced or omitted. The intended meaning can be made clear by eliminating or supplying punctuation as needed.

Let us look at the following examples give by Ozick (1986:228):

Ambiguous: As I watched the Owl swooped over the ship.

Clear: As I watched, the Owl swooped over the ship

Ambiguous: Richard III is a play about an English King and his Court intrigues.

Clear: Richard III is a play about an English King, and his Court intrigues.

Ambiguous: At the kernel, we inspected the cages, and the dog runs.

Clear: At the kernel we inspected the cages and the dog runs.

Empty superlatives can also occur as ambiguous signals. We are to avoid empty or meaningless superlatives – words like outstanding, fantastic and marvelous that have become stale from over use. In their place we should use vivid descriptive words and phrases that allow our readers to visualize the experience we want to communicate.

We should also avoid excessive use of exclamation marks. Our words, not the punctuation should communicate the extent of our feelings.

Let us examine the example below:

Weak: That was a fantastic sunset!

Revised: The western horizon gradually turned
Crimson, then deep scarlet and finally blood red. The sky was aflame with colours.

Weak: We attended a terrific party.

Revised: We enjoyed the lively conversation,
The mouth-watering snacks and the opportunity
to make new friends.

2.4.4 DANGLING MODIFIERS AND MISPLACED MODIFIERS

You might have noticed that some modifiers dangle because a passive is used in place of the active construction in the sentence pattern:

"A ship was sighted" in place of
"He sighted the ship". This is no reason to avoid passives, one must just be a little careful in their use. Sometimes the passive is what is required. For instance, "seen for the first time, Mirabelle was often thought repulsive".

Not all words ending in '-ing' must be followed by words which name the performer of the action. Some '- ing' words are conventionally used in an impersonal sense, as in this example:

'Assuming that he knows his business, it might work out all right'.

It clearly does not name the assumer. Nevertheless, assuming is taken to mean "if one assumes" and the sentence is not ungrammatical. Other –ing words commonly used in this impersonal way are considering, surprising, admitting.

Verb clusters in which the verb is a past participle also dangle sometimes:

Caught red-handed with the stolen money,

his guilt seemed obvious.

This is written as if the cluster derived from the sentence. "His guilt was caught red-handed with the stolen watch, he seemed obviously guilty".

Similarly, "Arrested and put in prison, his mother's heart was broken".

Corrected: his arrest and imprisonment was broken".

An adjective cluster sometimes occurs as a dangling modifier. "Furious at the delay, a riot nearly broke out".

This is written as if the cluster were derivable from "The riot seemed furious", of course the cluster is not so derived, one should write instead:

"Furious at the delay, the customers nearly started a riot".

Carver (1986:158), sees a misplaced modifier as "a word, phrase or clause that does not point clearly to the word it was meant to modify". In some cases the positioning of a single word in a sentence can change the meaning significantly. Notice, for example, the difference that the positioning of almost makes in the following pair of sentences:

'It almost rained on everyday of our vacation'. (It never really rained). It rained on almost everyday of our vacation. (It rained quite often).

The words are far from the noun or pronoun they were intended to modify. To avoid ambiguity efforts should be made to move the modify nearer to the word it modifies.

The following examples are given: - In Carver (1986:159),

Ambiguous: We admired the building driving down the street.

Clear: Driving down the streets, we admired the buildings.

The second sentence in the pair makes clear who is driving. In some cases a modifier is left dangling, with no noun or pronoun that it can logically modify. To avoid ambiguity, rephrase the sentence.

Ambiguous: Sitting in the Court-yard, the sun was warm.

Clear: Sitting in the Courtyard, Aisha enjoyed the warm sun.

2.5 THE EFFECTS OF AMBIGUITY ON STUDENTS WRITING

Ambiguity possess numerous advantages that could be used deliberately by writers to show creativity. According to Hofmann (1993:99),

> "...Ambiguity can be put to good use by a capable writer or speaker,... vagueness can be virtue for it entices the reader to provide an interpretation from his own experience. It makes reading a creative process, as is found in good poetry ..."

Hofmann goes further to assert that:

> "... a really capable writer will even create ambiguities that make good sense in two or more different ways. Some readers may interpret it one way, others another, and some will read it both ways to get some mixture of two meanings".

Inspite of the fact that the effect of ambiguity in students writing can be positive as seen above, the disadvantages however, outweigh the advantages.

One of the negative effects of ambiguity in students writing is that it can constitute an obstacle in students efforts to communicate their ideas, feelings or reasoning to the teachers Aliyu and Adeloye (1986:95), are of the opinion that "there is a significant relationship between students perception of the clarity

of essay questions and the quality of their performances on those questions". They went further to state that:

> Many of the students seemed totally uninitiated into the realm of ambiguous discussion questions, where it makes good sense to write about both sides of an argument and to incorporate some well – informed personal opinion. (Aliyu & Adeloye 1989:102).

Due to a particular way that words are arranged by students, ambiguity can thus result thereby creating the possibility of two or more meanings by the same sentence. For example:

"Loving men can be dangerous". Because of the way that the words were arranged, different interpretations can be given to this sentence. For instance, the sentence could mean: "To love men can be dangerous" or "Men with loving manner can be dangerous".

The use of ambiguity mutilates what would otherwise have been a direct interpretation of a sentence. The disadvantage of recourse to ambiguity especially in students writing is made manifest by the fact that it could lead to failure of students in tests and examinations. This is mainly because answers to questions would be full of nothing but contradictions.

Moreso, students who are not gifted with the art of thinking fast are bound to have disjointed and muddled thoughts any time they are confronted with works fraught with ambiguity. Disjointed

and muddled thoughts on the other hand may lead to hasty fitting of words.

We can similarly detect ambiguity in defective punctuation, noun and verb clusters, and dangling modifiers. Similarly, ignorant use of words by students while writing, may make nonsense of their ability to express themselves well. If we use letter writing as another example, letters written to parents, relations or close friends that are fraught with ambiguous words may cause confusion since accurate meaning of the intended message will be lost.

Also, most scholars are of the view that ambiguity should be avoided by students as much as possible to create avenue for effective communication.

Alex (1992:28), opines that ambiguity is a sign of weakness in structural language of students. Hence when noticed by students or writers, effort should be made to reframe the sentence(s) in a way that make(s) the meaning(s) unmistakable and clear.

Nwabuikwu (1998:17), advises that "It is ultimately wiser to steer clear of any statement/sentence that is fraught with ambiguity". For ambiguity can lead to students losing substantial marks during tests or examinations.

2.6 THE N.C.E III SYLLABUS

The research closely examined the syllabus of the N.C.E III students of the Federal Colleges of Education Zaria and Kano. The researcher observed that, the syllabus was based on the minimum standards for Nigeria Certificate in Education. This, therefore, means that, the syllabus is uniform across all the Colleges of Education in the Country.

Furthermore, the researcher also observed that the syllabus was tilted in two dimensions. These are:

i. Remedial

ii. Developmental

The syllabus is remedial in nature in the sense that, it sets out to include courses that would remedy what is lacking in the students; especially in the weaknesses that have been traced to their level.

These include areas in Grammar. There are courses like: an introduction to grammar; parts of speech: general description, articles, verbs-time; Tense and aspect, introduction to phonetics and phonology, qualifiers, indirect speech/direct speech, Active and passive voices, Registers, synonyms and antonyms e.t.c.

The syllabus is also developmental. The developmental features are based on the areas of needs identified for students at that level. Examples of courses that are developmental are: Applied English Linguistics, critical Theory/practical criticism, summary writing skills, children literature, long Essay e.t.c .

However, inspite of all these beautiful courses mentioned above, the researcher observed with concern that ambiguity is not one of the content areas to be covered at the N.C.E. III Level. The researcher is of the opinion that ambiguity should be given a great consideration and should be included at this level. This will greatly help in effective communication between student and teachers and vice versa. The students should be sensitized in the realms of ambiguity. This will aid in making them better writers of English. If the students are highly sensitized there would be better performance during writing of assignments, tests and examinations. For the students will write clearly and concisely without any form of ambiguity that would frustrate effective communication.

In addition, as teachers under trainee, there is a great need to be able to communicate both orally and in written form without double or multiply meanings read into what should otherwise be precise. It is therefore pertinent that the

syllabus should be expanded to include ambiguity. These should include both oral drills and written exercises. This would improve the students performance and sensitize them in the realms of ambiguity.

In conclusion, a change in the method of teaching would be a welcome development as this would change the method of teaching from lecture method to integrative approach of teaching. This would go a long way to help make the students better users and writers of the English Language.

3.0 CHAPTER THREE

3.1 DATA COLLECTION

3.2 THE DESIGN

This study is designed to affect the N.C.E. III students in Federal Colleges of Education, Zaria and Kano.

It seeks to examine how sensitive students are to ambiguity. Emphatically, it examines why ambiguity occurs; the effect of this on students' input in their academic pursuit.

In respect of this, performance tests were designed and administered. The performance tests are divided into four sections. Section A, B, C and D.

3.3 THE SAMPLE

The main focus of this research is a kind of investigation into the processing of syntactic ambiguity in English. The samples used are made up of N.C.E. III students of Federal Colleges of Education, Zaria and Kano. The selection cuts across only NCE III students who are studying English.

3.4 SAMPLING PROCEDURE

The sampling technique to be used by the researcher is going to be based on the population that is selected for study.

Random sampling procedure was used to limit the scope of points for the entire population.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION PLAN

The researcher issued out test questions to sampled students personally. Respondents were requested to answer the questions promptly.

3.6 DATA GATHERING TOOL: PERFORMANCE TEST

The main focus of this experimental design is the pursuit of experimental methods whereby grammatical and semantic inquiry can be put in a satisfying objective basis. The techniques are designed to cope with a multifaceted acceptability test which is therefore directly relevant to the investigation which is geared towards acceptability of how ambiguity influenced students writing, in this case, the N.C.E. III students of Federal Colleges of Education, Zaria and Kano.

PERFORMANCE TESTS are used in this research. Performance test is the method of inquiring into subject's use.

Performance tests comprise operational tests and completion tests, differentiated according to the type of tests required of informants.

In operational tests, subjects are asked to give interpretations to sentences given. Performance tests constitute an indirect method of eliciting informants' reaction.

Operation tests comprise compliance and selection tests differentiated according to the nature of linguistic problem under investigation. In compliance tests, some deviance is suspected in a string presented to subjects or in a sentence resulting from a change they are asked to make; non-deviance sentences are interpreted. For control and for contrast. However, in some compliance tests, the deviance only emerges as a result of the task performed by subjects.

Selection tests are designed to investigate divided usage and they resemble compliance tests in the sense that the sentence presented to subject is not thought to be deviant. Subjects are required to choose (whether or not they are conscious of choosing) between two or more variants.

Forced-choice selection tests are similar to selection tests in the sense that there is a limited set of items to choose and a limited set of environment in which their selected form is used, is presented to subjects.

Selection and forced-choice will therefore be used in this research.

3.7 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The method of collecting data for this thesis is done through performance test; selection test and forced-choice selection test.

Selection test is the presentation of sentences to subjects who are required to choose between two or more variant forms. In this research, paragraphs are used and students are to tick at least two interpretations that can be reached; variant forms i – iv are presented to subjects.

Forced-choice selection test is a process by which limited sets of items are presented and subjects are to choose from them. In this wise, expressions and word groups are used as forced-choice tests and subjects are asked to tick at least two interpretations that can be reached from the expressions and word groups given.

Collection of data and information plays the most significant role in research findings. This is so, because, it is through the information or data collected that a researcher can validate and make his finding reliable.

The data collected is reliable or dependable as a true representation of what population is, think, feel, desire about the issue in the study, where there is no bias or distortion in the information received and the information received is complete or

at least comprehensive and all things being equal, the same questions call for the same range of answers within the same population we can say the research data is reliable, any inference(s) drawn from it is/are reliable too.

3.8 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The method of data analysis is simple percentage. This is because the research does not require a complex analysis. The researcher would administer 100 questions to students of English language in N.C.E. III to determine how sensitive they are to ambiguity in their written communication.

The researcher would analyse the data gathered from respondents into percentage in order to find out the level of their sensitivity to ambiguity with a view to guiding them in their writing.

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 DATA ANALYSIS

4.2 INTRODUCTION: -

As stated in the preceeding chapters, this research sets out to examine how sensitive students are to ambiguity and how well they can give different interpretations to sentences in their writings.

In this regard, the research attempted a detailed analysis of the N.C.E. III students' responses to the test questions administered to them. This is to enable the N.C.E. III students (that is the terminal point) have enough exposure to ambiguity and whether they have adequate knowledge of how ambiguity can hinder effective communication.

The need for this arose because of the importance attached to effective communication in English especially while writing. Considering the fact that meaning of sentences are not always as precise as they first appear to be. One has to be careful not to be ambiguous while writing.

It is therefore with this in mind that it became inevitable to keep abreast of trends in English language and try as much as possible to be concise and clear while communicating especially while writing in school.

In order to achieve this, the researcher used two tools / instruments to gather details. This include:

(a) Library work

(b) Administered test questions to N.C.E. III students of F.C.Es Zaria and Kano.

The analysis and interpretation of the data collected through the above enumerated tools, shall be the main subject of this chapter. It should, however, be noted that the library research carried out was used for the literature review of this research.

4.3. RESULT OF THE TEST QUESTIONS ADMINISTERED

A total of one hundred (100) test questions were administered to the N.C.E. III students of the two Colleges of Education. The researcher was able to collect all the administered test questions back.

It was possible to get all the test questions back because the researcher personally administered the test in the classrooms.

In addition, immediately the time alloted for the test was over, the respondents handed over all the answers to the researcher.

Below is the statistical representation of the students responses to the questions asked. This gave the researcher one hundred (100%) of the students' population.

4.4 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The scores of the students' performance in the test is computed below. The numbers that passed were arrived at by taking the scores of students that got eight (8) and above over twenty (20) while Zero – seven (0-7) over twenty (20) failed.

SECTION A: PARAGRAPHS

TABLE 1: RESPONSES ON THE PARAGRAPHS

Scores	Frequency
0 – 7	55
8 – 9	10
10 – 11	10
12 – 13	15
14 – above	10
TOTAL	100

What we can thus infer from the above representation is that majority of the students failed the test (55%) while 45% formed the total number of those that passed. Any score from 0 – 7 failed the test.

In this section, the researcher observed that the kind of responses given by the students were tentative acceptance and rejection of hunches. For instance, some students were slow in responding. They were confused as to which of the two variants out of the four given were correct. The variants all seemed to be correct to them. During the course of marking their responses, the researcher observed that there were lots of cancellations in the process of ticking the correct answers.

This showed that the student were not sensitized to the realms of ambiguity hence the poor performance in this section.

SECTION B: EXPRESSIONS

In this section, the students were asked to indicate by ticking two interpretations that could be reached from twenty expressions. The responses were analysed as follows:

Scores	Frequency
0 – 7	40
8 – 9	10
10 – 9	15
12 - 13	10
14 and above	25
TOTAL	100

From the tabular analysis of the responses on expressions by the students, we can see that 60% of the students passed while 40% of the students failed. It is then clear that the students performed better in answering questions on expressions than on the paragraphs where 45% passed while 55% failed. Though one cannot give a conclusion now until the responses from the other sections are analysed.

To the surprise of the researcher, the students performed better in ticking the correct variants of the twenty expressions given. However, expression such as the following gave the students problems:

i. To put one's foot in it.

ii. The man in the street

iii. To show white feather

iv. To lead a dog's life

v. She left the counter note.

Most of the students ticked just one variant instead of two while some ticked the wrong variants.

SECTION C: RESPONSES ON WORD GROUPS

On word groups, the students were asked to indicate by ticking at least two interpretations that could be reached on each of the twenty word groups given. The responses are analysed thus:

Scores	Frequency
0 – 7	51
8 – 9	12
10 – 11	17
12 – 13	11
14 - above	09
TOTAL	100

The implication of the above is that 51% failed the test on word groups while 49% passed. This shows that the students are not so sensitive to ambiguity in relation to word groups.

The efforts made by the students based on the location of the ambiguity problem in word group was more difficult to process than the one in the expressions. Their level of sensitivity was very poor and below expectation.

SECTION D: CAPTIONS / HEADLINES

In this section, the students were asked to give at least two interpretations to 10 different captions/headlines. The response is tabulated below:

Scores	Frequency
0 – 7	65
8 – 9	15
10 - 11	10
12 - 13	06
14 - above	04
TOTAL	100

From the above table, the sensitivity of students to ambiguity is far below expectation or standard 65% of the students failed the test. Most of them left the last section of giving of interpretation to sentences blank while 35% passed the test. We can say, from the above, that a lot needs to be done with regard to ambiguity in the Colleges of Education. The report above, also shows that emphasis is not given to ambiguity. It is clear then, that ambiguity is thrown over board in terms of areas to be covered in Grammar.

In addition, the performance in this section was the worst of them all. Some students were slow in responding while majority of them did not respond to this section. They were limited in their level of making efforts to give interpretations to the captions. Majority of the students left the section blank. This now points to the fact that the students' attitude towards ambiguity left much to

be desired. Most of them believed that ambiguity is a 'dry' area in grammar and uninteresting to them. They see ambiguity as being difficult hence the poor sensitivity of the student to ambiguity.

5.0. CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.2 SUMMARY

This research concerns itself with the processing of syntactic ambiguity in English: A study of Federal Colleges of Education, Zaria and Kano students

English language has become a source of great concern particularly to educators, communication experts, manpower developers and language specialists in this country. There is great need for students especially at the tertiary institutions to write without being ambiguous. English language has become a world language and a greater percentage of the world population uses English as a means of interaction both nationally and internationally. In other words, the world at large is at the mercy of English language.

Competence and performance are developmental skills to practicalize the use of English among students in Nigerian tertiary institutions of learning.

This research is divided into five unequal chapters. The first chapter is introductory. In it, the researcher discusses how prevalent ambiguity is. The researcher also expresses concern over the seeming nonchalant attitude of students towards ambiguity in the colleges.

The chapter goes on to state the problem to be investigated. Ambiguity is not included in the syllabus at the N.C.E. level.

The significance of the study is also highlighted. The chapter went further to bring out the aims and objectives of the study. It aims at bringing out problem areas and advancing solutions to the problem.

In addition to the above, the chapter also dwells on the scope and delimitation of the study. Working definition of terms were also provided in this preliminary chapter.

The second chapter concentrates on the theoretical part of the research. That is the review of literature. Relevant materials to the research were reviewed in order to provide deep insight into the theoretical framework of the study. To do this effectively, the researcher refers to a number of text books, newspapers and journals.

The third chapter is the dealt with the data collection. It centred on the research designs and procedure, the method of data collection which were performance test items. The chapter also throws light on the data collection plan.

In chapter four, the data collected was analysed and interpreted. This was done in four sections. Under each section,

a number of questions were asked and the scores were interpreted accordingly.

The last chapter of the research is dedicated to the summary, recommendations and conclusion of the research.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the result from the interpretation of the analysis of the test in chapters four, the following recommendations are made:

(1) The teaching of ambiguity and ambiguous signals should be included in the course content of English students in our tertiary institutions.

(2) Ambiguity should also be included in the content of General English courses in our tertiary institutions.

(3) Since feelings and ideas are expressed through language, students should try as much as possible to use the right words for appropriate situations. They should also try to be concise and clear in the choice of words used for communication.

(4) Moreso, students should avoid using faulty punctuation as this could make the intended meanings unclear or unintended meanings read into what they have written.

(5) Secondary school syllabus should have ambiguity as a topic and should be examined by the WAEC in S.S.C.E Examinations.

(6) Writers of texts on English should devote more time to the treatment of ambiguity especially in students spoken and written communications.

(7) Curriculum developers should include the teaching of ambiguity in the school curriculum.

(8) Teachers should be conscious of using correct sentences and try as much as possible to be good examples for their students to emulate.

(9) Governments should give enough financial incentives to schools so that necessary texts can be bought for students to read and become better writers.

(10) In addition, dictionary should be made "a self accessible resource"

(Aliyu, 1991). This will help to minimize ambiguity.

It is to the researcher's conviction that if the above measures are taken, ambiguity will become minimal in the writings of students and there will be effective communication flow.

5.4 CONCLUSION

For the fact that most students have problem of ambiguity in their writings, the researcher has come to the conclusion that teachers should place more emphasis on ambiguous signals so that students can make correct sentences in a stretch of discourse. This will aid effective communication.

Students should learn to eliminate sources of ambiguity such as misplaced modifiers, ambiguous pronoun reference, empty superlatives and others that were mentioned earlier in the chapter.

Noun clusters, verb clusters and other signals must in addition, be carefully avoided through reading relevant linguistic materials as these materials will aid in correcting weak areas in students written work.

5.5 DIRECTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study was restricted to The Processing of Syntactic Ambiguity in English; a study of students written communication. Writing skill represent only one aspect of the four language skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing.

A starting point for further research therefore, is to include all the four language skills. Such a study may examine how ambiguity could affect listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Another line of research could be to pursue a Comparative Analysis of the influence of Ambiguous Signals Among undergraduate students.

In addition, A Comparative Analysis of the Sensitivity level of both the undergraduate and postgraduate students could be pursued.

In the Sampling Procedure, emphasis should be placed not only on N.C.E III English Students but also other level of N.C.E – I and II.

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF SCHOOLS USED

A. Federal College of Education, Zaria.

B. Federal College of Education, Kano.

APPENDIX B1

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR COLLEGES OF EDUCATION

MINIMUM STANDARDS

FOR

NIGERIA CERTIFICATE IN EDUCATION

LANGUAGES

REVISED EDITION

NOVEMBER, 1996.

ENGLISH AS A SINGLE MAJOR

1. **PHILOSOPHY**

The philosophy the idea of having a separate programme for English as a single major is informed by the necessity to cater for the needs of all those wishing to combine English with other subjects.

2 **OBJECTIVE**

Same as those for English as a Double Major

2. **ADMISSION REQUIREMENT**

i) General same as those for English as Double major, and indeed for all NCE students.

ii) Auditional: In addition to the general admission requirements candidates wishing to read English as a Single major must have the following:

a) A credit pass in the English at WASC/SSCE, GCEO/Level, or

b) A credit on the pass in Literature in English Examinations.

c) Any other qualification that may be added by an accredited

authority from time to time.

3. **FACILITIES**

Same as those for English as a Double Major

4. **PERSONNEL**

1) ACADEMIC:-

For effective teaching of English as a single Major, at least five (5) academic staff are needed. This number excludes the teaching needs of other departments offering English related courses such as GSE. Pre-NCE and PES. Academic staff should have at least a first degree with a second class Division, and minimum teaching qualification of NCE. Acquisition of a higher degree is an added advantage. Sufficient specialist Lecturers need to be provided to cater for all the major areas of Language: English Language, Literature, Methonology, Theatre. Theatre Arts Education and Drama.

ii) OTHERS:

Same requirements as those for English as a Double major.

6. **MODE OF TEACHING**

Same as for those for English as a Double Major.

5. **GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS. 2 (CREDITS) C**

All single major English students must earn a minimum of:

a. – Thirty-six (36) credits from English

b. - Thirty-six (36) credits from General Education

c. - Twelve (12) credits from – General studies

d - Teaching practice and projects requirements are same as hose for English as a Double major.

e. - Thirty-six (36) Credits from the second teaching subject.

8. **SUBJECT COMBINATION** 2 CREDITS)

English Language is combinable with any approved subject in the

minimum Standard, but this varies from college to college.

COURSE CONTENT

YEAR 1 - FIRST SEMESTER

ENG 112	Introduction to phonetics and phonology	Core	2
ENG 113	Grammar		- 2
ENG 115	Listening Skills		-2
ENG 116	Introduction to Lit/Literary Appreciation	Elective	2

YEAR - SECOND SEMESTER

ENG 121	Speech work 1	Core	2
ENG 122	*Reading Comprehension*	"	2
ENG 123	English Language Method	"	2
ENG 125	Modern African Literature	"	2

YEAR II - FIRST SEMESTER

ENG 211	The structure of English	Core 2
ENG 212	Composition	" 2
ENG 218	Selected European Authors	Elective 2
ENG 219	Literature Methods	Core 2

YEAR II - SECOND SEMESTER

ENG 222	Composition II	Core 2
ENG 223	Varieties of English	Elective 2
ENG 224	Theatre and Drama in Education	Core 2

TEACHING SEMESTER

YEAR III - FIRST SEMESTER

ENG 313	Applied English Linguistics	Core 2
ENG 314	Critical Theory/Practical Criticism	" 2
ENG 318	Female writer in Africa	Elective 2

YEAR III - SECOND SEMESTER

ENG 324	Summary writing skills	Core 2
ENG 326	Children Literature	" 2
ENG 329	Long Essay	Elective 2

N. C. E. ENGLISH

COURSE DESCRIPTION

ENG. 112 INTRODUCTION TO PHONETICS/PHONOLOGY

Same as ENG. 112 in Double Major

(2 CREDITS)

- Phonetics and phonology, definition and distinction
- Organs of speech of the mechanism of speech sounds:
- Consonants and Vowels
- Introduction to phonemic Transcription
- Stress; word-level and effects on pronunciation

Sentence level – emphatic and normal speech.

*Lecturers are to note that even though this course has a strong theoretical component, practical drills/practice are an essential part of the teaching.

The use of Language Laboratory should be emphasized.

ENG. 113 GRAMMAR I (2 CREDITS) C

- Grammar: an introduction
- Parts of speech: general description
- Nouns – articles-pronouns
- Verbs – time. Tense and aspect
- Prepositions and prepositional phrases
- Clauses and participial construction
- Adverbs – conditionals for adverbial clauses

- Adjective – relative pronouns for relative clauses: order of adjectives
- Sentences and their types
- Qualifiers
- Concord
- Indirect Speech/reported speech
- Active and passive voices
- Registers
- Synonyms and Antonyms

ENG. 116 INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE/LIT, APPRECIATION.

Same as ENG 116 in Double Major. (CREDITS) C

The course is designed to provide the students with the background knowledge, and in appreciation of the three Literary genres (prose, poetry of drama). The course will prepare them for all the other Literature courses on the NCE syllabus. Attention will be paid to the nature and functions of literature in society. Emphasis would be on the relationship between form (style/technique and content (message/subject matter/theme). For the purposes of illustration, a few texts should be randomly selected in the areas of prose, poetry and drama for intensive critical practice.

ENG. 114 PRACTICAL LISTENING SKILLS (2 CREDITS) E

- What is listening
- Techniques involved
- Ear training
- Cultivating good listening habits
- Listening for information
- Listening for carrying cut direction
- Listening for appreciation / evaluation
- Listening for academic talks, speeches, lectures etc.
- Anticipatory listening
- Listening for entertainment

ENG. 121 SPEECH WORK (2 CREDITS) C

- Drills in consonant and consonant contrasts
- Minimal pair/set drills in syllable-initial, medial and final position.
- Drills in vowels and vowel contrasts, minimal pair drills
- Further practice in phonemic transcription: effect of stress on pronunciation-word and sentence levels continued.
- Rhythm practice
- Intonation (contrast with tone in students' MT/L1)

: Intonation drills for sentence meaning / speaker' attitudes.

- Aural-oral discrimination practice:
- Listening to models of English speech, and practice in oral discrimination in the language laboratory or on recorded cassette.

ENG. 122 READING COMPREHENSION (2 CREDITS) C

- Word recognition
- Sentence comprehension
- Paragraph comprehension
- Text comprehension for areas like: inferential reading, critical reading for sequence.
- Intensive and extensive reading practice.

ENG. 123 ENGLISH LANGUAGE METHODS 1 (2 CREDITS) C

- Nature of language and now it is learned
- Distinctions between the learning/acquisition
- Teaching the four language skills using the contemporary language teaching methods
- The concepts of reading and reading readiness
- Method of teaching vocabulary
- Teaching reading skills.

ENG. 324 SUMMARY WRITING SKILLS (2 CREDITS) C

- Identifying key sentences or main point (s)

- Formulating key sentence(s) or main point (s)
- Separating supporting ideas from the main one(s)
- Learning to provide a title to a text
- Learning to identify author's intention

ENG. 211 THE STRUCTURE OF ENGLISH

(2 CREDITS) C

Morphology: Definition and scope

: The morpheme, and allomorphs

: Morphological process-affixation inflection, compounding, derivation etc, and their phonological realization.

: The word as a linguistic concept (word and lexeme.)

: Paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations.

Syntax: The English sentence: Structural types and constituents.

Sentence types: The phrase and clause.

(basic approach to demonstrate relationships between words in sentences and sentence types to be adopted).

Semantics: Semantic structure (Synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms etc.)

- Collocation and idioms, denotation and connotation

ENG. 212 COMPOSITIONS (2 CREDITS) C

- The basic components of composition writing
- Types of composition and their characteristics
- Formal and informal letters
- Punctuation.

ENG. 213 ENGLISH METHODS II (2 CREDITS) C

- Techniques of teaching language arts, teaching lexis and grammar
- Teaching handwriting
- Questioning and examination techniques
- Preparing and utilizing aids in language teaching.
- Lesson note preparation.

ENG. 214 EVALUATING AND DEVELOPING TEACHING MATERIALS

- Evaluating textbooks
- Evaluating lesson units
- Adapting materials for teaching
- Developing language teaching materials

ENG. 221 LANGUAGE TESTING (2 CREDITS) C

- Some basic questions in language testing
- Types of texts: Subjective, objective, multiple-choice, open-ended free response and close tests.

- Marking, scoring and analysis of results
- Testing listening, speaking, reading and writing skills
- Use of tests for teaching.

ENG. 222 COMPOSTION II (2 CREDITS) C

- Revision of essential features of composition writing Balancing the requirements of languages and format within different types of writing.
- Elements of some special forms of writing including: Technical writing especially report writing (e.g. accident report, duty report, lending over report, instruction manual minutes of meetings)
- Other forms of writing like.
- Personal data
- Diary keeping, memorandum writing

ENG. 223 VARIETIES OF ENGLISH (2 CREDITS) C

- Variety according to user - dialect
- Variety according to subject - register
- Regional variation (including status and role of written English in Nigeria)
- The National language question
- Analysis description of language use in written texts, recorded or spontaneous dialogue.

ENG. 314 CRITICAL THEORY/PRACTICAL CRITICISM

(2 CREDITS) C

The course aims at introducing students to the great critical debates so that they would see how different schools of thought perceive literary productions and their techniques of appreciation. The major schools would include the sociological formalist structuralist, Feminist, Marxist schools. Teachers are free to select any texts as bases of reference.

- The dramatic structure of Shakespeare's comedies and tragic comedies (e.g. As you like it, Merchant of Venice etc.
- An In depth study of one of Shakespeare's comedies. The plot. Themes, comic elements, and the tragic-comic elements.
- Shakespeare's poetry especially his great and moving sonnets (Select six)

ENG. 318 FEMALE WRITERS IN AFRICA (2 CREDITS) C

- The course aims at exposing students to the most important contributions of African women in the area of creative writing, The list should be updated from

time to time as few female writes emerge on the scene. The three literary centers of Poetry, Prose and Drama should be effectively covered.

ENG. 326 CHILDREN LITERATURE 2 (2 CREDITS)

The course aims at exposing students to children literature. This is to make them understand the philosophy, techniques and ideological focus-of-the large body of Literature produced for children. Although the bulk on the texts would be by African writers, it is important that a few texts from other sub-region are included to give a picture of what it happening elsewhere.

ENG. 329 PROJECT/LONG ESSAY (2 CREDITS) C

*Students reading English as single major are expected to write their projects in English. If, however, a student has written a project in another course, he should only be required to write a long essay in English as substitute for a project in English.

NOTE: This course is for English major students who are writing their projects in departments other than the English Department.

It should be a piece of extended writing on any topic in English Language or Literature in English chosen by students in consultation with their Lecturers.

The work should demonstrate scope and depth of understanding and holistic knowledge of the subject area by the student, as well as ability to use the English Language effectively in extended written formal discourse. It should also manifest.

Appropriate use of presentation and mechanical features especially in the areas of referencing, illustrating, insemination and generalization. The length should not be more than or about 3,000 words, clearly structured according to Rational/Background/Introduction, main body and Conclusion.

Like the project it should be supervised and typed. Two copies are to be submitted not necessarily bound.

APPENDIX B2

Department of English,

Ahmadu Bello University,

Zaria.

Dear Respondent,s

PERFORMANCE TESTS ON: THE PROCESSING OF SYNTACTIC AMBIGUITY IN ENGLISH: A STUDY OF FEDERAL COLLEGES OF EDUCATION, ZARIA AND KANO STUDENTS.

You are please requested to answer these questions on "The Processing of syntactic ambiguity in English: A study of F. C. Es Zaria and Kano students", for the purpose of a research being conducted for the award of M. A. English.

Your response does not require you to state your identify. Information received from you will be very beneficial to the realization of the research objective.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours faithfully,

MRS.RASHIDAT SALAWU ABDULRASHEED.

SECTION A: Time allowed: 40mins.

INSTRUCTION: Read the following paragraphs and answer the questions that follow:

1. The scorching flame of the sun these days especially in Lagos is indescribable. The flame stings on the skin like a ferocious brimstone even when air-Conditioner cools at full blast.

Question:

For the following sentence(s) taken from the above paragraph, indicate (by ticking) at least two correct interpretations that can be reached:

A. The flame stings on the skin like a ferocious brimstone even when the Air-conditioner cools at full blast.

i. The flame bites as a bee stings.

ii The flame is stuck on the skin.

Iii The flame is causing pain on the skin.

Iv The skin is stinging the flame seriously.

2. What leaves one bewildered is that the National Electricity Power Authority (NEPA) has chosen this flaming time when everyone needs electricity to prove for the umpteenth time that it is the most incompetent institution in the world.

Tick at least two correct interpretations from this phrase taken from the above paragraph:

B. ... this flaming time when everyone needs electricity...

i. Time is flaming too fast.

ii. Time is surrounding by fire.

iii. Time is still flying fast.

iv. The time is very hot.

3.. Electricity, according to Ige, is the blood of the nation, so it is. Our dream of industrial and technological growth will come to nought without a stable power supply. Go to hospitals and see how patients are roasting in heat due to power outage

Tick two interpretations that can be reached in the following sentences taken from the above paragraph:

C. "Electricity", according to Ige, "Is the blood of the nation".

i. Electricity has a red liquid just like human beings.

ii. The nation is blood for electricity.

iii. Electricity is the life-line of the nation.

iv. The nation is electricity fuel for growth.

4. To the best of my memory in 1998 a staggering #2,206 billion was give n to NEPA for the rehabilitation of Kainji, Shiroro, Afam and Delta Power Stations.

Tick at least two possible interpretations that can be reached from this expression taken from the above paragraph:

D. ...a staggering #2.206 billion was given to NEPA...

i. 2.206 billion naira is little for the project.

ii. Unsteady movement by #2.206 billion as in a drunk.

iii. NEPA will give 2.206 billion naira to the nation.

iv. An astronomical amount in terms of the money given.

5. A time has come to meet under an umbrella and sort things out to avert further blood-letting. First, government should listen to the voices of the people.

Tick two appropriate interpretations that can be got from these expressions from the above paragraph; for questions 5 and 6.

E. ... to meet under an umbrella ...

i. To meet under an umbrella to have shelter from the rain.

ii. To meet in different groups for different views.

iii. To meet under an association or patronage.

iv. To give umbrella to every individual in the country.

6. ... and sort things out ...

i. To deal with something squarely.

ii. To arrange things groups.

iii. To attack the enemies seriously.

iv. To find a solution to a problem.

7. Yesterday, when asked about Maria, Cardinal Thomas Winning said: The. day I start speaking to the News of the

world. Is the day I may as well hang up my robes.

Tick at least two interpretations that can be reached from the sentence below which was taken from the paragraph above:

G. The day I start speaking to the News of the world is the day I may as well hang up my robes.

i. He will hang his robes on a hook.

ii. He will give up the ghost.

iii. He will give up his priesthood.

iv. He will give his roles to his friend.

8. Mr. Nwachukwu, now suspecting foul play, went round several hospitals in Lagos, afraid that his son may have been arrested about the Beach by the police or perhaps hit by a hit-and-run driver. But no news at the hospital.

Bring out (by ticking) at least two possible interpretations that can be reached in the following expression from the above paragraph:

H. Mr. Nwachukwu, now suspecting foul play:

i. An action against the rules of a sport.

ii. The foul was too playful for his liking.

iii. An action that could be unfair or illegal

iv. He is suspicious of the fowl's action.

9. "Life is a battle", says Salawa Abeni; a musician. She

further added that, "I thank Allah for being by my side. You cannot expect everything to go smoothly. One needs to struggle and battle"

For the following sentence taken from above paragraph, indicate (by ticking) at least two correct interpretations that can be reached:

i. Life is a battle

ii. Life is called battle..

iii. Life is something you wrestle with.

iv. Life means to quarrel everyday.

v. Life is full of ups and downs.

10. He is not the only man experimenting. City lawyer and Chairmen of Nigeria Football Association supporters Club, Mr. Rotimi Pedro has floated a sports management firm.

Indicate by ticking two or more possible interpretations that can be reached from this sentence taken from the above paragraph:

i. Mr. Rotimi Pedro floated a sports management firm.

ii. To put a thing on water to float.

iii. To destroy something heartlessly.

iv. To launch a new business somewhere.

v. To bait a new business deal.

11. Those who stoutly resisted Obasanjo's candidature... easily pointed to his military background which stamped on him the image of a dictator...

Tick two or more interpretations that can be given to the following expression from the above paragraph:

K. Those who stoutly resisted Obasanjo's candidature

i. Those who are fat resisted Obasanjo's candidature.

ii. Those who strongly gave support to Obasanjo's candidature.

iii. Those who gave a strong resistance to Obasanjo's candidature.

iv. Those who drink dark beer resisted Obasanjo's candidature.

12. They argued that Obasanjo's military background would be a valued asset, especially in warding off professional coupists and putting the 'khaki boys' in their proper place.

Tick two interpretations that could be reached from the expression taken from the above paragraph:

L. ... and putting the khaki boys in their proper place.

i. The boys are named khakis.

ii. The boys are made from khaki cloth.

iii. The boys are friends with khaki.

iv. The boys are in the military.

13. One Mohammed ... expressed a "bureaucratic" regret at the incident and then flew a kite. The coke in question was faked.

Tick two appropriate interpretations that can be reached from this expression from the above paragraph:

M. ... and then flew a kite...

i. To make a kite fly high.

ii. To hold a big kite.

iii. To test possible public reaction rumours.

iv. To pull out a kite.

14. Then, Muhammed, who in a manner, was apparently speaking tongue in cheek, offered a replacement for the lethal product.

For the following expression taken from the above paragraph, indicate (by ticking) at least two correct interpretations that can be reached.

N. ... was apparently speaking tongue in check...

i. Was speaking in a pompous way.

ii. Was speaking in a funny way.

iii. Was speaking all the time to keep his anger.

iv. Was not expressing his true feelings.

15. His prison experience, they postulated, had greatly humbled him, and would put him on a firmer ground to fight

injustice and identify with the yearnings and aspirations of the common man, having experienced life at its highest and lowest forms.

For the following expression taken from the above paragraph, indicate (by ticking) at least two correct interpretations that can be reached.

O. ... and identify with the yearnings and aspirations of the common man...

i. To identify with an unpopular man.

ii. To identify with a man who is popular.

iii. To identify with a village man.

iv. To identify with the ordinary citizen.

16. One night, one of his female customers to whom had been served a bottle shouted at the bars.

Tick two appropriate interpretations that can be reached from this sentence from the above paragraph:

P. ...one of his female customers to whom had been served a bottle shouted at the bars.

i. She shouted a t the iron rods.

ii. She shouted at the errand boy.

iii. She shouted at the bar tender.

iv. She shouted at the sky.

17. This never happens abroad or else you call your attorney and you sue the product manufacturer through the nose, he fumed.

For the following sentence taken from the above paragraph, indicate (by ticking at least two correct interpretations that can be reached:

Q. ... and you sue the product manufacturer through the nose...

i. You should use note to sue the product manufacturer.

ii. You should sue the product manufacturer's nose.

iii. You should cut the product manufacturer's note out

iv. You should sue him and make him pay excessive price.

18. If the idea of the agitators... is to find better ways of enhancing the working of our federal structure, then it is a welcome development.

For the following sentence taken from the above paragraph, indicate (by ticking) at least two correct interpretations that can be reached:

R. ...it is a welcome development.

i. The development is welcome from a journey

ii. The welcome is rapid developing.

iii. It is a well accepted idea.

iv. It is the least expected idea.

19. They are recycling the same argument about oil smuggling; he has a feeling that the oil money was stolen.

S. He has a feeling that the oil money was stole.

i. The stolen money was made of oil.

ii. Oil owns money, so it is rich.

iii. The wealth got from the sales of oil was stolen.

iv. The oil was stolen by a thief.

20. So when analyzing some of the unpopular actions of president Obasanjo, one only needs to take a trip down memory lane to fathom an answer.

For the following sentence taken from the above paragraph, indicate (by ticking) at least two correct interpretations:

T. ...one only need to take a trip down memory lane...

i. One should take a trip down the narrow lane.

ii. One should travel abroad once a year.

iii. One should go back to past events.

iv. One should take a trip to the rural areas.

SECTION B:

Read the following expressions carefully and indicate (by ticking) at least two interpretations that can be made from each.

1. The man with the leaking pocket.

i. James has a hole in his pocket.

ii. James likes leaking his pocket.

iii. James spends money recklessly

iv. James is deliberately leaking his pocket.

2. She left the counter note.

i. She left a note called counter.

ii. She left a note on the table.

iii. She left a note on the chair.

iv. She left a contrary note to the former.

3. We are expecting the August visitor to the College.

i. The visitor is August by name.

ii. The visitor is expected at the eighth month.

iii. The visitor is a stranger to the College.

iv. The visitor is of high repute in town.

4. In the same boat.

i. In the same ship while traveling.

ii. Working on the same team.

iii. In exactly the same position.

iv. Belonging the same tribe.

5. At a loose end.

i. Having no money.

ii. Having nothing to do.

iii. Without any future.

iv. Not knowing what to do.

6. To lead a dog's life

i. To have a miserable existence.

ii. To always follow behind the rest.

iii. To give no peace to somebody.

iv. To be greedy and lazy.

7. To make both ends meet.

i. To settle quarrel between friends.

ii. To live within one's income.

iii. To solve difficult problem.

iv. To balance one's income with one's expenses.

8. Sitting on the fence.

i. Staying neutral, not taking sides.

ii. Having a very favourable advantage.

iii. Sitting on the wooden rails round the garden.

iv. Suffering great discomfort.

9. It makes my mouth water.

i. It makes me feel sick with disgust.

ii. It arouses me feel sick with disgust.

iii. It fills me with fear.

iv. It is highly appetizing.

10. To be in the red.

i. In debt.

ii. Out of favaour.

iii. Having menstruation.

iv. Freed from trouble.

11. To be on one's feet.

i. Be in good health.

ii. To be standing.

iii. To be weak.

iv. Rise to speak.

12. To put one's foot in it.

i. To stand firmly for ones belief.

ii. To make a mistake socially.

iii, To get a good start on the job.

v. To physically put one's foot on something.

13. The man in the street.

i. A typical citizen

ii. The illiterates.

iii. A person standing on a road.

iv. The average person.

14. To bury the hatchet.

i. To hide a weapon in a hole.

ii. To work with all your strength.

iii. To decide to forget past quarrel.

iv. To start cultivating the bush.

15. To take the bull by the horns.

i. Make friends with your enemy.

ii. Tackle the problem boldly and bravely.

iii. Boast about your strength and skill.

iv. Take an animal by its horns.

16. To show the white feature.

i. The colour of a bird's feather.

ii. Show others how to do something.

iii. Be a very fast runner.

iv. To be a coward.

17. To face the music.

i. To be bright and cheerful all the time.

ii. To take the punishment for something done wrong.

iii. To live too high and extravagant life.

iv. To turn to the tape playing the music.

18. To burn the midnight oil.

i. To burn oil that is named midnight.

ii. To burn oil when it is midnight.

iii. To be like the foolish virgins.

iv. To study late into the midnight.

19. Out of frying pan into the fire.

i. Going from one bad situation into another worse one.

ii. Having a very narrow escape from death.

iii. The food fell out of the frying pan into the burning fire.

iv. Causing a serious accident.

20. Cut your coat according to your cloth.

i. Work hard at whatever job you are given.

ii. Do not sew a dress that is more than the materials.

iii. Do not give up African dress for European suit.

iv. Keep your expenses within limits of your income.

SECTION C:

Read the following word groups carefully and indicate (by ticking) at least two interpretations that can be made from each:

1. A light weight representative of the famous college.

i. A person whose weight is on the light side.

ii. A very important personality of the College.

iii. A not too important personality of the College.

iv. A very popular person in the society.

2. To step on someone's toes.

i. To be on alert.

ii. To tread on somebody's toes

iii. To be ready for action.

iv. To hurt somebody's feelings.

3. To come in through the back door.

i. To come in through the door at the back of a house.

ii. To come late to work.

iii. To obtain an unfair advantage.

iv. To come in like an important person.

4. To go to the bad.

i. To become ill.

ii. Become completely immoral.

iii. Become unfit to eat.

iv. To become ruined.

5. To keep something in mind.

i. To bear something in mind.

ii. To keep mute.

iii. To keep malice

iv. To be sensitive to things.

6. To be taken a back.

i. To take something back.

ii. To be taken backwards.

iii. To be deceived again.

iv. To be startled by something.

7. To run into something/somebody.

i. To knock something/somebody down.

ii. To run to meet something/somebody.

iii. To meet something/somebody suddenly.

iv. To quarrel with something/somebody.

8. To be a live wire.

i. To be active and energectic.

ii. Not to agree with any proposed plans.

iii. The wire was too naked.

iv. To have an explosive temperament.

9. For want of evidence.

i. For liking an evidence.

ii. For lack of evidence.

iii. For refusing an evidence.

iv. For insufficient evidence.

10. To hit the nail on the head.

i. To guess a thing right/wrong.

ii. To disclose a secret to someone.

iii. To say the truth as it is.

iv. To be angry and ready to fight.

11. His hands were clean.

i. He explained himself satisfactorily.

ii. His hands were well washed.

iii. He was proved to be guilty.

iv. He was proved to be innocent.

12. We don't see eye to eye.

i. We don't see each other often

ii. We don't have strong views on things.

iii. We don't have identical views.

iv. We do have identical views.

13. Live from hand to mouth.

i. Use one's fingers to eat.

ii. Have no savings but can survive

iii. Cannot feed on one's wages.

iv. Eat a great deal.

14. A wolf in sheep's clothing.

i. One looks like a wolf

ii. One is dressing in sheep's clothing.

iii. One is a good person.

iv. One is not to be trusted.

15. Buring a candle at both ends.

i. Exerting oneslf beyond one's strength.

ii. Could do two things successfully

iii. Has some candles lit at both ends in the room.

iv. Would soon give up one of the things.

16. An old hand at teaching.

i. Has since retired from teaching.

ii. A person of long experience.

iii. Isn't aware of modern teaching methods.

iv. Has aged hands and ideas.

17. To keep an eye on the child.

i. Watch the child all the time.

ii. Keep the child very busy.

iii. Remove an eye and keep on the child.

iv. Feed the child continuously.

18. To give one quite a turn.

i. To make one turn around.

ii. To give one turn to do something.

iii. To make one change one's mind.

iv. To shock someone suddenly.

19. To develop cold feet.

i. One's feet suddenly becomes cold.

ii. To become unnaturally calm.

iii. To become suddenly frightened.

iv. To refuse to move an inch.

20. To avoid loss of face.

i. To appear in a disguise form.

ii. To avoid one's face being injured.

iii. To avoid being publicly humiliated.

iv. To exert revenge against a foe.

SECTION D :

Give at least two interpretations to the following captions:

1. Fuel for Death:

i.

ii.

iii.

2. Another arms race soon.

i.

ii.

iii.

3. She calls with fake names.

i.

ii.

iii.

4. Walking Tall.

i.

ii.

iii.

5. Parents warned against curses on their children.

i.

ii.

iii.

6. Curtain falls on USA '99'.

i.

ii.

iii.

7. Former V.C. lead board member.

i.

ii.

iii.

8. Adjustment should have human face.

i.

ii.

iii.

10. Take a bow, Mr. Jackson.

i.

ii.

iii.