RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Study of Ambiguity in social context of Iranian newspapers

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Manuscript Info	*Abstract*

This research named "The study of ambiguity in social context of Iranian newspapers" is a semantic-based approach. The aim of this study is to identify and introduce the ambiguous sentences used in the social pages of newspapers. This research sought to find appropriate answer for the four given Hypotheses. According to the first hypothesis, the lexical ambiguities are the most types of ambiguities used in the contexts of social news in Iran. The second hypothesis discuss that structural ambiguities are also used in Iranian newspapers. The third hypothesis, introduced "Iran" daily newspaper as the newspaper, which contains the most ambiguous sentences. According to the last hypothesis in this research, context and the correct use of punctuation signs can play consequential roles in removing ambiguity from the language in spoken and written forms. This research is a descriptive analysis and data have been collected in the library. To carry out this research, pages of social and urban topics in 8 newspapers as Hamshahri, Iran, sharq, Etemad, Jam-e-Jam, Keyhan, Haft-e-sobh, and Mardomsalari have been studied in the period of four months. Based on the results of the present study, structural ambiguities are the most types of ambiguities that can be found in the context of the Iran's news media.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays mass media have very important role in awareness of society. Mass media, especially Presses have great role in public speech and writing and as a result widespread influence on fate of a language. As we know, contexts of presses is a standard language, therefore any error and shortcoming in these contexts may spread quickly among people and gradually change live image of language, which contains culture, tradition and national identity of a society.

The present research, based on semantics, intends to study social contexts of Iranian Newspapers in order to find out the amounts and different kinds of ambiguous sentences used in newspapers, which publish daily in Iran and further determine which kind of Ambiguity mostly used in the selected newspapers. Finally some solutions for avoiding ambiguity in Persian written language have been introduced.

Research Problem
Experts, who deal closely with media activities, believe that we haven't done effective studies to filter the language of mass media.
Language of media has ambiguity and failure. Necessity of rapid translation of news from other languages to Persian; differences of language structures in source and destination language and etc. cause Ambiguity.

Because of the widespread use of news and the impact they have on their audiences, who are often belong to different levels of society, it seems important that the way of writing and editing texts in the newspapers must considered carefully to avoid written ambiguity and reader's confusion.

Research Questions
The present research seeks to find proper answers for the following questions:
Among different types of ambiguities, which type used more in the social context of Iranian newspapers?
Is there any structural ambiguity in the social context of Iranian newspapers?
Which newspaper contains the most ambiguous sentences?
Can the context and appropriate usage of punctuation signs, prevent ambiguity?

Research Hypotheses
It seems that lexical ambiguity use more than other types of ambiguity in social context of Iranian newspapers.
There are structural ambiguities in social context of Iranian newspapers.
It seems that "IRAN" newspaper contains the most ambiguous sentences.
Context and appropriate usage of punctuation signs can have effective roles in preventing ambiguity.
In language and communication field, ambiguity is an unavoidable matter. It happens over time in either speech or written communication in all languages. Ambiguity causes confusion and unclearness. Newspapers as a medium communication can also lead ambiguity to their readers. Several studies have been conducted on the issue of ambiguity and Linguistic experts and researchers presented variety of definition and classification of ambiguity.
A linguistic unit is said to be ambiguous when it is associated with more than one meaning. The term is normally reserved for cases where the same linguistic form has clearly differentiated meanings that can be associated with distinct linguistic representations.
Ambiguity has played an important role in developing theories of syntactic and semantic structure. Most studies differentiate between lexical and syntactical ambiguity, with the former referring to ambiguity conveyed through polysemy and homophony strings and the latter to phenomena of ambiguous word order, referential ambiguity, prepositional phrase attachment.
Ullmann (1977) defines ambiguity as a linguistic condition which can arise in a variety of ways. From a purely linguistic point of view, he distinguishes ambiguity into three main forms: phonetic, grammatical and lexical.
Ullmann concludes that polysemy and homonymy are the factors, which cause lexical ambiguity in a sentence.
According to Ullman, the same word may have two or more different meanings. This situation has been known since Breal as polysemy. He also mentioned two or more different words may be identical in sounds that known as homonymy. It should be noted that both polysemy and homonymy may be accompanied by syntactical differences. When a word belongs to several parts of speech as for instance "double" which can be an adjective, an adverb, a verb and a noun; these uses will differ not only in meaning but also in grammatical function. Homonyms too may come from different word-classes: grave (adjective/noun), bear (noun/verb).
Ullmann states, there are two possibilities that equivoque may result from the ambiguousness of grammatical forms or from the structure of the sentence .a) Many grammatical forms, free as well as bound, are ambiguous. Some prefixes and suffixes have more than one meaning, and this may, on occasion, create misunderstanding. The suffix -able does not mean the same thing in desirable or readable as it does in eatable, knowable, debatable. There are also homonymous prefixes and suffixes. The prefix in-, meaning "into, within, towards, upon" (e.g. indent, inborn, inbreeding, inflame), has a homonym in the prefix in- expressing negation or privation (e.g. inappropriate, inexperienced, inconclusive). Though the two enter into different combinations they can occasionally give rise to confusion and uncertainty. Form words too may have several meanings which may make for confusion in some contexts. Another source of grammatical ambiguity is equivocal phrasing "amphibology". Here, the individual words are unambiguous but their combination can be interpreted in two or more different ways. For example, in the sentence: "I met a number of old friends and acquaintances". The adjective old may be taken to refer either to both friends and acquaintances, or only to the former. Most ambiguities of this kind will be clarified by the context and in spoken language, by intonation.
According to Leech (1981), "An expression is said to be ambiguous when more than one interpretation can be assigned to it". This ambiguous expression can happen in one word or one phrase/ sentence. That's we know as lexical and structural ambiguity.
Kevin (1998) believes that there is a direct relationship between vision and cognition with respect to newspaper headlines. It suggested that headline reader should first pay attention to the structure of the newspaper headline, in order to avoid wrong interpretations.

Hoefler (2003) contends that ambiguity means there is more than one meaning assigned to the same single. If it results from a computational grammar, i.e. if a complex single can be parsed in more than one way, we end up with syntactic ambiguity.

Beaver (2004) stated that words are stored in a mental dictionary or (lexicon). Some words have more than a single meaning. The result is lexical ambiguity. He believes that sometimes the same sequence of words can be structured in more the one way, giving rise to more than one meaning. And the result is syntactical or structural ambiguity.

Bucaria (2004) studied some forms of linguistics ambiguity in English in a specific register, i.e. newspaper headlines and focused on lexical and syntactic ambiguities that result in source of voluntary or involuntary humor.

Bucaria divided types of ambiguity in 3 categories as lexical, syntactic and phonological ambiguity and studied 135 verbally ambiguous headlines found on web sites presenting humorous bits of information.

Bucaria concluded the headlines presenting syntactic ambiguity were found in greater number than headline based on lexical or phonological ambiguity.

Kristianty (2006) in her thesis "The Structural and Lexical Ambiguity Found in Cleo Magazine Advertisements" found that there are five structural ambiguities including three declaratives sentences, one adjective phrase and one noun phrase; ten lexical ambiguities that are included in the advertisements; there are four nouns, two verbs, three adjectives and one adverb. She concludes that lexical ambiguity occurs more frequently than structural ambiguity of advertisements in Cleo Magazine.

Irawan (2009) studied ambiguity in the articles of The "Jakarta Post" published on Thursday, December 11, 2008. According to Irawan's thesis there are two kinds of ambiguity; Lexical and grammatical; found in the articles of The Jakarta Post.

Irawan stated Lexical ambiguity arises when a single word has more than one meaning, and grammatical ambiguity arises when phrase, clause or sentence create ambiguity because the structure of words, phrases and sentences may be interpreted in many ways.

According to his study, 15 data (among 23 data) were grammatically ambiguous. The data shows that there is more grammatical ambiguity than lexical ambiguity found in the articles of The Jakarta Post published in Thursday, December 11, 2008.

According to Elmawati (2013), ambiguity occurs in lexical level in which one word can be interpreted as having several different meanings. Unlike a spoken text, ambiguity may occur in a written text due to the lack of tone, stress and pitch.

Elmawati focused on structural ambiguity and studied ambiguous headlines complied by Department of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics Bucknell University based on the X-bar theory.

Elmawati stated that the differences of syntactic category, placement of prepositional phrase that functions as an adjunct and sub categorization of verbs are three factors which cause structural ambiguities. A word may have different categories depending on the following or preceding words. This difference of syntactic category causes the headline to be structurally ambiguous. A prepositional phrase which is usually placed in the final position also creates structural ambiguity. It can be the adjunct of a noun phrase or the adjunct of a verb phrase. Sub categorization of verbs also causes structural ambiguity. Transitive verbs can be followed by a direct object only or a direct object and an infinitive phrase.

Khamahani (2013) studied the ratio of lexical (polysemy) ambiguity and structural (noun/verb) ambiguity in newspaper headlines written by native and non- native journalists, without entering into different kinds of ambiguity found everywhere in Language.

Based on the phenomenon and explanation above, the writer is interested to introduce different kinds of ambiguity, found in language of Iranian newspapers. Moreover, this research tries to figure out the causal factors of the ambiguity and also discusses the interpretations which may arise in the ambiguous words and sentences found in the social context of Iranian newspapers.

Ambiguity in Persian written language can be classified into 2 major categories. Lexical and syntactic ambiguity. The first category contains lexical ambiguity, which can occur in 5 ways:

*Polysemy***:** Polysemy is a phenomenon in which a single word is associated with multiple distinct but related meanings (Saeed, 2009; Safavi, 2001; Lobner, 2002). While homonymy is a rare phenomenon, polysemy is abundant. Polysemy is another source of ambiguity (Murphy & Koskela, 2010). A good example of polysemy is cousin. Polysemy is a natural economic tendency of language. Rather than inventing new words for new entities or phenomena, the existing words will be used for similar things (Lobner, 2002). Polysemy should not be confused with homonymy. In homonymy, a single word has two or more related meanings but polysemous words are different words with different meanings but one single form (Murphy &Koskela 2010)

Homonymy: Homonyms are two different words with the same form (Lyons, 1981:146). Moreover, Bloomfield (1961:45) states that homonym refers to the different linguistics forms which have the same phonetic form (and

differ, therefore, only as to meaning). (Examples: to, too, two; or bat the animal, bat the stick, and bat as in the bat the eyelashes).

Hyponym always entails hyperonym unilaterally. A very simple example is: John ate an apple. John ate a fruit. The first sentence unilaterally entails the second sentence but not vice versa (Krifka, 1998). Therefore, entailment in hyponymy is a downward entailing. Concepts or terms that are hyponyms of the same hyperonym at the same level, semantic sisters, are called cohyponyms. For example, apple, banana and peach are co-hyponyms of the hyperonym fruit (Safavi, 2001).

Homography: When different words are spelled identically and possibly pronounced the same (examples: lead the metal and lead, what leaders do).

Idiomatic/figurative: occurs when a part of a sentence has different meanings and one of these meanings uses as irony (Davari, 1996:123).

Categorical (lexical-structural): This category of ambiguity can also refer to syntactic ambiguity. In this category, grammatical classes of a word are considered.

The second category of ambiguity is syntactic ambiguity, which can be divided into 2 classifications, group ambiguity and structural ambiguity.

Groups, in general, constitute the immediate structure after clause in the rank ladder offered by Thompson (2000: 166). Just as the clause has functional slots (e.g. Subject; Actor; Theme) which are filled by groups and phrases, so these slots or elements themselves "can be analyzed in terms of the functional slots that they offer" (ibid.: 179).

Group ambiguity arises because of the juxtaposition of blocks forming a sentence, so that the relationship between their constituent units will have multiple implications and can be interpreted in different ways.

Ambiguity in a level of Group, can originate from Epenthesis or Conjunction constructions in Persian.

Phrases which contain more than two nouns (multiple word noun phrases) can make a sentence ambiguous (Sehat, 1998:103).

The genitive case, introduced as ezâfe in most Persian grammar references, marks a word as modifying another word. For example, it relates words to indicate possession. The genitive case is introduced with preposition «e» («ye» after vowels).

Epenthesis construction:

One of the school woman principal had resigned from job.

Above sentence makes confusion, because the reader (according to Persian translation of this sentence; woman means an adult female human being and also a man's wife in Persian) can't distinguish weather the school's principle is a woman or she is a wife of a man, who is the principle of the school.

Appositive:

Relative clauses and adjectives are defined functionally; formally these constructions are appositive nominalizations (Yap et al., 2011:226). Appositive constructions sometimes make the sentences ambiguous.

The father of shahriyar, contemporary Turkish lyric poet, was an accomplished novelist.

Underlined sentence is an appositive clause which can refers to either shahriyar or the father of shahriyar (Qolamalizadeh, 2003:73).

Conjunctions:

Conjunctions can also be one of the other reasons for structural Ambiguity in the level of group in a sentence (Sehat, 1998:104).

"va" in Persian means "and". "va": and is use in compound numerals and in certain compounds (Lambton, 2000: 138-139).

"Va" is one of the Persian conjunctions, which connects two or more lexicon in a sentence. The connected lexicons play the same grammatical functions in a sentence.

According to Alizadeh (2007:67), the combination of adjective group (noun+ adjective) with its pervious noun, through "and" can cause ambiguity.

He traveled with his sick father and mother.

This sentence can be interpreted in two ways:

[Sick father] and [sick mother]

[Sick father] and [mother]

Structural ambiguity is the other type of syntactic ambiguity that goes beyond the group level and will be studied in the level of the whole sentence. Ellipsis is one of the reasons for structural ambiguity in Persian. Ellipsis of verbs, pronouns, and genitives are the explicit examples for this case.

One of the general characteristics of public speaking is to remove parts of speech (anvari&givi, 2006:321).
As mentioned before, Ellipsis can be one of the reasons for structural ambiguity in Persian.

Ellipsis of pronoun
I met my Professor every week after the return from France.
I met my Professor every week after my return from France.
I met my Professor every week after his return from France.

Ellipsis of Verb
Did you see the leopard hunting program on TV?
A hunter was hunting a leopard
A leopard was hunting

Ellipsis of genitive
Ellipsis of genitives sometimes makes a sentence ambiguous.
Example:
Iranian material
According to Persian translation, this sentence can be interpreted in two ways: (safavi, 2011)
Special features of Iranian people
Special features of Iranian products
Unrecognized prepositional phrase due to deletion, unrecognized antecedent, structural disagreement, punctuation, role ordered, deduction and transformational operations are also the factors which may lead sentence to structural ambiguity. Below are explanations for some of these cases.

Structural disagreement
In this type of ambiguity, the reader can consider two different syntactic roles for a specific structure in the sentence at the same time.

Punctuation
Stops should be used as sparingly as sense will permit: but in so far as they are needed for an immediate grasp of the sense or for the avoidance of any possible ambiguity, or occasionally to relieve a very lengthy passage, they should be used as freely as need be. The best punctuation is that of which the reader is least conscious; for when punctuation, or the lack of it, obtrudes itself, it is usually because it offends (Carey, 1976:22).
Transformational ambiguity
The category of transformational ambiguity is mentioned by Lyons (1975), who characterizes its prototypes as "ambiguous constructions which depend upon the 'deeper connexions'" (p. 249). Furthermore, he points out that these constructions are mostly only ambiguous out of context. One of his examples is the phrase the love of God. Isolated from any textual relations it is unclear whether God is the subject or the object in this noun phrase. Additionally, Lyons quotes Chomsky's already mentioned example of flying planes, which he; in contrast to other linguists; counts as belonging to transformational ambiguity. Basically, neither categorization is wrong as many linguists do not distinguish transformational from grammatical ambiguity. Thus, transformational ambiguity is a subcategory of grammatical ambiguity.

Another Chomskian example mentioned by Lyons is: the shooting of the hunters. This is the same case as the God-example: it is unclear whether the hunters are subject or object in this phrase.

Logical ambiguity, referential ambiguity and contextual ambiguity can also lead to syntactic ambiguity in Persian.

Logical ambiguity
Logical ambiguity shows a clear contradiction. This ambiguity seems irrelevant in meaning as a semantic point of view, but can be interpreted easily in pragmatics (Alizadeh, 2007:75). A statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true
Example: All the wrongs you saw are correct.

Referential ambiguity
According to kreidler (1998) misunderstandings occur when a speaker has one referent in mind for a definite expression like George or the papers, and the addressee is thinking of a different George or some other papers. No

doubt we have all experienced, and been troubled by, this kind of problem in reference. We can see other instances of referential ambiguity that are due to the nature of referring expressions, the vagueness that pieces of language necessarily have. Referential ambiguity occurs when:

➢ An indefinite referring expression may be specific or not;
➢ Anaphora is unclear because a personal pronoun, he, she, it or they, can be linked to either of two referring expressions;
➢ The pronoun you is used generically or specifically
➢ A noun phrase with every can have distributed reference or collected reference.

Contextual ambiguity

Ambiguity, however, is context –dependent, i.e. the same linguistic item, be it a word, phrase, or sentence may be ambiguous in one context and unambiguous in another (Hamidi, 2009). In some cases, the context conditions may allow the different meanings of a word or a polysemy or Homonymy utterance apparent at the same time, therefore it cause ambiguity. In this case the word is not ambiguous itself, but the context in which the word is used, cause ambiguity (Alizadeh, 2007:75)

2-Research method

For this study, eight Iranian local newspapers have been selected. These newspapers were selected according to particular criteria, such as archaism of publication, newspaper circulation, number of readers, the access and distribution throughout the country, attraction and etc.

The selected newspapers were Hamshahri, Iran, Sharq, Etemad, Jam-e-jam, MardomSalari, Haft-e-sobh and keyhan. For this research the numbers of 56 newspapers were collected in the period of four months and the pages of social and urban topics in each of these newspapers have been studied.

This study was a descriptive analysis and data have been collected in the library.

For extraction of the required data of this study, each of the selected newspapers was read carefully at least twice by the researcher and once by a person, who has no background about the topic of the research or the science of linguistics. After that the collected data, specifically the number of 73 ambiguous sentences were classified and sorted according to the classification of different kinds of ambiguity in Persian language.

Excel software has been used in order to analyze the data and to identify the most common types of ambiguities used in social contexts of newspapers.

3- Discussion

The present study has analyzed the following data from social texts of 8 selected newspaper of Iran.
Lexical ambiguity caused by:

Polysemy:
1- Law enforcement of smoking in public places <u>by</u> the end of the year (Iran, Jan/10/2015, p 4).

In this sentence the preposition "by" can withdraw two meanings:
Law enforcement of smoking in public places just runs until the end of this year
Law enforcement of smoking in public places will begin to run from the end of this year.

Homography:
2- Innocence of IRIB[1] from Padideh[2] to snail cream! (Mardomsalari, Jan/01/2015, p 16).

Here, the pronunciation of the word "cream" in Persian as / kerm /, / kerem / or /korom / causes ambiguity.

Homonymy:
3- "Un" doesn't have internet connection(haft-e-sobh, Dec/24/2014, p 4)

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[1] Islamic republic of Iran Broadcasting
[2] An offending company that the court sentenced their managers to prison

"Un" is a demonstrative pronoun, uses in the Persian spoken language and refers to an object or a person stands in a long distance from the speaker. The pronunciation likeness of this pronoun with the family name of the North Korean leader "Kim Jong-un", which was exactly the author's intention, causes ambiguity.

Idiomatic/figurative
4- No <u>under table violation</u> was reported this New Year (Hamshahri, Apr/04/2015, p8).

Under table violation is an idiomatic term, uses for staffs (people), who take or accept bribe in order to do something against the law.

5- Destruction of the giant's horn of Tehran (Etemad, Jan/03/2015, p13).

The title refers to a Mall named"Aladdin"[3].The readers of this article can't understand the intention of writer, unless they read the whole context.

Epenthesis construction
6- Inflorescence era of <u>women's poetry</u> (Iran, Jan/10/2015, p7).

Poetry with the purpose of adoring women.
Poems that are written by women poets.

7- <u>Bread problem</u>, will not be solved by increasing prices (Hamshahri, Feb/09/2015, p 5)

Bread quality problem, bread distribution, bread price problem, shortage of bread.

Verb ellipsis
8- Increasing the threat of Muslim snipers (Hamshahri, Jan/26/2015, p 19).

Sometimes, ellipsis of the verb in written Persian texts can cause ambiguity. In the above sentence, the readers will not able to define whether Threatening of Muslim snipers against other people are increased, or Threatening of snipers against Muslim is increased.

Not using punctuation signs
9- Silencing the voice of the dutar player from Khorasan (Sharq, Apr/04/2015, p14).

Because of the Persian alphabet's deficiency to show prosodic elements, this statement becomes ambiguous. It should be noted that /du/ in Persian means two and /tar/ is also refer to a musical instrument. Writer preferred to use the word "silence" instead of the word "death". So this sentence can be interpreted in two ways:
A musician, who was from khorasan and played dutar, is death.
Two musicians, who were from khorasan and played tar, are death.

Logical ambiguity
Logical ambiguity can occurs in a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true; a self-contradictory statement that at first seems true; an argument that apparently derives self-contradictory conclusions by valid deduction from acceptable premises.

10- Elixir of youth captured the beauty of a woman (Hamshahri, Dec/03/2014, p 19).

According to ancient stories, elixir of youth was a rare liquid with medicinal properties that could cure diseases and prevent the aging. Therefore, the reader, who reads this article, is faced with confusion and ambiguity.

11- The birth of the first child free of hereditary disease (Jam-e-Jam, Apr/04/2015, p 20).

The word "first" in this sentence, leads readers to logical ambiguity, that no child is born healthy and free from hereditary diseases till now.

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[3] A legendary Persian giant

4- Conclusion

This study reveals structural ambiguities are the most common type of ambiguities, which have been used in social context of Iranian newspapers. According to this result, the first hypothesis is rejected. Collected data indicate that from the 73 sentences, which have been analyzed, 38 sentences have structural ambiguity; therefore the second hypothesis is approved. The most ambiguous sentences were found in "IRAN" newspaper; so the third hypothesis is approved. Referring to the results, context and the correct use of punctuation signs can play consequential roles in removing ambiguity from the language in spoken and written forms; therefore the last hypothesis of this study is approved.

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