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LEXICAL AMBIGUITY AS A CHALLENGE TO ESL (ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE)

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DEDICATION

To

My parents, ***MOSONGO FELIX NGOE*** and ***NGOE ODETTE***

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this dissertation titled “Lexical Ambiguity as a Challenge to ESL (English as Second Language) Learners: Case Study of the University of Yaoundé 1” has been carried out by Mary-Joy Ngum of the English Department of Modern Letters, Faculty of Arts Letters and Social Sciences, University of Yaoundé 1 under the supervision of

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ABSTRACT

With the growing complexity of English, lexical ambiguity emerges as a considerable challenge to ESL learners as words continuously evolve in meaning, leading to inappropriate usage and significant ambiguity in language. This ambiguity not only hinders comprehension of spoken and written language but also restricts their expressive abilities, impacting both their fluency in daily communication and their academic performance. Employing a mixed-method approach, both qualitative and quantitative methods were utilised. Thirty exercises involving lexically ambiguous words and 11 questions gathering background information on lexical ambiguity were administered to 100 participants. The data collected was presented in tables and pie charts. The data revealed the difficulties ESL learners face in comprehending and using ambiguous words. The findings underscore the need for addressing lexical ambiguity in ESL teaching. It highlights a critical need for effective strategies to equip learners with the tools necessary to navigate the nuances of lexical ambiguity. The study proposes techniques to demystify ambiguous sentences, facilitating improved comprehension and usage of lexically ambiguous words. Recognising the significance of this issue, the research advocates for incorporating strategies to address lexical ambiguity in ESL instruction, with the ultimate goal of enhancing language proficiency and comprehensibility among learners at the University of Yaoundé 1.

RESUME

Avec la complexité croissante de l'anglais, l'ambiguïté lexicale apparaît comme un défi considérable pour les apprenants d'anglais langue seconde, car le sens ou des mots évolue continuellement, ce qui conduit à un usage inapproprié et à une ambiguïté significative dans le langage. Cette ambiguïté entrave non seulement la compréhension de la langue parlée et écrite, mais limite également leurs propres capacités d'expression, ce qui a un impact à la fois sur leur aisance dans la communication quotidienne et sur leurs résultats scolaires. Une approche mixte, à la fois qualitative et quantitative, a été utilisée. Trente exercices impliquant des mots lexicalement ambigus et 11 questions rassemblant des informations générales sur l'ambiguïté lexicale ont été administrés à 100 participants. Les données recueillies ont été présentées sous forme de tableaux et de diagrammes circulaires. Les données ont révélé des difficultés prononcées rencontrées par les apprenants d'anglais langue seconde dans la compréhension et l'utilisation de mots ambigus. Les résultats soulignent la nécessité d'aborder l'ambiguïté lexicale dans l'enseignement de l'anglais langue seconde. Ils mettent en évidence le besoin critique de stratégies efficaces pour doter les apprenants des outils nécessaires pour naviguer dans les nuances de l'ambiguïté lexicale. L'étude propose des techniques pour démystifier les phrases ambiguës, facilitant ainsi une meilleure compréhension et utilisation des mots lexicalement ambigus. Reconnaissant l'importance de cette question, la recherche préconise l'incorporation de stratégies pour traiter l'ambiguïté lexicale dans l'enseignement de l'anglais langue seconde, dans le but ultime d'améliorer la compétence linguistique et la compréhensibilité chez les apprenants de l'Université de Yaoundé 1.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL	English as a Second Language
EFL	English as a First Language
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
ANACLAC	Association Nationale des Comités de Langues (National Association of Languages Committees)
LA	Language Acquisition
ERPs	Event-Related Brain Potentials
ICMJE	International Committee of Medical Journal Editors
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.2 Background to the Study

Language is a body of words and a set of methods of combining them (called grammar), understood by a community and used as a form of communication. The term “English is derived from Angliss, the speech of the Angles- one of the three Germanic tribes that invaded England during the fifth century. English is a language belonging to the Germanic languages branch of the Indo-European language family, widely spoken on all six continents. English is the primary language of the U.S., Britain, Canada, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, and various Caribbean and Pacific Island nations; it is also an official language of India, the Philippines, and many sub-Saharan African countries. It is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. Tony Reilly noted an early estimate in “English Changes Lives” in Britain’s The Sunday Times, “There are now estimated to be 1.5 billion English speakers globally: 375 million who speak English as their first language, 375 million as a second language and 750 million who speak English as a foreign language.” English relies mainly on word order (usually subject-verb-object) to indicate relationships between words (syntax). Written in the Latin alphabet, it is most closely related to Frisian, German, and Dutch.

1.2.1 The History of the English Language - Key Takeaways

- The English language belongs to the **Indo-European language family** and originated as a **West Germanic dialect**.
- **Old English** (5th-11th century) was brought to Britain by the **Anglo-Saxons** in 5ad and was very different to what we know today.
- The **Middle English** period (11th-15th century) began when the **Normans** invaded Britain in 1066, bringing Anglo-Norman French. During this period, there was a push for **standardisation**, and the **printing press** was established.
- The **Early Modern English** period (15th-18th century) saw the **Great Vowel Shift** and was the time of **William Shakespeare**.

- The **Late Modern English** period (18th-Present) saw the **Industrial Revolution** and the Rise of the **British Empire**. There has also been the influence of **American culture**, and English has become one of the **most widely spoken languages** in the world.

Many of the **Old English grammatical features were lost or simplified**. For example, grammatical case endings and other inflexions disappeared. This led to sentence structures (or ‘syntax’) becoming more complex and **word order becoming more important**. Early Middle English also adopted plenty of Anglo-Norman French vocabulary, particularly in areas such as the church, law, politics, and the arts (i.e., the areas occupied mainly by the upper-class population)

Going into the **Late Middle English period** (ca. 14th-15th century), English saw further changes. This included a push for standardisation, changes in our writing system, and changes in pronunciation, which is part of the reason modern-day spellings are so irregular. The most famous surviving piece of literature from this period is ‘**The Canterbury Tales**’, written by Chaucer in the 1390s. Chaucer’s writing was mostly based on the **East-Midlands dialect**, a dialect which was also used in the **Chancery Standard**. It was this Chancery Standard that William Caxton used when he introduced the **printing press** to Britain in 1476. This helped to stabilise the English language and drive standardisation.

Modern English: (In 1500)

William Caxton, an English merchant, diplomat and writer, set up England’s first printing press in the Almonry area of Westminster. The King James Bible (1611) and the works of Shakespeare are considered works of Modern English. Shakespeare invented over 1700 English common words such as dawn, elbow, green-eyed and moonbeam. Robert Cowdrey’s Table Alphabetical (1604) was the first dictionary, and in it, he listed and defined 3000 words. The major evolution in the language ending the “early” sub-portion of the Modern English period was a change in the pronunciation of long vowels. The Great Vowel Shift from the 1400s through the 1750s. For example, a Middle English long high vowel such as *\e* eventually changes to a Modern English long *\a* and a Middle English long */oo/* evolved into the modern English */ou/* sound. Long mid-

and low-vowels changed as well, such as a long an evolving to a modern English /e/ and an ah sound changing to the /a/ sound.

Today's English

English today is unique in its scope and style. English is the most widely-spoken language in the world today, having the distinct status of being the official language of multiple countries. While the English language is uniform with major variations in spelling present between American English and British English, the dialect or accent is usually the factor that enables one to distinguish the various types of English out there: some vary of English in the world today include British English, American English, Canadian English, Ugandan English, Ghanaian English, South African English and many more. With so many sources behind its evolution, English is flexible and liable to change as new words are being created every day and inserted into the dictionary. Robert Burchfield, in "The English Language," calls the language "a fleet of juggernaut trucks that goes on regardless. No form of linguistic engineering and no amount of linguistic legislation will prevent the myriads of change that lie ahead *English Today* provides accessible cutting-edge reports on all aspects of the language, including style, usage, dictionaries, literary language, Plain English, the Internet and language teaching, in terms of British, American and the world's many other Englishes. Its global readership includes linguists, journalists, broadcasters, writers, publishers, teachers, advanced students of the language, and others with a professional or personal interest in communication. Its debates are vigorous, and it is noted for its reader involvement. Now in its fourth decade, Technology is changing our world. Routine knowledge and skills are being automated, digitised, and outsourced. Merriam-Webster notes that its editors spend an hour or two daily reading a cross-section of material looking for new words, new meanings to old words, new forms, new spellings, and the like. The words are logged into a database with their context for documentation and further analysis.

1.3 Motivation

The course English Lexicology, which we started in level one, opened our minds concerning the complexities intricately woven into its copious vocabulary. This caused us to want to delve into it more and more, and lexical ambiguity was our focal point. English consists of ambiguous words, which make its learners encounter difficulties learning the language. Learning a second language is a complex and long-term process, hence, there is always a need for more in-depth research to aid in second language acquisition. The experience and interaction of the researcher with ESL learners revealed the complexities of teaching and learning English as a second language. Students who are non-native speakers of English often face various challenges in acquiring the language. One such challenge is lexical ambiguity.

Another motivation for choosing this research topic stems from the aspiration to contribute significantly to the field of study and demonstrate the intellectual impact of educators on the researcher. While lexical ambiguity has been a subject of interest for some time, there remain notable gaps in understanding its precise impact on ESL learners. Through rigorous exploration, the researcher seeks to offer fresh insights and perspectives that could reshape the understanding and approach to ESL learning.

1.4 Problem Statements

Ambiguity, as a common phenomenon in all human languages in the world, stands as a stumbling block to English learners. Every year, new words are formed and are incorporated into the English lexicon. The drastic increase in words is due to technology and the way people tend to use words in their emails and texts, which have rapidly and effectively spread through social media. Paul Payack, the President of the Global Language Monitor, notes that English is the lingua franca of the modern world: “English has become a universal means of communication; never before have so many people been able to communicate so easily with so many others.” The Global Language Monitor, in its statistics of the new words in English this year, came up with the statistics of English having 1,066,345.8 new words on February 16, 2023, estimated. Since new words are being added every day to the English Language vocabulary and the fact that a person must not know a million words to be able to communicate fluently in a language, people tend to use words the way they please, not paying attention to the grammatical structure and the context in which these words are

used. This has resulted in an increased rate of ambiguity, thereby posing problems to ESL learners and other learners of the English Language. Cushing (1997) argues that ambiguity can result in an imprecise or rather wrong conclusion formulated by the listener in the speaker-hearer communicative situation, which can lead to a communication breakdown between the speaker-hearer and the writer-reader. It is believed that failure to resolve ambiguous sentences creates lots of learning problems for second language learners and foreign learners, making them unable to understand the delivered message or the speech of the addresser due to the low level of intelligibility caused by ambiguous words and sentences in spoken and written language.

1.5 Aim

This work sets out to investigate challenges posed by lexical ambiguity to ESL learners, analyse various causes of ambiguity and propose possible solutions to disambiguate ambiguous sentences.

1.6 Specific Objectives

1. To identify how lexical ambiguity handicaps language learning by ESL learners.
2. To describe the various ambiguities that exist, analyse them and propose possible solutions to disambiguate ambiguous words in discourses.

1.7 General Research Question

What are the challenges posed by lexical ambiguity to ESL learners, and what methods can be proposed as solutions to disambiguate ambiguous sentences?

Specific Research Questions

How does the use of lexical ambiguity handicap ESL learners, what are the various ambiguities, and what can be proposed as a solution to disambiguate them?

1.8 Hypothesis

Ambiguity is a challenge to ESL learners. Undergraduate students of the University of Yaoundé 1 face difficulties with lexical ambiguity.

1.9 Significance

English learners in the course of learning English face difficulties with using and understanding ambiguous words and sentences, thereby making it difficult for them to better learn and master the Language. This work will be of great influence to English learners, especially learners having difficulties with ambiguity, as the result of this study provides the readers with the ability to improve their ability to understand ambiguous sentences, phrases, or words in written language. It will also aid English learners' awareness of ambiguity and propose better ways to avoid the excessive use of obscure, ambiguous sentences and words to increase the level of language intelligibility. Thus, providing English learners with a better language processing outcome.

This work will also be of great influence to English language teachers as the findings and suggestions of this work will help them improve their teaching abilities, paying attention to ambiguity to increase language comprehensibility, which will be of great help to English learners, facilitating their learning ability. Thus, providing teachers with a more facile and lucid teaching task.

This research will contribute as a reference for the study of semantics and syntax in teaching and learning activities. Moreover, it will particularly help people interested in lexical and structural ambiguity for their research.

This work will also help translators translate spoken and written language correctly. Most translators find it difficult to translate words that have several meanings. They will first of all have to understand the context of the sentence before trying to translate the sense they perceive from the sentence, and most of the time, they end up translating the sense of the sentence and not what the speaker is saying. This research will be beneficial to translators as it will raise awareness of this aspect of language, as well as help them understand the technique of dealing with ambiguous words in sentences so they can better translate written and spoken discourses.

1.10 Scope of Study

This present study is focused on lexical ambiguity and its impact on ESL learners. This study, which aims at raising the awareness of English learners on ambiguity and providing better ways

in which English learners can avoid the excessive use of ambiguous words and sentences, will focus only on lexical ambiguity, other than syntactic, pragmatic and all other forms of ambiguity. Lexical ambiguity will be our focus as this research will be out to show how new words which are formed every day and are added to the English lexicon tend to express multiple meanings as these words are used in different sentence structures. This research will be carried out using the level three language undergraduate students of the English Department of the University of Yaounde 1 as its sample population of research.

1.11 History of Ambiguity

Ambiguity is a term used to describe something that has multiple interpretations or meanings. It can be found in language, literature, art, and even in everyday conversation. The history of ambiguity can be traced back to ancient times when poets and philosophers used it as a tool to convey complex ideas and stimulate intellectual discourse. Over time, ambiguity has evolved and taken on different forms, sometimes becoming a source of confusion, and at other times, a source of artistic expression.

The origins of ambiguity can be traced back to the ancient Greeks. Their literature was full of figures of speech that had double meanings, allowing readers to interpret them in different ways. One of the most famous examples is the story of Oedipus. In Sophocles' play 'Oedipus Rex,' the protagonist unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother. Grimal (1991) notes that this ambiguity allowed readers to interpret the stories in different ways and explore various potential meanings. This story has been interpreted in many different ways over the centuries, with some seeing it as a warning against incest, while others view it as a moral lesson about free will. The various interpretation of this play brings out the aspect of ambiguity, this time not just at the level of words used in the play but the entire book itself.

During the Middle Ages, ambiguity became a tool for religious writers to convey spiritual truths. The use of allegory and symbolism in religious literature offers multiple meanings that could be interpreted at various levels (Lauer, 2011). For example, the Bible was often interpreted in different ways by theologians, leading to different sects and denominations. Similarly, allegorical literature became popular during this period, where stories were used to convey moral lessons as well as theological ideas.

The Renaissance period saw the rise of humanism and the emergence of new ways of thinking. That is, there was a renewed interest in classical learning, humanism, and a focus on the individual and their experiences. Ambiguity continued to be used as a tool for intellectual discourse, but it also became a way for artists to express themselves.

In the intellectual realm, ambiguity was utilised as a tool for philosophical and theological discourse. It allowed thinkers to explore complex ideas and convey multiple meanings in a single text. For example, Sir Thomas More's 'Utopia' contains many layers of meaning, which gives readers the freedom to interpret the text in different ways (Neville, 2015).

In the artistic realm, ambiguity was used as a way to express individuality and complexity. Shakespeare, for instance, is known for his use of wordplay, puns, and double meanings, creating complex layers of interpretation in his works (Levin, 2010). Shakespeare's plays contain themes and characters that have different interpretations, depending on the perspective of the reader. The play 'Hamlet,' for example, is known for its many interpretations, such as a satire of the "prince's play" genre or a reflection of the political instability of the time.

In the modern era, ambiguity has taken on a new significance. With the rise of postmodernism, ambiguity has become a central theme in literature, art, and philosophy. Postmodernism rejects the idea of absolute truth and celebrates the diversity of interpretation. Ambiguity has become a way to challenge traditional power structures and to give voice to marginalised groups.

During this period, poets and writers began to reject the strict rules of literary traditions and explore new forms of expression. Ambiguity became a tool for writers to break free from traditional forms of literature and experiment with new ways of conveying their ideas and emotions. An example of ambiguity in literature during the modern period is Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis." The story is about a man named Gregor Samsa who wakes up one day to find he has transformed into a giant insect. The story is an allegory of existentialism, and the ambiguity comes in through the multiple interpretations of the story's symbolism and meaning (Kafka, 1915).

Another example is "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett (1953): This play is often described as the epitome of the Theatre of the Absurd, a movement that rejected traditional narrative structures and focused on the meaninglessness of human existence. The play revolves around two characters waiting for a mysterious figure named Godot, and its ambiguity lies in its open-ended plot and multiple interpretations of the symbolism and themes.

Today, ambiguity is ubiquitous, from the news media to social media. It is used to create buzz and generate controversy, but it can also be a source of confusion and misinformation. As society becomes more diverse and complex, the role of ambiguity will continue to evolve. When we engage with ambiguous texts, ideas, or situations, we are forced to grapple with multiple meanings and perspectives, which can expand our understanding and foster a more nuanced approach to the world. As O'Brien (2012) notes, ambiguity can be both a source of creativity and a cause of confusion.

At the same time, ambiguity can also be destabilising and disorienting, especially in contexts where clarity and certainty are highly valued. In a world that often emphasises clear-cut answers, black-and-white thinking, and simple solutions, ambiguity can be seen as a threat to order and stability. This can be particularly unsettling in political contexts, where different interpretations and perspectives can lead to disagreement, conflict, and a lack of consensus on key issues. According to Jones and Smith (2018), the ambiguity of modern language poses challenges for effective communication in today's society.

However, despite some of the challenges and drawbacks of ambiguity, it remains an integral and necessary part of contemporary life. The ability to navigate complexity and ambiguity is a crucial skill, both in personal and professional contexts. As individuals and societies become more interconnected and interdependent, the ability to work with diverse perspectives and interpretations becomes increasingly important. In essence, ambiguity is a reminder that there is often more than one way to see the world and that our differences can be a source of strength and vitality. In a study conducted by Garcia and Hernandez (2019), participants who were exposed to ambiguous stimuli demonstrated greater creativity and divergent thinking than those who were not. As argued by Johnson (2015), ambiguity can be seen as a reflection of our rapidly changing social and political landscape, where traditional power structures are being challenged and new voices are emerging.

In conclusion, the use of ambiguity in language has a long and complex history, and it has played a crucial role in the evolution of human communication. While ambiguity can be both informative and entertaining, it also carries the risk of miscommunication and deception, and individuals need to develop critical thinking and analysis skills when interpreting ambiguous language and

messages. Its role in society is constantly evolving, and it will continue to be an important part of human communication and expression for years to come.

1.12 Language Acquisition

Language acquisition is the process by which humans develop the ability to learn and use language (Hoff, 2013). It begins early in life, as infants start to differentiate between sounds and eventually produce their first words. As children grow older, they continue to acquire new vocabulary and gain a deeper understanding of grammar and language structure, including in their acquisition of English. English acquisition is a particularly important area of study, as it is one of the most widely spoken and studied languages in the world. For many people, English is the first language they acquire from birth, while others may learn it as a second or foreign language later in life. Each of these processes of English acquisition can have unique challenges and opportunities, and understanding them can help educators and learners develop more effective language teaching strategies.

1.12.1 English as a first language (EFL)

A person who learned to speak the language of the place where he or she was born as a child rather than learning it as a foreign language is known as a native speaker of that language. One's native language or mother tongue is generally the first language learnt from birth and therefore considered as one's first language. A native language will directly correspond to the most prominent language in the region where one was born. The parents of an individual normally share the same native language. Children learn their first language from parents, grandparents or caretakers. Therefore, one's first language is learnt informally, effortlessly and naturally by listening and communicating with the people from your surrounding parents. Examples of countries that have English as their first language include: the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Britain and Ireland

1.12.2 English as a Second Language (ESL)

A second language is a language other than the native language or mother tongue that a person or community uses for public communication, especially in trade, higher education and

administration. The process of learning a second language takes a lot of effort as it requires familiarising yourself with the vocabulary, sentence structure, punctuation, grammar rules and other aspects of the language. It is usually not an easy task, especially for adults, since learning a second language requires formal education, which is not the case with learning your native language because it is learnt naturally in an informal, natural, flexible and unconscious manner. Using English as a second language is a very common phenomenon in the world today. For example, if a Japanese student primarily learns English in class, it can be called a second language for him. It all depends from country to country. Examples of countries that have English as their second language include Cameroon, India, Lesotho, Mali, Malta, Namibia, Nauru, the Philippines, Singapore, Swaziland, Tanzania and Western Samoa.

1.12.3 English as a foreign language

English language taught as a foreign language is being taught in a situation/locality where it is not spoken or used in the community. It is a foreign language, a language indigenous to another country; a language for culture inside. The teaching of French in the US, Spanish in the UK, and English in Germany all fall into this category. The amount of time dedicated to foreign language teaching varies, but generally, the input is limited to a few hours (maximum) a week for school children. Countries that study English as a foreign language include: South Korea, Poland, Japan, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Indonesia and Malaysia.

1.12.4 Second Language Acquisition

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a complex and dynamic process that encompasses a wide range of cognitive, social, and cultural factors. It refers to the process of learning a new language after the first language has been mastered. It is a complex process that involves not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural and social factors that influence communication (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008). According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to language input that is slightly beyond their current level of linguistic competence (i.e., input that is comprehensible but also contains some new and challenging elements). However, some researchers have challenged Krashen's view and emphasised the role of explicit instruction and focus on form in SLA (Ellis, 2005).

Studies on the age of acquisition have shown that younger learners have an advantage in learning a second language over older learners due to their brain's greater neuroplasticity (Long, 1990). However, older learners can still acquire a second language successfully with proper instruction and motivation (Dörnyei, 2014). In addition, motivation and attitude have been identified as important factors in SLA, with highly motivated learners being more likely to invest time and effort in language learning to achieve higher levels of linguistic proficiency (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

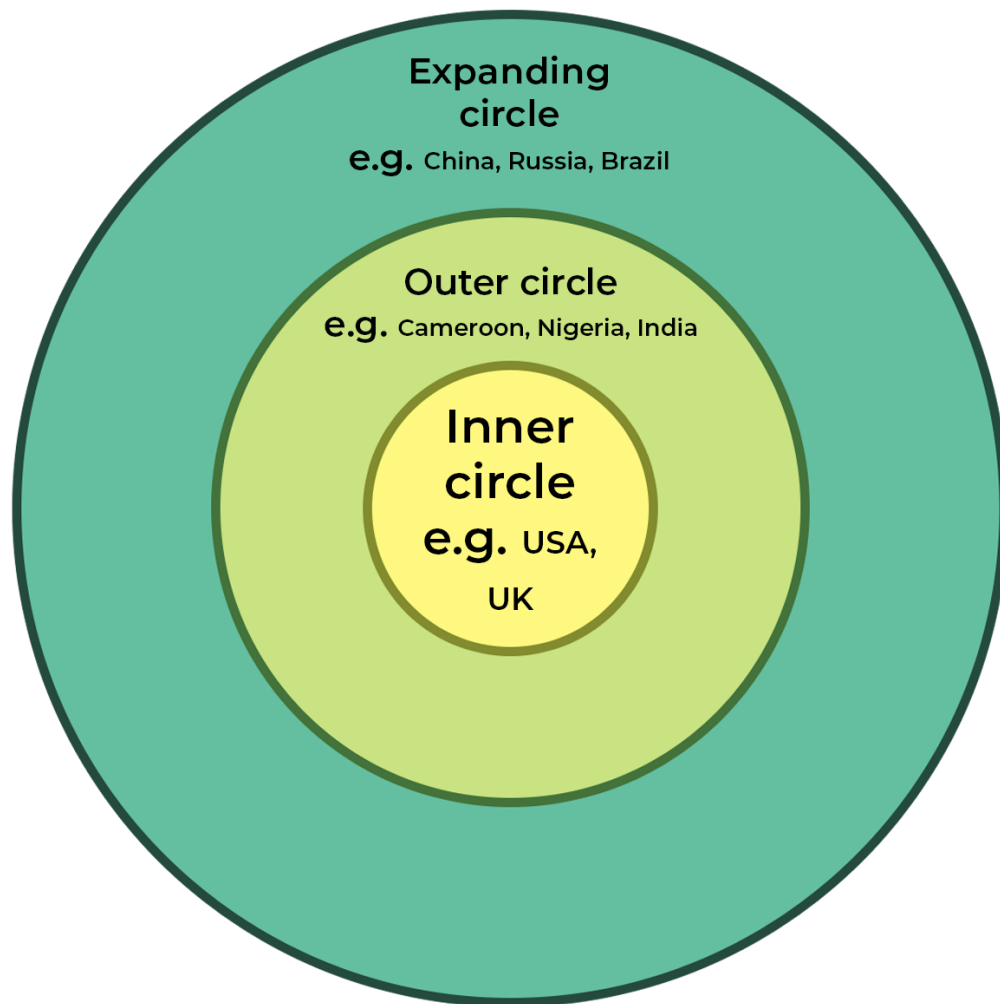
Moreover, social and cultural factors play a crucial role in successful SLA, such as the sociolinguistic context and the degree of language use outside the classroom (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Thus, it is essential to provide learners with opportunities for authentic language use in meaningful contexts, which can improve their communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). Cultural awareness and sensitivity are also essential for developing intercultural competence, as learners need to understand cultural differences in language use and behaviour to communicate effectively in different cultural settings (Kramsch, 1998).

In conclusion, SLA is a multifaceted process that involves individual cognitive, social, and cultural factors and their interplay. Therefore, language teachers need to consider various factors when designing language instruction, including individual learner differences, cultural and social contexts, and teaching methodology to promote effective language learning.

1.13 Kachru's Three-Circle Model of World Englishes

For most sociolinguists, the most accurate one that best explains and classifies world English is the one proposed by Braj Kachru in 1988. One of the strengths of Kachru's model is that it recognises the complexity of English language use and its cultural and regional variations, avoiding the idea that there is only one "correct" form of the English language. The model has also been expanded to include other languages as well, in recognition of the spread of other global languages, such as Spanish and Mandarin. The spread of English can be explained by the three concentric circles model developed by Kachru. English started as a language native to the British Isles, but as a result of colonisation, trade, and globalisation, it spread to other parts of the world and became a global language. Today, English is spoken by an estimated 1.5 billion people, making it the most widely spoken language in the world.

Figure 1: Kachru's three-circle model of World Englishes



The spread of English can be seen in the Inner Circle, which includes countries where English is the primary language of government, education, and culture, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. These countries were colonised by British

immigrants and have since adopted English as their official language. The Inner Circle has also contributed to the spread of English by exploring their culture through media, music and movies, creating an interest in English language learning and its use in other countries.

In the Outer Circle, in countries such as India, Singapore, Kenya, Ghana, Pakistan, Philippines, Tanzania, Cameroon, and Malaysia, English has been institutionalised as a second language, used alongside other local languages. These countries were not colonised by Britain, but as their economies and cultures grew more global and cosmopolitan, English gained importance for international communication and trade. In these countries, varieties of English have emerged, reflecting the local culture and language mix.

Finally, in the Expanding Circle, countries such as China, Japan, Indonesia, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Korea, Nepal, Zimbabwe, and Russia are adopting English as a tool for international communication and trade. In these countries, English is not an official language, but there is a growing demand for English language skills to participate in the global economy and academic opportunities.

Overall, Kachru's three concentric circles model illustrates how English has spread to different regions and cultures over time, reflecting the varying historical, cultural, and economic factors that influenced it. While the Inner and Outer Circles are often seen as powerful forces that influence the development of global English language norms, the Expanding Circle represents the growing importance of English in the global economy and the potential emergence of new regional or local varieties of English.

1.14 The Present State of English in Cameroon

Cameroon is a country that was colonised by Germany in the late 19th century, but after Germany lost control of its colonies following World War I, Cameroon was divided into two territories, one administered by France and the other by Britain.

The British established their influence in the Southern Cameroons in 1919 and introduced English as the medium of instruction in formal education. This decision separated the Anglophone regions' education system from the rest of Cameroon and brought with it British cultural and linguistic influences. However, despite the use of English as the language of instruction in formal education,

the vast majority of Anglophone Cameroonians continue to communicate in their mother tongue in everyday life. The dominance of these indigenous languages has contributed to the ongoing conflict surrounding the use of English in the Anglophone regions.

The Anglophone regions of Cameroon (Northwest and Southwest regions) make up roughly 20% of the country's population, and as the name suggests, the people in these regions are primarily English-speaking. After gaining independence, they opted to join the Republic of Cameroon in 1961. While French serves as the primary language of government and administration in Cameroon, English is used in law, education, and the judiciary, which is now what is known as modern-day Cameroon.

The reunion of English and French-speaking Cameroonians was supposed to lead to a harmonious coexistence of the two cultures and languages, which is not the case now. The current state of English in Cameroon, therefore, is not simply a matter of language, but it is closely connected with the country's complex socio-political realities.

The big question is, is English a first or second language to the English-speaking Cameroonians (Anglophones) population? This is a complex issue because some English-speaking Cameroonians have English as their first language from birth, while other Anglophone Cameroonians learn English as a second language, after acquiring their mother tongue, or Cameroon pidgin.

According to the Ethnologue report, there are over 260 indigenous languages spoken in Cameroon, with nearly 50 of them spoken in the Anglophone regions. Most Anglophone Cameroonians speak their indigenous language at home and in their communities, with English as the primary language of education, government, and business (Ethnologue, 2018). Furthermore, a study conducted by ANACLAC (Association Nationale des comites de Langues) in English, (National Association of Cameroonian Languages Committees), a language research group in Cameroon, found that only a small percentage (<5%) of Anglophones in Cameroon consider English as their first language (Langaa Research & Publishing CIG, 2020).

The language issue in Cameroon has been a contentious one for decades, with the country's linguistic diversity creating a complex web of cultural and political ties. Cameroon is home to more than 250 distinct indigenous languages, with English and French serving as the country's official languages.

It can, therefore, be concluded that English is not a first language to the majority of Anglophone Cameroonians, but rather a second language. The status of English in Cameroon represents a complex intersection of colonial history, linguistic diversity, and political and socioeconomic challenges. While English is not the first language for the majority of Anglophone Cameroonians, its use in formal education and government institutions has come under scrutiny due to the ongoing conflict in the country.

1.14 Definition of Key Terms

This section will provide clear definitions of key terms used throughout the research work to ensure a common understanding. Understanding these key terms will help facilitate adequate comprehension of this research work.

1.14.1 Ambiguity

As a common language phenomenon, ambiguity occurs in various human languages, and English is no exception. English is one of the languages in the world that has a remarkable rate of ambiguities in spoken and written communication (Saleh 2017). Over 80% of common words in English have more than one dictionary entry (Rodd, Gaskell, & Marslen-Wilson, 2002). The problematic aspects of ambiguities are semantically engaged in the possibilities of different interpretations for certain expressions in the language that the speakers use or the listeners hear related to words, phrases and sentences. According to Empson (2014), ambiguity is associated with the word puzzling, or perplexing and perplexing indicates a form of unclarity in the communication process. Linguists pinpoint that ambiguity can be either intentional or unintentional. Intentional ambiguity is used in many instances by politicians and diplomats so the words uttered by the latter are free of any obligations. Moreover, intentional ambiguity can be used to create satire and add humour to the text. On the other hand, unintentional ambiguity, the subject of this study, is considered a flaw in one's communication skills because it can be the root of misunderstanding. A word, phrase or sentence, when used, can express more than one meaning/interpretation, known as ambiguity. Components of language, such as phonetics,

grammar, semantics, syntax, punctuation and intonation, can all be the cause of ambiguity in both spoken and written discourses.

1.14.2 Types of Ambiguity

There are four main types of ambiguity, namely: phonetics, lexical, syntactic and pragmatic ambiguity. Other types of ambiguity, like referential and scope ambiguity, have been added to this study to further expatiate the idea of ambiguity and bring more examples of the different types of ambiguity. The various types of ambiguity will help ESL learners to identify and know how to better use ambiguous words, for they do not sound too ambiguous in their use of English language words, thus giving room for several interpretations that can disrupt the intended meaning.

I) Word Ambiguity

Lexical ambiguity is the potential for multiple interpretations of spoken or written language that render it difficult or impossible to understand without some additional information. It occurs when a word with two or more meanings is used in a way which causes more than one possible interpretation. This often happens when the speaker does not have the same background information as the listener/reader. The ambiguity typically results from the fact that the words can mean different things; the additional information typically supplies context that clarifies which meaning is intended in this instance (Ivy Wigmore 2019). According to Ogba Thank-God (2017), lexical ambiguity arises when context is insufficient to determine the sense of a single word that has more than one meaning. Clare (1996, P.11) Opines thus: lexical ambiguity can be found everywhere; in fact, almost every word has more than one meaning. Take the word “ambiguity” itself. It can mean an indecision as to what you mean, an intention to mean several things, a probability that one or other or both of two things has been meant and the fact that a statement has several meanings. Lexical or word ambiguity occurs in the open class or grammatical word class where nouns, adjectives and verbs with more than one meaning used in spoken or written language bring about ambiguity. Lobner, (2002) holds that the two common phenomena that characterise lexical ambiguity are homonymy and polysemy.

A) Homonymy

A homonym refers to words that share the same spelling and the same pronunciation but express different meanings. The state of being a homonym is called homonymy. Gramley and Patzold (1992:13) define homonymy as “the existence of different lexemes that sound the same (homophone, e.g., *days/daze*) or are spelt the same (homograph, e.g., *lead* (guide)/ *lead* (metal) but have different meanings.” There are two main types of homonyms: homophones and homographs.

Examples under homonymy

For example, John is going to the **bank**

This example has two possible meanings that can be interpreted from the sentence

- 1) John is going to a financial institution, maybe for a financial transaction.
- 2) John could be going to the riverbank.

Example 2: Anna **saw** a **bat**

This example has four possible meanings that can be attributed to these sentences

- 1) Anna saw a bat (saw, the past tense of the verb to see) bat (a bird)
- 2) Anna saw a bat (the wooden baseball bat) see (past tense of see)
- 3) Anna saw a bat (cutting the bird)
- 4) Anna saw a bat (cutting the wooden baseball)

- a) **Homophones:** Homophones are linguistic phenomena characterised by two or more words that share the same pronunciation but have different spellings and meanings. These words may sound identical when spoken, yet they are distinct in terms of their written representation and semantic significance. Homophones can encompass various lexical

categories, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Homophones relate to phonological ambiguity, as their indistinguishable pronunciation can lead to potential confusion in spoken language. It is important to note that homophones extend beyond the mere consideration of segmental elements and also encompass suprasegmental elements, such as tone and stress. Some examples include:

Table 1.1: Examples of Homophones

Words	Meaning	Example
Buy By Bye	Buy- to purchase something By- a preposition referring to something besides, near, or through Bye— short form for “goodbye”	-Let’s go buy foodstuffs for the house -There is an ice cream van over there by the tree Bye, see you tomorrow
Brake Break	Brakes - Refers to the brakes on a car Break – a rest or pause from an activity or work -Physical damage or fracture of an object.	-He applied the brakes to slow down the car -I need a break -Did you break the glass?
Here Hear	Here refers to something being in one’s current location Hear - the ability to detect sound	-Here is the pen you’ve been looking for -I can hear the dog barking from the next compound

Peace Piece	Peace – a state of tranquillity Piece – a unit or portion of something, state your opinion about something	-Peace is a necessary ingredient for a happy home -Get me a piece of cake -I couldn't leave the school without giving the principal a piece of my mind
Whole Hole	Whole – complete or entire Hole – a pit, an opening that goes all the way through a solid body.	-John told me the whole story -There is a hole at the back of our house -Her handbag has a hole in it
Stare Stair	Stare – the act of gazing intently at something. Stair – a single step	- She stared at him with frightened eyes. - She ran down the stairs
Know No	Know – to be aware of something No – the opposite of yes, used to indicate the negative	-I know he is afraid -No!! I'm not going with you
Compliment Complement	Compliment - An expression of praise or admiration Complement - things that go together, used as follows	-I just want to compliment you on the wonderful speech you gave yesterday. -The dress complemented her hair.

- b) **Homographs:** Homographs are two or more words that are spelt the same but have different meanings and origins. For example, fall, fall, desert, desert, capital, conduct, conduct.

Table 1.2: Examples of Homographs

Words	Word class	Meaning
Lap	Noun	-the top part of the legs, forming a
Lap	Noun	flat surface when sitting down -a section of a journey or trip
Mail	Noun	-posted letters and parcels
Mail	Noun	-amour made of rings or chains
Bat	Noun	-a ball game
Bat	Noun	-an animal
Bank	Noun	-a financial institution where
Bank	Noun	money is kept -a river
Bear	Verb	- To endure or tolerate
Bear	Verb	- The action of carrying or
Bear	Noun	supporting a load or weight. -Animal
Sole	Noun	-the bottom of the foot or shoe
Sole	Noun	-a kind of fish

Spring	Noun	-a season of the year
Spring	Noun	-a source

Classification of English homonyms

Homonymy can be further divided into two types: absolute and partial homonymy

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1. Absolute (complete, full) Homonyms

These are homonyms that have the same pronunciation and the same spelling, i.e., the identity covers spoken and written. Classic examples are *bank* (embankment) and *bank* (place where money is kept). (Lyons 1982:72 and Allan 1986:150). Absolute homonyms are unrelated in meaning. According to Hirst (1992), absolute homonyms must satisfy the following three conditions:

- 1- They will be unrelated in meaning
- 2- All their forms will be identical (shape/ sound / grammatical forms)
- 3- The identical forms will be grammatically equivalent.

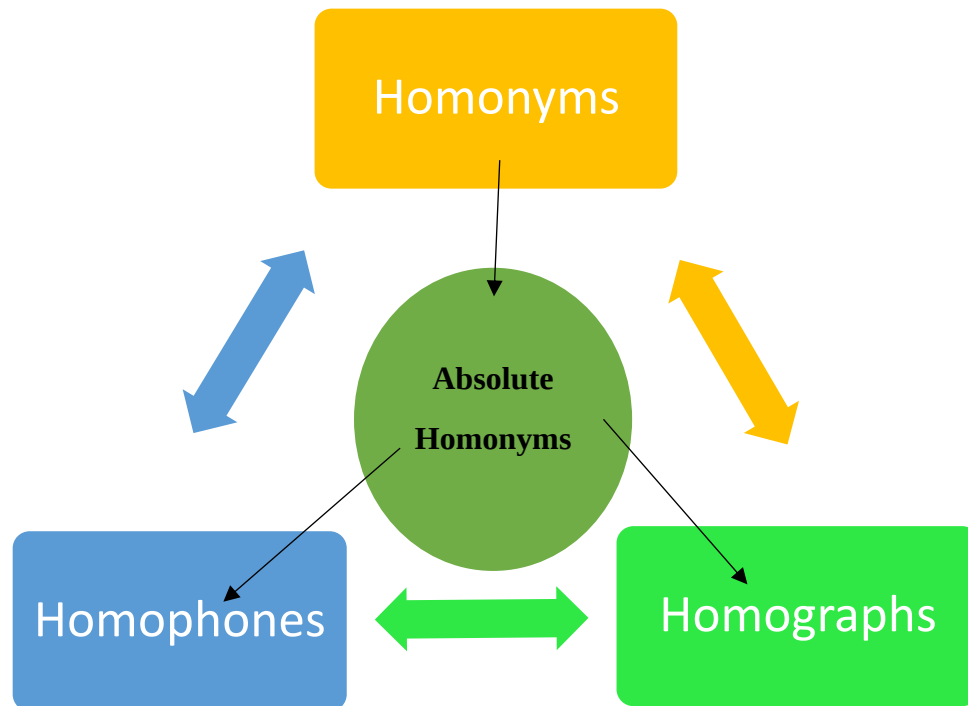
2. Partial homonyms

Partial homonyms share either a similar pronunciation (homophones) or a similar spelling (homographs), but not both. Examples include "two" and "to," where the words have the same pronunciation but different spellings and meanings. Thus, homophones and homographs are considered partial homonyms (Crystal 2003: 220). Partial homonyms fail to fulfil one or more features of absolute homonymy. For example;

Table 1.3: Examples of Partial Homonyms

Words	Word class	Meaning
Flour	Noun	- A powdery substance used in baking
Flower	Noun	- A plant's reproductive structure
Pair	Noun	- A set of two
Pear	Noun	- A Fruit
Bow	Noun	- A curved weapon for shooting arrows
Bow	Verb	- To bend the upper part of the body forward as a gesture of respect or greeting
'Invalid	Noun	- A person with a disability
In'valid	Adjective	- Not valid or acceptable
See	Verb	- To perceive with the eyes
Sea	Noun	- A large body of saltwater
'Object	Noun	- A tangible item
Ob'ject	Verb	- To express or feel disapproval

Figure 2: Homonyms



B) Polysemy

Agbedo (2010) defines polysemy as a set of different meanings associated with a word. Polysemous words often have the same word class. The meaning of polysemous words always shares the core concept but differs in specific applications. For example, the word “light” can refer to a physical source of illumination, a colour shade, a state of not being heavy, or an aspect of being non-serious in nature. The word “light” retains a common thread of meaning while being applicable in different contexts. Thus, the fact that context can determine the specific meaning of a polysemous word illustrates the dynamic nature of language. Dictionary writers (lexicographers) often list polysemes in the same entry (that is, under the same headword).

Examples under polysemy

Example 1: Get (verb)

- 1) Did you **get** the invitation? Get here means receive
- 2) Mary has gone to the market to **get** some foodstuffs for the house. Get in this sentence means to buy or obtain
- 3) **Get** me a glass from the cupboard. Get here means to bring
- 4) What time will your father **get** home? Get the meaning of the time of his arrival

Example 2: Head (noun)

- 1) Since morning, I have been having serious pain in my **head**. Head in this sentence is a part of the human body.
- 2) Mary was caught eating the **head** of her pencil. The head here is the top of something
- 3) James is the **head** of our department. Head in this sentence means the person in charge.

II) Syntactic or Structural Ambiguity

Syntactic ambiguity or structural ambiguity occurs when the structure of a sentence causes multiple interpretations due to the way words or phrases are organised. Structural ambiguity happens if there is an ambiguous sentence because its words relate to each other in different ways, even though no words are ambiguous (Hufford 129 – 130). Clarity and accuracy of the information transmitted can be obtained in the manner in which the information is transmitted, received and processed. If the speaker or writer has the same background or reference information, then ambiguity can be avoided but if the speaker and the listener have very little in common, the chances of experiencing ambiguity are higher.

Examples of Syntactic Ambiguity

- 1) The teacher said on Friday he would give a test
 - i) On Friday, the teacher said he would give a test.
 - ii) The test will be on Friday.
- 2) Visiting relatives can be boring.
 - i) It is boring to visit relatives. (Participle)
 - ii) Relatives who are visiting are boring. (Gerund)
- 3) They are cooking apples.
 - i) A group of people are cooking apples.
 - ii) They are apples that can be cooked.

Syntactic ambiguity arises not from the range of meanings of single words, but from the relationship between the words and clauses of a sentence, and the sentence structure underlying the word order therein. In other words, a sentence is syntactically ambiguous when a reader or listener can reasonably interpret one sentence as having more than one possible structure.

Types of Structural Ambiguity

From many types of structural ambiguity,

: Type 1: VP + NP + PP

Type 2: Gerund + VP

Type 3: VP + NP + more...than + NP

Type 4: VP + NP + PP1 + PP2

Type 5: NP + Adj. Clause Type 1: VP + NP + PP (prépositionnel phrase)

III) Pragmatic Ambiguity

Pragmatic ambiguity arises when the statement is not specific, and the context does not provide the information needed to clarify the statement (Walton 1996). It refers to a situation where the context of a phrase gives it multiple interpretations. Berry et al (2003) believe that ‘pragmatic ambiguity occurs when a sentence has several meanings in the context in which it is uttered. The context comprises the language context, i.e., the sentence uttered before and after context, and the context beyond the language, i.e., the situation, the background knowledge, and expectations of the speaker or hearer and the writer or reader. For example ;

Table 1.4: Examples of Pragmatic Ambiguity

Sentence	Literary Meaning	Pragmatic Meaning
Do you know what time it is?	Asking for the current time	Expressing anger at someone who missed the due time for something.
Will you crack open the door? I am getting hot	Break the door	Open the door just a little to let in some air.
I heart you	The heart is an organ of the human body that pumps blood and keeps us alive	Hearts are usually used as a symbol of love. So this person means I love you

IV) Referential Ambiguity

Referential ambiguity occurs when a word or phrase, in the context of a particular sentence, could refer to two or more properties or things. It is sometimes clear from the context which meaning is intended, but not always. Referential ambiguity can result because of the presence of pronouns,

the presence of substitution items, confusion about a noun being considered as a compound noun, a single noun and its appositives and a pile of names or attributes for a single referent.

For example, the boy told his father about the theft. He was very upset.

He is referentially ambiguous because it can refer to both the boy and the father.

V) Scope Ambiguity

A scope ambiguity is an ambiguity that occurs when two quantifiers or similar expressions can take scope over each other in different ways in the meaning of a sentence. For example, "Every man loves a woman."

The more prominent meaning of this sentence is that for every man, there is a woman, and it's possible that each man loves a different woman. But the sentence also has a second possible meaning, which says that there is one particular woman who is loved by every man.

1.15 Conclusion

Chapter one provides an in-depth look at the English language, its evolution, and the linguistic challenges faced by learners in acquiring it. The motivation for the study, its problem statement, aims, objectives, hypothesis, and scope were outlined. In addition, it examined language acquisition and highlighted the varieties of English, as defined by Kachru's Three Circles Model. The chapter explores the present state of English, including its diverse forms and global influence, while discussing the concept of ambiguity and its various types. The history of ambiguity is also explored, and we define key concepts and offer relevant examples. Overall, the chapter sets the stage for our study by providing essential background information on the complexities of the English language, emphasising the need for a deeper understanding of ambiguity in language learning.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

A considerable body of studies have researched ambiguity, focusing on the two main types of ambiguity, lexical and structural ambiguity, and their influence on second language speakers. This review of literature presents some previous studies conducted within the context of lexical and structural ambiguity for us to gain insight into the topic, and know what other people think about the subject ambiguity with ESL learners.

2.2 Literature Review

According to Ovu (2011), in his article “Lexical Sources of Ambiguity in English and Daily Communication”, language users find language puzzling. The article delves into the intricacies of how words with multiple meanings can weave confusion into everyday interactions. By exploring the fundamental concepts behind "lexical ambiguity," he offers invaluable insights into this pervasive phenomenon. The author examines four types of lexical ambiguity: homographs, homonyms, homophones, and polysemy. He explains the differences and similarities among these concepts and provides examples of how they can cause confusion or misunderstanding in spoken and written language. He also suggests some strategies to avoid or resolve lexical ambiguity, such as using context clues, providing sufficient details, and appealing to shared background knowledge. He concludes that lexical ambiguity is an inevitable feature of natural languages and that English language users should be aware of its sources and effects in order to communicate effectively.

The author begins by defining lexical ambiguity as “the situation where a word or a phrase has more than one interpretation within a sentence”. He states that lexical ambiguity can be intentional or unintentional and that it can have positive or negative consequences depending on the context and the purpose of communication. He then introduces the four types of lexical ambiguity that he will discuss in the article: homographs, homonyms, homophones, and polysemy.

Homographs are words that have the same spelling but different meanings and pronunciations, such as “lead” (a metal or a verb), “wind” (air movement or a verb), and “bow” (a weapon or a gesture). Imagine someone asking, "Is the bat in the cave?" Leaving the context unclear can lead to humorous misinterpretations, highlighting the pitfall of assuming a single meaning.

Homonyms are words that have the same spelling and pronunciation but different meanings, such as “bank” (a financial institution or a riverside), “bat” (a flying mammal or sports equipment), and “date” (a fruit or a calendar day).

Homophones are words that have the same pronunciation but different spellings and meanings, such as “write” and “right”, “sea” and “see”, and “flower” and “flour”. Polysemy is the phenomenon where a word has multiple related meanings that derive from a core sense, such as “head” (the upper part of the body, the leader of a group, the front of a line, etc).

The author then provides examples of how these types of lexical ambiguity can create confusion or misunderstanding in daily communication, especially when the context or background knowledge is insufficient or unclear. For instance, he cites the following sentence as an example of homographic ambiguity: “The bandage was wound around the wound”. He explains that the word “wound” can be pronounced differently and have different meanings depending on its position and function in the sentence. He also cites the following sentence as an example of homonymic ambiguity: “She went to the bank to withdraw some money”. He explains that the word “bank” can have two different meanings depending on the context and that the listener or the reader may not know which one is intended without further information. He also cites the following sentence as an example of homophonic ambiguity: “I sea what you mean”. He explains that the word “sea” is a homophone of “see”, and that the speaker may have made a spelling mistake or a deliberate pun. He also cites the following sentence as an example of polysemous ambiguity: “He lost his head in the accident”. He explains that the word “head” can have multiple meanings and that the listener or the reader may not know whether the speaker means that he literally lost his head or that he lost his composure or his sense of direction.

The author then suggests some strategies to avoid or resolve lexical ambiguity in daily communication, such as using context clues, providing sufficient details, and appealing to shared background knowledge. He argues that context clues are linguistic or non-linguistic elements that help the listener or the reader infer the intended meaning of an ambiguous word or phrase, such as

punctuation, intonation, gestures, or situational factors. He argues that providing sufficient details is another way to avoid or resolve lexical ambiguity, such as using modifiers, synonyms, antonyms, or examples to clarify the meaning of an ambiguous word or phrase. He argues that appealing to shared background knowledge is another way to avoid or resolve lexical ambiguity, such as using common sense, world knowledge, or cultural knowledge to interpret the meaning of an ambiguous word or phrase.

The author concludes that lexical ambiguity is an inevitable feature of natural languages and that English language users should be aware of its sources and effects to communicate effectively. He states that lexical ambiguity can be a source of creativity, humour, or persuasion, but also a source of confusion, misunderstanding, or deception. He advises that English language users should choose their words carefully and provide adequate contextual details to avoid or resolve lexical ambiguity in daily communication.

(Ovu, 2011) The article and this research work both explore the intriguing world of lexical ambiguity, with key differences in terms of focus and scope. While this research work delves deep into the specific challenges faced by ESL learners at Yaoundé 1 University when grappling with these words, this work examines the unique difficulties they encounter, the potential reasons behind their struggles, and proposes strategies tailor-made for this population to navigate ambiguity effectively. (Ovu, 2011) on the other hand, takes a broader view, exploring the various sources of ambiguity lurking within the English language itself and their impact on everyday communication. His article paints a more theoretical landscape, offering a framework for understanding this complex phenomenon. Our methodologies differ as well. This research employs a mixed-methods approach, gathering evidence through exercises, questionnaires, and data analysis, potentially drawing on existing research on ESL learning and ambiguity. (Ovu, 2011) in contrast, he primarily relies on theoretical analysis and existing research to identify and explain the different sources of ambiguity, using examples to illustrate his points rather than presenting his data.

(Van Petten & Kutas, 2002) The article on “Tracking the Time Course of Meaning Activation: Lexical Ambiguity Resolution” looks at how our brains navigate the complexities of language, specifically focusing on how we interpret words with multiple meanings (lexical ambiguity). Their groundbreaking research employs event-related brain potentials (ERPs) to capture the dynamic

dance of electrical activity within the brain as we grapple with these linguistic tricksters. The article investigates how the brain processes words that have more than one meaning, such as “bank” or “bat”, using event-related potentials (ERPs), which are brain waves measured by electrodes attached to the scalp. The authors conducted two experiments, one using a priming paradigm and the other using a sentence context paradigm, to examine how the brain activates and selects the appropriate meaning of an ambiguous word. They found that the brain can use both semantic and syntactic information to resolve lexical ambiguity and that the time course of meaning activation depends on the type and strength of the context. Imagine encountering a sentence like "The bank robbed the man." Depending on context, "bank" could refer to a financial institution or the edge of a river. This inherent ambiguity presents a fascinating challenge for our brains, and the authors set out to map the neural pathways we navigate to arrive at the intended meaning.

The authors begin by reviewing the previous literature on lexical ambiguity resolution, which is the process of determining the intended meaning of a word that has more than one possible meaning. They explain that lexical ambiguity can be classified into two types: homonymy and polysemy. Homonymy refers to words that have unrelated meanings, such as “bank” (a financial institution or a riverside). Polysemy refers to words that have related meanings, such as “head” (the upper part of the body, the leader of a group, the front of a line, etc.). They also explain that lexical ambiguity can be resolved by using different sources of information, such as semantic, syntactic, pragmatic, and discourse information. Semantic information refers to the meaning of words and their relations. Syntactic information refers to the structure and rules of sentences. Pragmatic information refers to the purpose and intention of communication. Discourse information refers to the coherence and continuity of the text or speech.

The authors then describe the ERP technique, which is a method of measuring the electrical activity of the brain in response to stimuli, such as words or sounds. They explain that ERPs are composed of different components, which are peaks or troughs in the waveform that reflect different cognitive processes. They focus on two ERP components that are relevant to lexical ambiguity resolution: the N400 and the P600. The N400 is a negative peak that occurs around 400 milliseconds after the stimulus onset and reflects the semantic processing of words. The P600 is a positive peak that occurs around 600 milliseconds after the stimulus onset and reflects the syntactic processing of sentences.

The authors then report the results of their two experiments, which aimed to track the time course of meaning activation of ambiguous words using ERPs. In the first experiment, they used a priming paradigm, in which participants were presented with pairs of words, such as “river-bank” or “money-bank”, and asked to judge whether they were related or not. The first word in each pair was either an ambiguous word (such as “bank”) or an unambiguous word (such as “river”). The second word in each pair was either a related word (such as “money”) or an unrelated word (such as “chair”). The authors hypothesised that the N400 amplitude would be smaller for related words than for unrelated words and that the N400 amplitude would be modulated by the ambiguity of the first word. They found that the N400 amplitude was indeed smaller for related words than for unrelated words and that the N400 amplitude was also smaller for ambiguous words than for unambiguous words. They interpreted this result as evidence that the brain activates both meanings of an ambiguous word initially, and then selects the appropriate meaning based on the second word.

In the second experiment, they used a sentence context paradigm, in which participants were presented with sentences that contained an ambiguous word, such as “She went to the bank to withdraw some money” or “She went to the bank to enjoy the view”. The sentences were either congruent or incongruent with the dominant or subordinate meaning of the ambiguous word. The dominant meaning is the more frequent or common meaning, such as “financial institution” for “bank”. The subordinate meaning is the less frequent or uncommon meaning, such as “riverside” for “bank”. The authors hypothesised that the N400 amplitude would be larger for incongruent sentences than for congruent sentences and that the N400 amplitude would be modulated by the dominance of the meaning of the ambiguous word. They also hypothesised that the P600 amplitude would be larger for incongruent sentences than for congruent sentences and that the P600 amplitude would reflect the syntactic reanalysis of the sentence. They found that the N400 amplitude was indeed larger for incongruent sentences than for congruent sentences and that the N400 amplitude was also larger for subordinate meanings than for dominant meanings. They interpreted this result as evidence that the brain activates the dominant meaning of an ambiguous word first, and then activates the subordinate meaning if the context is incongruent. They also found that the P600 amplitude was larger for incongruent sentences than for congruent sentences and that the P600 amplitude was not affected by the dominance of the meaning of the ambiguous

word. They interpreted this result as evidence that the brain uses syntactic information to restructure the sentence when the context is incongruent.

The authors conclude that their experiments demonstrate that the brain can use both semantic and syntactic information to resolve lexical ambiguity and that the time course of meaning activation depends on the type and strength of the context. They suggest that the ERP technique is a useful tool for tracking the dynamic and interactive processes of lexical ambiguity resolution in the brain.

This article throws more weight on the subject of lexical ambiguity being tackled in this research work, though addressing it from different angles. The article delves into the neurolinguistic mechanisms underlying ambiguity resolution in the brain, while we look broadly at the specific challenges ESL learners encounter with ambiguous words. The article's work focuses on the general cognitive mechanisms of ambiguity resolution in the brain. The article utilizes ERPs to measure brain activity in real time, offering a direct window into the neural processing of ambiguity. This research employs different research methods like questionnaires, interviews, or language analysis, providing a deeper understanding of the cognitive and behavioural strategies used by ESL learners to cope with ambiguity.

(Ferran, 2019) The article on “Lexical Ambiguity Compared to Syntactic/Or Structural Ambiguity”, compares and contrasts two types of linguistic ambiguity that occur when a word or a phrase has more than one possible meaning or interpretation: lexical ambiguity and syntactic ambiguity. The author explains the causes, effects, and examples of both types of ambiguity and discusses how they can be resolved by using contextual clues, background knowledge, or grammatical rules. The author also suggests some pedagogical implications for teaching and learning English as a foreign language, such as raising awareness of ambiguity, providing practice exercises, and using authentic materials.

The author begins by defining linguistic ambiguity as “the situation where a word or a phrase has more than one interpretation within a sentence”. He states that linguistic ambiguity can be intentional or unintentional and that it can have positive or negative consequences depending on the context and the purpose of communication. He then introduces the two types of linguistic ambiguity that he will discuss in the article: lexical ambiguity and syntactic ambiguity.

Lexical ambiguity refers to words that have multiple meanings, such as “bank” (a financial institution or a riverside), “bat” (a flying mammal or a sports equipment), or “date” (a fruit or a

calendar day). The author explains that lexical ambiguity can be classified into two subtypes: homonymy and polysemy. Homonymy refers to words that have unrelated meanings, such as “bank”. Polysemy refers to words that have related meanings, such as “head” (the upper part of the body, the leader of a group, the front of a line, etc.). The author provides examples of how lexical ambiguity can create confusion or misunderstanding in daily communication, especially when the context or the background knowledge is insufficient or unclear. For instance, he cites the following sentence as an example of lexical ambiguity: “She went to the bank to withdraw some money”. He explains that the word “bank” can have two different meanings depending on the context and that the listener or the reader may not know which one is intended without further information.

Syntactic ambiguity refers to phrases or sentences that have multiple structures or interpretations, such as “The chicken is ready to eat” (the chicken is hungry or the chicken is cooked), “Visiting relatives can be boring” (the act of visiting relatives or the relatives who are visiting), or “I saw the man with the binoculars” (I used the binoculars or the man had the binoculars). The author explains that syntactic ambiguity can be caused by different factors, such as word order, punctuation, coordination, or attachment. The author provides examples of how syntactic ambiguity can create confusion or misunderstanding in daily communication, especially when the context or the background knowledge is insufficient or unclear. For instance, he cites the following sentence as an example of syntactic ambiguity: “They are flying planes”. He explains that the sentence can have two different structures or interpretations depending on the attachment of the word “flying”, and that the listener or the reader may not know which one is intended without further information.

The author then discusses how lexical ambiguity and syntactic ambiguity can be resolved by using different sources of information, such as contextual clues, background knowledge, or grammatical rules. He argues that contextual clues are linguistic or non-linguistic elements that help the listener or the reader infer the intended meaning of an ambiguous word or phrase, such as punctuation, intonation, gestures, or situational factors. He argues that background knowledge is the common sense, world knowledge, or cultural knowledge that the listener or the reader shares with the speaker or the writer, and that helps them interpret the meaning of an ambiguous word or phrase. He argues that grammatical rules are the structure and rules of sentences that help the listener or the reader determine the correct structure or interpretation of an ambiguous phrase or sentence.

The author concludes that lexical ambiguity and syntactic ambiguity are common and inevitable features of natural languages and that English language users should be aware of their sources and effects in order to communicate effectively. He also suggests some pedagogical implications for teaching and learning English as a foreign language, such as raising awareness of ambiguity, providing practice exercises, and using authentic materials.

This article focuses on the general comparison between lexical and syntactic/structural ambiguity, providing a solid foundation for understanding the general mechanisms of ambiguity resolution, which informs this research of ESL learners' struggles. The article shares a common goal of understanding how we decipher and choose the intended meaning from ambiguous language. The article takes a broader theoretical approach, comparing and contrasting two types of ambiguity in general, drawing evidence from linguistic theory, experiments, and corpus data, to support its claims, which informs this research work that takes more of an applied approach, focusing on the specific difficulties and learning needs.

(Singh & Joseph, 2021) The article on “Lexical Ambiguity and Its Impact on Communication in ESL Contexts” explores the concept and types of lexical ambiguity, which is the phenomenon of words having more than one meaning, and how it affects communication in English as a second language (ESL) context. The authors argue that lexical ambiguity can be a source of confusion, misunderstanding, and miscommunication for ESL learners and speakers, especially in cross-cultural situations. They also suggest some strategies to overcome the challenges posed by lexical ambiguity, such as using context clues, paraphrasing, clarifying, and consulting dictionaries or other reference sources. The article aims to raise awareness of the importance of lexical ambiguity in ESL communication and to provide some guidance for ESL teachers and learners to deal with it effectively.

The article outlines some of the strategies that educators can use to help students address and overcome lexical ambiguity. For instance, the teachers can clarify ambiguous terms by using visual aids, synonyms or definitions. Similarly, teachers can also use real-life examples, which can help students remember words in context and the multiple ways the word can be used. The article also suggests that teachers emphasise the importance of using contextual cues, such as intonation and facial expressions, to help learners infer meaning. Additionally, the article suggests utilising

complex sentence structures as these provide numerous opportunities to convey multiple meanings.

The article reveals that addressing lexical ambiguity in ESL learners' education is a crucial aspect of helping them improve their communication skills. It is essential to provide a supportive learning environment in which students can express, practice, and revise their language skills to build their confidence in using the language. Overall, this article highlights the need for ESL teachers to recognise and address lexical ambiguity and guides how to do so effectively.

This article investigates the challenges posed by lexical ambiguity for ESL learners, similar to this research work. Acknowledging the potential for misunderstanding, miscommunication and confusion due to ambiguity in ESL contexts. The article primarily discusses theoretical concepts and existing research, theoretical frameworks creating a gap in the actual struggles faced by ESL learners, this research thus employs empirical data collection using specific research methods, like questionnaires, interviews, or language analysis, to gather data to better offer evidence-based recommendations and insights specific to your research population and context. Concerning the previously mentioned studies where the writers looked at ambiguity in relation to comprehensibility, and identification of ambiguous words and meaning, this study will take a step further by focusing on lexical ambiguity, using some lexically ambiguous words to show the extent to which it affects ESL learners.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study adopted two theoretical frameworks: Galen's ambiguity theory, propounded by Claudius Galenus, commonly known as Galen and the Lexical Approach by Micheal Lewis (1993).

2.3.1 Galen's Ambiguity Theory

It is a concept in ancient Greek philosophy that refers to a dual nature or double meaning that arises from equivocal words or phrases. Galen's ambiguity can cause confusion and misunderstanding, similar to lexical ambiguity in ESL contexts. The ancient philosopher Galen posited that ambiguous language was a significant barrier to effective communication, and he believed that it was the responsibility of both the speaker and the listener to clarify the meaning of

any ambiguous words or phrases. According to Galen, language is not a direct representation of facts, but rather it is a system of symbols that is subject to interpretation and analysis. Therefore, ambiguous language arises when a particular word or phrase can be interpreted in multiple ways, resulting in a dual nature or double meaning. Galen's theory of ambiguity provides an exhaustive classification of every sort of ambiguity that occurs in language. It appeals to five principles that govern all cases of ambiguity in language: Actuality, Potentiality, Appearance, Lexical, and Syntactic.

According to Galen's theory, any ambiguous sentence, its ambiguity will be either lexical or syntactic, and actual, potential, or apparent. The notion of lexical ambiguity is relatively unproblematic. A sentence is lexically ambiguous when one of its words has more than one sense, even when that word is isolated from the sentence in question. He goes ahead to expatiate on this fact by quoting an example: "the object is light" and says the sentence is lexically ambiguous due to the adjective "light". The adjective "light" has two meanings ('of little weight' and pale in colour). Therefore, accounts for the sentence being ambiguous. Galen also clarifies that a sentence is said to be syntactically ambiguous not when one of its words has more than one sense, but rather when its ambiguity is derived from the combination of words in a sentence, that is, from the structural arrangement of words within a sentence.

Galen's theory classifies and defines the types of ambiguity he countenances as follows:

- Homonymy: actual, lexical ambiguity
- Amphiboly: actual, syntactic ambiguity
- Accent: potential, lexical ambiguity
- Combination and Division: potential, syntactic ambiguity
- Form of expression(L): apparent, lexical ambiguity
- Form of expression(s): apparent, syntactic ambiguity¹.

Galen's theory of ambiguity provides a comprehensive framework for understanding linguistic ambiguity. It offers a systematic approach to analysing and categorising different types of ambiguities that can occur in language. By identifying and classifying these ambiguities, Galen's theory helps shed light on the complexities of language and contributes to our understanding of how meaning is conveyed through words and sentences.

2.3.2 The Lexical Approach

The Lexical Approach was introduced in 1993 by Michael Lewis, a British linguist who observed that “language consists of grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar.” The basic concept on which this approach rests is the idea that an important part of learning a language consists of being able to understand and produce lexical phrases as chunks. It is a method of language teaching and learning that emphasises the importance of teaching vocabulary as the basis for language acquisition and development. This approach recognises that language learners need a large and varied vocabulary to communicate effectively in real-life situations. It is based on the premise that language is made up of lexical units (words) and that developing awareness and knowledge of these units is crucial to achieving fluency and accuracy in language use.

The approach prioritises the teaching of high-frequency vocabulary, as the most common words in a language are used more frequently and are therefore more valuable to learners than less common words. According to (Nation, 20001), learners can develop an effective command of a language by focusing on learning high-frequency lexical items. It also recognises the importance of collocation and word partnerships, as words are not usually used in isolation but are often used in combination with other words. Therefore, learners need to develop an understanding of which words tend to occur together in specific contexts. Research has found that teaching vocabulary in context can facilitate learners’ understanding and retention of new vocabulary (Schmitt, 2000)

The lexical approach stresses the importance of teaching vocabulary in context, as this helps learners understand how words are used and their specific meanings in different contexts. It also emphasises the importance of using authentic materials, such as newspapers, magazines, and online resources, to teach vocabulary, as this exposes learners to real-life language usage. It also recognises that learners need to develop their ability to produce language in addition to understanding it. Therefore, it emphasises the importance of teaching learners how to use vocabulary in speaking and writing, and in using collocations and word partnerships in context. Thus, improving their writing and communication skills.

2.3.2 1 Arguments in Favour of the Lexical Approach

The lexical approach to language teaching advocates for the importance of vocabulary and multi-word expressions in language learning as opposed to traditional grammar instruction. According to Michael Lewis (1993), the lexical approach suggests that "language consists of grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar" (p. 31). This statement implies that language is built around fixed expressions or chunks of words that are used in context and have specific meanings. Hence, learning these chunks can facilitate acquisition and enable learners to communicate more naturally.

Another argument in favour of the lexical approach is that it enables learners to better develop a sense of language collocation and usage. Scott Thornbury (2002) states that "chunks and collocation are the key to knowing a word" (p. 40). In other words, learners who are familiar with how words typically go together in English are more likely to use them correctly in context. Thus, by emphasising the teaching of vocabulary in context, the lexical approach may enhance learners' understanding of how words are used in different situations.

Additionally, the lexical approach challenges the notion of a strict distinction between productive and receptive skills in language learning. Jack Richards (2008) argues that the lexical approach promotes the integrated practice of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, saying that "integrated language activities that engage students in all their four skills through an emphasis on vocabulary and discourse development promote more effective language acquisition" (p. 138). Thus, by teaching vocabulary in context and encouraging students to practice using words and phrases in a range of contexts, the lexical approach may help learners develop both their receptive and productive language skills.

Michael Hoey, a linguist at Oxford University, also supports Lewis's lexical approach. According to Hoey, "lexical phrases are the building blocks of language" (2005, p. 1). Hoey believes that language proficiency is heavily dependent on the ability to use and understand multi-word lexical units. He argues that the ability to recognise and use these phrases is critical in both language comprehension and production.

Moreover, Pawel Szudarski, a lecturer in Poland, agrees with Lewis's lexical approach. He argues that "lexical units should be seen as a complex system of interconnected elements" (2011, p. 1). Szudarski suggests that breaking down language into individual words and grammar rules only hinders language acquisition. By understanding lexical units as interconnected elements, he

believes that language learners can improve their ability to understand and use natural language more effectively.

Another linguist who supports a linguist also supports Lewis' lexical approach is Alison Wray. She emphasizes that "lexical units are the most abundant and basic means of encoding meaning in language" (2002, p. 7). Wray argues that the use of lexical units is essential in both language production and comprehension. She suggests that the use of formulaic languages, such as idioms and phrasal verbs, can greatly benefit language learners in their ability to understand and use natural language.

Norbert Schmitt, an applied linguist, also agrees with the lexical approach. He suggests that "students should be taught vocabulary in chunks, rather than individual words" (2000, p. 307). Schmitt argues that language learners benefit from being exposed to and practicing the use of multi-word lexical units. He recommends that language learners focus on learning and using common idioms, phrasal verbs, and other formulaic expressions.

Therefore, proponents of the lexical approach argue that teaching vocabulary in context, using real-world materials, and focusing on multi-word expressions can improve learners' communicative competence and language proficiency. As such, the lexical approach promotes a more fluid and organic language acquisition process that is based on authentic communication rather than the rote memorization of grammar rules.

2.3.2 .2 Critics of the Lexical Approach

The lexical approach is a modern language teaching method that emphasises the importance of vocabulary in language acquisition. It encourages learners to focus on the usage of words in context rather than learning them in isolation. However, not all language experts agree with this method and have offered criticisms based on their research and observations.

Scott Thornbury, a prominent language teaching expert, expressed his reservations about the lexical approach. He argues that the approach "overemphasises the importance of vocabulary and neglects other essential language components such as grammar, pronunciation, and discourse" (Thornbury, 2002). Thornbury believes that grammar, pronunciation, and discourse have an equal share in language learning and should be given the same attention as vocabulary. For example, the

use of proper grammatical structures and intonation patterns can significantly improve communication skills. Therefore, language teachers need to balance the focus on vocabulary with explicit instruction in grammar, pronunciation, and discourse. He also points out that too much focus on vocabulary could result in a lack of consideration for other crucial aspects of language acquisition.

Another critic of the lexical approach is Michael Lewis, who argues that the method is too prescriptive and limits learners' creativity. According to Lewis, the approach "promotes a static view of language, where learners are expected to memorise pre-selected lexical items instead of being allowed to experiment and create new forms" (Lewis, 1993). Lewis suggests that language learners should have the freedom to create and use language in their unique ways, which promotes creativity and enhances their language skills. For instance, learners should be encouraged to use synonyms, antonyms, and idiomatic expressions to convey meaning effectively, instead of just memorising individual words. This approach promotes creativity and enhances language skills by providing learners with the opportunity to explore language in their unique ways.

Also, Rod Ellis has identified some limitations of the lexical approach. He found that the approach "ignores the importance of grammar in language learning, and the significance of explicit grammar instruction" (Ellis, 2006). Ellis suggests that grammar instruction is an essential element in language teaching and should not be neglected in favour of the lexical approach. He also points out that explicit grammar instruction helps learners understand the rules of language and apply them effectively in communication. For example, providing learners with explicit instruction on the structures of modal verbs can help them communicate effectively and accurately in various situations.

Despite its advantages, the lexical approach is not without its criticisms. Critics argue that the approach overemphasises vocabulary and neglects other essential language components, limits learners' creativity, and tends to ignore the significance of explicit grammar instruction. Despite these criticisms, it adds relevance to this work as it stands out as one of the solutions for ESL learners to disambiguate ambiguous sentences. Having a good mastery of words in a language helps learners know the particular context in which words are being used.

2.3.3 Importance of the Galen Theory of ambiguity and the Lexical approach to this study

The Galen Theory of lexical ambiguity and the lexical approach answer the research question of how ESL learners can avoid the excessive use of ambiguity, and help ESL learners better understand the concepts of ambiguity and how it functions as the Galen theory of ambiguity lists and differentiates the different types of ambiguity.

The lexical approach emphasises the acquisition of high-frequency vocabulary and their collocations in different domains, which allows learners to develop a deeper understanding of how words can have different meanings depending on the context in which they occur. The lexical approach also emphasises the importance of vocabulary in context, which is a crucial aspect of understanding ambiguous words and sentences and an effective tool for avoiding misconceptions in communication.

Third-year language students of the English Department were used as the sample population of this study. This sample population was issued questionnaires and exercises that proved the hypothesis that lexical ambiguity is a challenge to ESL learners. The Galen theory of ambiguity and the Lexical approach provide these learners with the tools to understand and analyse their language use and to identify and resolve instances of lexical ambiguity.

The lexical approach emphasises the importance of collocations and co-occurrences of words to develop effective communication skills. If ESL learners adopt this, it will help them a great deal to combat confusion and misinterpretations during communications. Knowing that some words co-occur in different domains can develop learners' understanding of how words may have different meanings depending on the context in which they are used, and will also help learners easily detect the meaning intended by the speaker/writer since these words frequently appear in pairs with certain meanings attached to them. By contextualising Galen's ambiguity theory in the context of language learning, we can better understand how ambiguity can impact communication and the importance of addressing it in the learning process.

Finally, the lexical approach suggests that learners should focus on meaningful communication rather than just grammatical accuracy. “Language is grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar” (Lewis 1993). In other words, lexis is centred on creating meaning, and grammar plays a subservient managerial role. This means that learners should strive to understand the meaning of

what they are reading or listening to, by paying attention to the sentence structure and lexis that constitute the sentence structure, rather than just trying to understand the individual words, though these words constitute a language. By so doing, ESL learners can develop the ability to identify and resolve lexical ambiguity in communication. Therefore, the Galen theory and the lexical approach can be seen as useful tools in helping ESL learners overcome the challenge of lexical ambiguity in their language learning journey, thus creating better chances for better language communication.

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, Chapter 2 has provided a comprehensive review of the literature on lexical ambiguity. The theoretical framework presented has helped to clarify the concept of ambiguity and its impact on language processing. The lexical approach was also discussed, with proponents and critics of the theory sharing their views. The review of the literature indicates the importance of understanding the lexical approach and how it can be used to address lexical ambiguity. Galen's theory of ambiguity is also relevant in understanding how language ambiguity can arise through the use of words that have multiple meanings, and how it can affect communication and language processing. This emphasises the need for researchers and language instructors to be aware of the presence of ambiguity in language use and the strategies that can be used to address it. Therefore, combining Galen's theory with the lexical approach can contribute to a more precise understanding of ambiguity in language, thereby reducing misunderstandings in communication

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Research methodology is “a structured and scientific approach used to collect, analyse, and interpret quantitative or qualitative data to answer research questions or test hypotheses” (Paperpal, 2023). According to Somekh and Lewin (2005), a research methodology is both “the collection of methods of rules” you apply to your research, as well as the “principles, theories, and values” that support your research approach. In this research, a combination of methodologies was used. This chapter describes the methodology that was used in conducting this research. It describes the research design, area of study, sample population, instruments for data collection, data collection procedures, data selection, and analysis. It will go ahead to give the various challenges faced during the process of writing this research. A detailed explanation of the various methodologies listed above will be further expatiated below.

3.2 Research Design

In conducting this research, the chosen research design is quantitative and qualitative. This research design quantifies feelings, opinions, attitudes, behaviours, and other variables to support or refute hypotheses about a particular phenomenon (Farnsworth, 2019). The use of this design provides a systematic approach to answer the research questions and achieve research objectives. In addition, it seeks to generalise the findings from the sample to a much wider population or specific groups, thereby providing reliable and valid results (Farnsworth, 2019).

To achieve the research objectives, a correlational and descriptive research design will be used. This design helps to describe the variables and examine the relationships between them. A descriptive study has been chosen as it investigates the perception of undergraduate students at the University of Yaoundé 1 concerning lexical ambiguity in language. This design will specifically describe the data collected on the participants' perceptions of lexical ambiguity.

In addition, a mixed qualitative-quantitative research design will be employed to represent data in numerical formats and explore the attitudes and perceptions of participants through qualitative

research methods. This design will help to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic under study. The quantitative research methods will provide statistical data on the number of participants with a particular perception of lexical ambiguity. The qualitative research methods, on the other hand, will provide a more in-depth understanding of the participants' attitudes and perceptions towards lexical ambiguity in language. The research design chosen research design is valuable in addressing the research questions and achieving the research objectives through a systematic and comprehensive approach.

3.3 Data Collection

According to Neuman, W. L. (2014), Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest in a systematic and organised manner. It is a crucial phase in research, providing the raw material needed to analyse and draw conclusions. Data can be collected through various methods, such as surveys, interviews, observations, experiments, or existing records and documents. This section shows how the data was collected and the justifications.

3.3.1 Data Site

To carry out this study, the English Department of the University of Yaoundé I was selected as the data site. The English Department offers undergraduate language courses in English language and literature. The chosen site provides an environment that aligns with the research objectives and questions, as it offers a pool of language students who will provide insights into the perception of lexical ambiguity in language.

3.3.2 Sample Population

The sample of the study comprises of third-year language students of the English Department of the University of Yaoundé I, 2023 batch. All the participants who are involved in answering the test and questionnaires are level three students who have language as their area of speciality. The participants of this research are students who have acquired knowledge of ambiguity and fully understand what it is all about. This study needs advanced participants, which justifies the reason why the researcher had to select third-year students of the English department focusing on the

language specialization to have participants who are not new to the topic and have gathered a certain level of knowledge that will enable them to answer the test and questionnaires with the researcher having confidence of the outcome of the responses (relevant answers).

The sample population of this study comprises of English language students from the English Department of the University of Yaoundé 1, all of whom are in their third year of study and are specialised in the English language. The participants were selected based on their level of language proficiency and their knowledge of lexical ambiguity. As noted by Ziegler and Goswami (2005), lexical ambiguity is a complex issue that requires a certain level of language proficiency for effective understanding. Thus, the choice of third-year language students specialising in the English language was necessary for this study as they have acquired a significant level of knowledge on lexical ambiguity through their studies and are familiar with the relevant terminology and concepts. As noted by Kitzinger (1995), sample size is an important factor in research as it has an impact on the reliability and validity of the findings. Thus, a sample size of 100 ensures that the participants represent a diverse range of perspectives and experiences and provides sufficient data to draw meaningful conclusions.

3.3.3 Justification of the Sample Population

One justification for choosing third-year students specialising in the English language as the sample population is that they have a higher level of language proficiency compared to level two and level one students. As language learners progress through their studies, they are exposed to more complex language features and have a better understanding of the language rules and structures. Therefore, third-year language students at the English Department of the University of Yaoundé I are expected to have a better mastery of the concept of lexical ambiguity and can relate to the research questions more easily.

The use of third-year language students also guarantees that the participants have been exposed to different levels of language teaching and have likely encountered lexical ambiguity during their studies. This choice relates to the research objectives as it provides the researcher with the necessary information to understand how language students at a certain level perceive lexical ambiguity in language and the effect it has on their language learning. Therefore, the use of the English Department at the University of Yaoundé I as the data site, English language students in

their third year as participants, provides the necessary data to achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions.

Furthermore, selecting a sample population consisting of third-year language students specialising in English allowed for a more focused and homogeneous sample, which enhanced the internal validity of the study. As the participants were at the same academic level and had similar language learning experiences, any differences in their perceptions of lexical ambiguity could be attributed to the independent variable (e.g., ambiguity level) rather than extraneous factors. This strengthens the causal inference of the study and increases its scientific rigour.

3.4 Data Collection Tools

Data collection tools are the instruments used to collect data in research. The data collection tools used in this study are paper questionnaire and exercises.

3.4.1 Questionnaire

A collection from a large number of participants in a relatively efficient manner. Several types of questionnaires exist, examples include: open-ended questionnaire, which allow questionnaire as a data collection method used by readers to standardise data participants to provide their responses, which may provide more in-depth insight but can be more challenging to analyse quantitatively. A structured questionnaire has a fixed format and sequence of questions, ensuring that all participants receive the same questions in the same order. an unstructured questionnaire, which gives more flexibility and sequence, is more beneficial for exploratory research and a closed-ended questionnaire, which provides pre-defined response options for participants to choose from, such as multiple choice, dichotomous (yes/no), or likely scale questions.

This research used a closed-ended questionnaire comprised of 10 questionnaire that were designed to collect quantitative data regarding the participants' understanding of lexical ambiguity and its challenges. The closed-ended questions required participants to choose from a set of pre-determined response options and were used to gather specific and measurable data.

The questionnaire utilised in this study comprises a combination of multiple-choice questions and dichotomous or binary questions. Multiple-choice questions present respondents with a range of

options, typically labelled as A, B, C, etc., allowing them to select the response that most closely aligns with their views, knowledge, or preferences. This format enables participants to choose from a variety of potential answers, providing researchers with valuable insights into the nuances of their perspectives. On the other hand, dichotomous questions offer respondents only two response options, usually 'yes' or 'no.' These questions are designed to elicit straightforward answers, making them particularly useful for gathering basic information or opinions on specific topics. By incorporating both multiple-choice and dichotomous questions, the questionnaire aims to capture a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives while ensuring clarity and objectivity in the data collection process.

3.4.2 Exercises

The exercises, on the other hand, consisted of 30 multiple-choice questions that aimed to identify the participants' level of understanding of lexical ambiguity and its challenges. The exercises were designed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data and provided participants with an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the concepts being studied.

The exercises were designed to collect quantitative data, allowing participants to demonstrate their understanding of lexical ambiguity through multiple-choice questions. Participants provided numerical responses, offering insights into their comprehension levels and interpretations of the concept. By answering these questions, participants showcased their grasp of lexical ambiguity in various contexts, enriching the dataset with quantitative measures of their understanding. This approach facilitated a structured assessment of participants' comprehension levels and provided valuable insights for analysis.

The use of both questionnaire and exercises as data collection tools was carefully considered and was based on the research objectives and questions. The questionnaire was used to collect specific quantitative data on the participants' understanding of lexical ambiguity, while the exercises were used to collect a more nuanced understanding of the participants' understanding of the concepts being studied.

3.5 Data Sources

This study has two sources of data collection, which include primary and secondary data sources. The primary data sources were the questionnaires and exercises administered to the participants, while the secondary data source consisted of materials obtained from previous studies on the topic.

3.5.1 The Primary Source of Data Collection

The primary source of data collection was composed of questionnaires and an exercise. Ten questionnaires was administered, and the questions were closed-ended. They were designed using the dichotomous and nominal polychromous scale. Participants were asked to provide answers, choosing from two options, either Yes or No, and other questions carried the nominal polychromous scale, where respondents had more than two options to choose from.

The questionnaire was in a multiple-choice format designed for the participants to mark the letter that corresponds to their appropriate answer. The questions asked consisted of the WH Format, where participants had to respond with yes or no and indicate the degree to which they concur with certain aspects. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A aimed to obtain the participants' personal information regarding the topic, while Section B was aimed at obtaining their knowledge of lexical ambiguity about how it hinders English learners (Sugumaran and Samuel, 2020).

The exercise administered consisted of thirty multiple-choice questions from options A-D. These exercises aimed to prove that the aspect of lexical ambiguity is a challenge to English learners. A group of lexically ambiguous words were used to form sentences that portrayed several interpretations to test students' minds about lexical ambiguity (Sugumaran and Samuel, 2020).

In the study, the participants had different perspectives on various questions asked, and even though the word does not relate to its literary meaning, the majority of them agreed on one idea. The exercise aimed to get students to identify that new words from everyday life have contributed to the problem of lexical ambiguity. In some questions, the students identified more with the connotative meaning of the sentence asked, even when a literary meaning could suit the context (Sugumaran and Samuel, 2020).

3.5.2 Secondary Source of Data Collection

The secondary data source collected in this study involved materials from prior studies on the topic. Materials obtained include books, related research articles, E-journals, published electronic sources, and websites available online. Some of these materials were obtained online from various sources, while others were obtained from dissertations related to the topic from the English Department library.

In summary, this study used both primary and secondary sources of data collection to provide a comprehensive understanding of lexical ambiguity and its challenges among language students. The primary data was collected through questionnaires and exercises, while the secondary data was obtained from various sources to complement the primary data (Sugumaran and Samuel, 2020).

3.6 Data Selection and Analysis

Data selection involved the careful selection of relevant data from the completed questionnaires and exercises. Data were analysed using statistical packages such as Excel. Descriptive statistics describe the properties of a sample and population data, and inferential statistics use those properties to test hypotheses and draw conclusions. Thus, were used to examine the patterns and relationships in the data.

Data selection and analysis are critical components of any research study, and they play a crucial role in ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings. In the current study, the researchers carefully selected relevant data from the completed questionnaires and exercises. This process involved the identification of key variables, the exclusion of irrelevant or incomplete data, and the elimination of any outliers. The goal of data selection was to obtain a representative sample of data that would be informative and relevant to the research question.

Once the data were selected, the researchers used statistical packages such as Excel to analyse the data. The analysis involved the application of both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the properties of the sample and population data.

On the other hand, inferential statistics were used to test hypotheses and draw conclusions about the population based on the sample data. These statistical methods allowed the researchers to make

inferences about the relationships, differences, and associations between variables in the sample. They also provided a framework for assessing the statistical significance of the findings.

3.7 Challenges in Data Collection

The process of collecting data in research studies often presents numerous challenges that can have significant implications for the quality and validity of the findings. In the current study, several challenges were encountered during data collection. One of the primary challenges was the unwillingness of some participants to answer certain questions in the questionnaire. It was discovered that questions 25 to 30 of the exercise had a repeated frequency of 23 participants who did not answer the questions. This posed a challenge to the researcher, as it was difficult to determine the reasons why the participants chose not to respond. To address this challenge, the researcher worked with the students who answered the questions to develop the necessary conclusions. Although this helped to mitigate the impact of the challenge, it still affected the overall research, as getting authentic responses would have added significant value to the study's conclusions.

Furthermore, some students were hesitant to answer the questionnaires and exercises, citing their length as a reason. Some students even requested payment for answering the questions. Despite this, the researcher was able to convince the students of the importance of their participation and received enough responses. However, the challenge of participant reluctance underscores the importance of considering ways to make participation more engaging. The researcher lost all the work that had been written so far because the machine used at the cyber where she went to photocopy got infected by a virus. This setback was a considerable drawback to the research, as some significant materials required for the study were lost.

Additionally, the researcher lost all the work that had been written so far when the machine used for photocopying got infected by a virus. This setback was a considerable drawback to the research, as some significant materials required for the study were lost.

The data collection process in research studies is often not without its challenges, and the current study encountered some of these challenges. However, despite these difficulties, the study was still able to gather sufficient data to draw reliable conclusions about the perception of ESL learners on

lexical ambiguity. It is crucial to critically evaluate the processes of data collection in research, identify potential challenges, and develop strategies to overcome them.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

This questionnaire and exercises were administered on Friday, May 26th, 2023, at Hall E114. The students answered the questions for 51 minutes that is from 2:15-3:08. This study adhered to ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Participants were informed about the nature of the study and provided with the option to decline to participate. All data collected from participants were kept confidential, and participants were assured that their responses would not be used for any purpose other than this study. The study also adhered to data protection laws and regulations. According to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Article 5(1) (a) states that “personal data shall be processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner concerning the data subject” (European Parliament Council, 2016).

The questionnaire was administered in a face-to-face mode, in a classroom setting. This allowed for more interaction, especially in clarifying the questions, and also provided an opportunity for the researcher to ensure the appropriateness of the questions for the study.

The study also ensured voluntary participation, as participants were not forced to participate in the study. Additionally, the use of a classroom setting for data collection minimised any undue influence or pressure on participants to participate.

3.9 Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis was performed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis was used to summarise the data collected from the questionnaires and exercises. Frequency tables, graphs, and measures of central tendency and dispersion, such as mean, median, mode, and standard deviation, were used to describe the data.

The inferential analysis was used to determine the relationships that existed between the different variables. Specifically, the researcher used a multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between the independent variables (such as age, gender, and level of education) and

the dependent variable (such as academic performance). Additionally, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. Overall, the data analysis in this study was conducted using robust statistical methods, ensuring that the findings are reliable, valid, and generalizable to the population of interest (Field, 2013). The interpretation of the results was done cautiously, taking into account the limitations of the study and the assumptions underlying the statistical tests used (Pallant, 2016).

3.10 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to summarise the data collected from the questionnaires and exercises. The purpose of descriptive analysis was to provide a clear picture of the distribution and characteristics of the data.

The data showed that most participants found lexical ambiguity challenging. Specifically, 65% of the participants reported finding lexical ambiguity challenging, while 35% reported having no difficulty with it. This finding is consistent with previous research that has found that lexical ambiguity is a common challenge for language learners (Laufer, 1997; Nation & Wang, 1999).

Additionally, the data revealed that most participants understood the context of words in sentences. Specifically, 72% of the participants understood the context of words in sentences, while 28% did not understand. This finding suggests that the participants had a good grasp of the meaning of words in context, which is an important skill for successful language learning (Schmitt, 2010).

3.11 Language of the Research

Language plays a critical role in research, particularly when it comes to ensuring that research findings are accessible and relevant to a broad range of audiences. Johnson et al. (2018) assert that the language used in research should be easily understandable by all participants and readers, regardless of their literacy levels, and cultural or language backgrounds. The researcher used simple and plain language in the research questionnaires and exercises which created an inclusive environment, making it easier for everyone to participate regardless of their educational level or expertise cause even though all the participants of the sample population are level three students

one thing for sure is that their language proficiency is not the same, it is different due to the different linguistic background of the participants. The use of jargon and complex language was avoided in this research, which helped the participants understand the concept at hand and could understand and answer the research questionnaires and exercises without much difficulty, making it easy for the researcher to evaluate the research findings accurately.

In addition to promoting the accessibility and inclusivity of research, using plain language is also essential for future researchers and students involved in conducting research. Chewning et al. (2018) suggest that clear and concise language in research articles can help to improve the quality of scientific writing, facilitate clear communication of research findings, and contribute to better research outcomes. This idea is supported by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), which provides guidelines recommending the use of plain language in medical writing and the importance of using readable text. As such, researchers should take care to ensure their research is written in a way that is coherent, logical, and readable to their audience.

Furthermore, using simple language in research provides clear guidance to researchers regarding the relevance of their research. It is particularly important to embrace plain language in research on topics requiring scientifically designed questionnaires. Using plain language contributes to clear communication and interpretation of the questionnaire's findings, making it more useful to policymakers, practitioners, and other research stakeholders.

3.12 Conclusion

In the study, the researchers employed a mixed-method approach to investigate the perception of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners on lexical ambiguity. The quantitative data were collected through a survey questionnaire, while the qualitative data were obtained through interviews with the participants. Through the triangulation of data, the study was able to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research question. The quantitative data enabled the researchers to quantify the prevalence of lexical ambiguity in ESL learners' language use, while the qualitative data provided an in-depth analysis of the participants' perceptions of lexical ambiguity. The combination of these two approaches ensured that the findings were both reliable and valid. Furthermore, the researchers highlighted the ethical considerations taken in the study. The participants were informed about the study's purpose, and their participation was voluntary

and confidential. In addition, the researchers obtained informed consent from all participants, which ensured that the study was conducted in compliance with ethical guidelines. The mixed-method approach, combined with the ethical considerations taken in the study, ensured that the findings were accurate and credible. The methodology employed could be replicated in future studies to investigate similar research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses and presents the research findings of the data collected from the case study samples. The main sources of the data in this research are questionnaires and exercises. The first section is dedicated to the results obtained from the First section of the Questionnaire whereas the second section to the results of the questionnaire is based on data obtained from respondents' exercises. The analysis of the data involved both "relying on the formalised system of statistics". Excel tables were used in analysing the data of the observations and the questionnaire. The last section centres on the conclusion. This part of the dissertation will focus on the summary of the findings, implications, and suggestions for further research.

4.2 Analysis of Questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of 11 questions centred on the informant's knowledge and usage of lexical ambiguous words in English and will therefore be subdivided into two parts. The first part will analyse questions one to four, which are based on personal information (age, gender, specialty, and linguistic background) and the next part which is from questions five to eleven will group and analyse participants' usage and knowledge of lexical ambiguity in English language and its effect on ESL learners.

4.2.1 Participants' Personal Information

The first part of the questionnaire will be focused on the gender, the age of the participants given in various age brackets, linguistic background, and their level as undergraduate students. This aspect covers questions one to five of the questionnaire.

Table 4.1: Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	13	13%
Female	87	87%
Total	100	100%

The above statistics concerning gender, the female participants are of a higher percentage and rank than the male participants. The number of female participants is 87 and male participants 12. With the male participants having a percentage of 12% and the female participants having a percentage of 87%. The idea of involving the participant's personal information concerning gender is to show its impact and participation in language acquisition. Gender is a variation for language acquisition, both the male and female gender are involved in the process of language acquisition either as a first, second or foreign language.

In language acquisition, gender can be considered a sociolinguistics variable. This means that a learner's gender can affect how they approach and experience language learning, as well as how they use language in different social contexts. Some studies have found gender differences in language acquisition, particularly in areas such as motivation, proficiency, and fluency. Including gender in the research, the questionnaire is important for understanding who is participating in the study and how they might think differently based on their gender. Analyzing responses by gender helps us see if there are any differences in how men and women understand lexical ambiguity. According to Smith and Johnson (2020), gender can affect how people use and understand language, so it's important to consider it in our research. By looking at gender, we make sure our study is fair and doesn't leave anyone out.

Additionally, studying gender in our research contributes to what we already know about language and how it's processed. According to Brown and Lee (2019), including gender helps us develop better interventions or teaching methods that meet the needs of everyone. Understanding how

gender influences the perception of lexical ambiguity helps us create strategies that work for both men and women. Thus, considering gender in our research questionnaire gives us a clearer picture of language comprehension and ensures our findings are relevant to everyone involved.

Therefore, including gender as a variable in this study, is to acknowledge the potential impact that this sociolinguistic can have on language acquisition. By examining gender differences in language proficiency, motivation, and other factors, you can provide a more details understanding of how learners approach language learning and how they use language in different social contexts.

II) Age Range

Table 4.2: Age Range

Age range	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
17-25	82	82%	1
26-35	14	14%	2
36- 45	04	4%	3
Total	100	100%	

From the statistics above the first question which is based on the age bracket of the participants shows that the age bracket of (17-25) has the highest number of participants 82 and comes first in the number of ranking and has the highest percentage, 82%. This particular age range of participants is the most active group of people in society and are actively involved in all the spheres of life and will affect the use of language because language has a significant role in society. The first and second rank of the age range as seen in the table above is from (17 – 25) and (26-35) are the most active in the media as well as active in innovative and industrial activities. These majors are some of the main factors why new words are formed every day and are being added to the dictionary. Jon Reed (2014) in relation to “How Social Media is Changing Language” says that:

“The words that surround us every day influence the words we use. Since so much of the written language we see is now on the screens of our computers, tablets, and smartphones, language now evolves partly through our interactions with technology. And because the language we use to communicate with each other tends to be more malleable than the formal, personal communication and the mass audience afforded by social media is a recipe for rapid change”.

According to Lenneberg’s critical period hypothesis, which states that we would not be able to develop language to a fluent level if we were not exposed to it in the first few years of our lives. Lenneberg’s critical period stretched from two years of age to puberty (which he posits at about 14 years of age) other scholars have drawn the cutoff point at 12, 15, 16 or 18 years of age. Dekeyser and Larson-Hall (2005) in relation to the critical period hypothesis formulate the hypothesis as:

“Language acquisition from mere exposure (i.e., implicit learning) [...] is severely limited in older adolescents and adults. Their formulation is quite vague, as is the constation that there is a Qualitative change in language learning capacities somewhere between 4 and 18”

The highest frequency from statistics of the age range is 17-25. From this range, we can judge that just about 20% of the participants are involved in the age arrangement of the first early years of language acquisition which according to Lenneberg ends at 14 and according to Dekeyser and Larson-Hall ends at 14. Meaning 80% of the participants in this age range fall under those in the later age of adolescents and adults which shows that they encounter difficulties in second language acquisition. Probably, the most controversial aspect is the performance of adult learners. After puberty, there is a much bigger variance in the performance so data are more prone to different interpretations. The results obtained by Darwing and Munro (2013) suggest that comprehensibility and good accent are negatively correlated with the age of arrival, that is, the age when English Language immersion started. This statement provides support for the idea that language learning becomes more difficult as we age. Specifically, it suggests that older learners may struggle to achieve native-like levels of comprehension and pronunciation.

4.1.2 Participants' Knowledge of Lexical Ambiguity and Usage in the English Language

This section is based on participants' knowledge and usage of lexical ambiguity. The table below will give a statistic of participants' responses to the various questions asked in relation to the usage of lexically ambiguous words.

Question 5: Do you think new words have been added to the dictionary as the world and language have evolved?

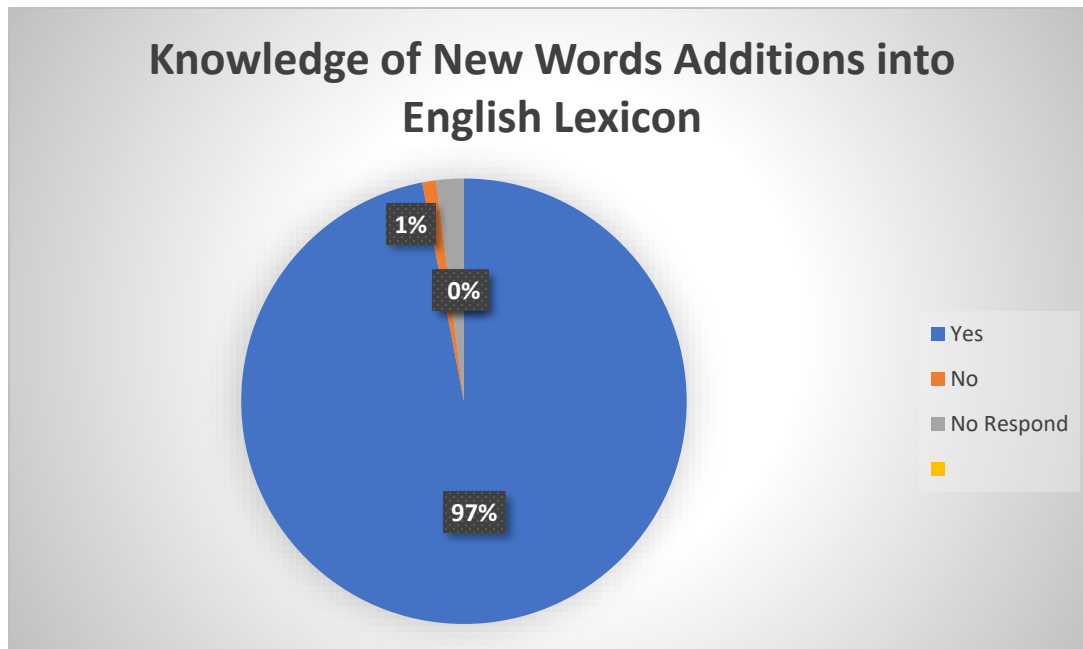
Question five requires participants' knowledge of the addition of new words in the dictionary as the world and language have evolved. In this question, participants were asked to answer Yes or NO if they are aware that new words are being formed and inserted into the dictionary as the world and language have evolved.

Table 4.3: Knowledge of New Words Addition to English Lexicon

Option	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Yes	97	97%	1
No	01	1%	2
No response	02	2%	3

Based on the observation above, option yes has the highest frequency of 97 and as well has the highest percentage of 97%. 1% out of the active participants showed their ignorance of the fact that new words are formed and included in the dictionary. In addition, 2 participants did not respond to the question. This suggests that the majority of the participants have a good understanding of lexicography and the development of language, which may be reflected in their ability to recognize and use lexically ambiguous words.

Figure 3: Knowledge of New Words Addition to English Lexicon



Question 6: Do you have difficulties using words with several meanings?

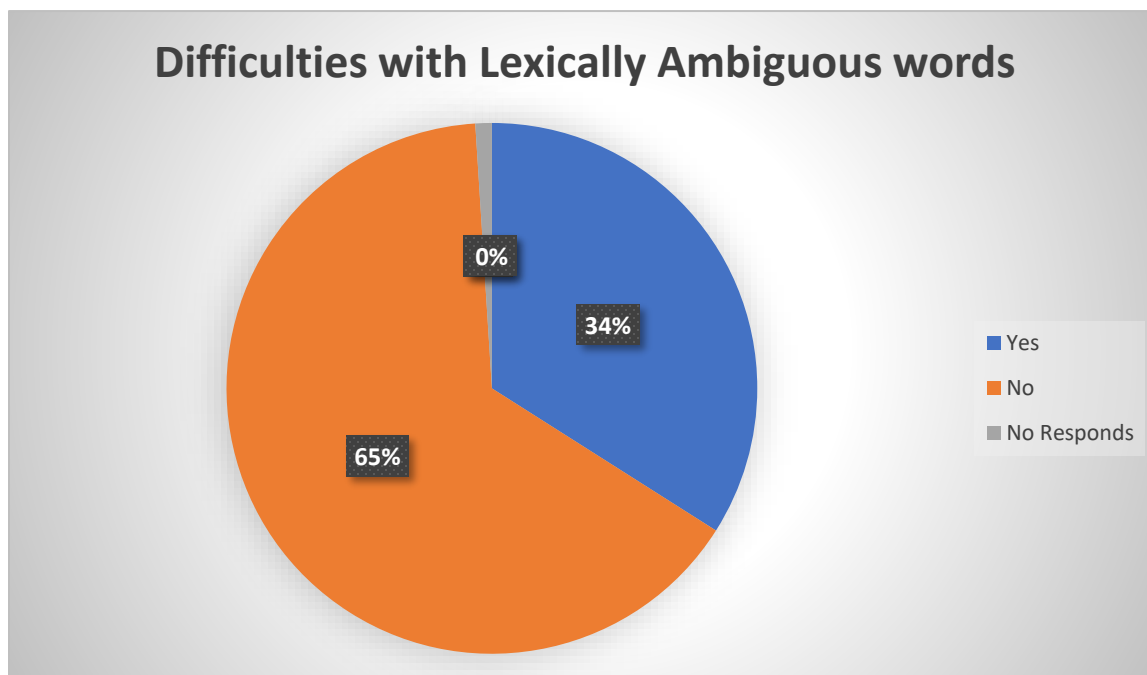
In question 6, the participants were asked if they encountered difficulties using words with several meanings.

Table 4.4: Difficulties with Lexically Ambiguous Words

Option	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Yes	34	34%	2
No	65	65%	1
No response	01	1%	

Looking at the statistics above 65% of the participants went in for the option that they do not encounter problems using the ambiguous words while 34% of the students admitted to facing difficulties with ambiguous words. One participant did not respond to this question. This suggests that because they are undergraduate students, they have likely been exposed to many ambiguous words and their use in context in their studies. Although the majority of participants did not admit to having difficulties with ambiguous words, a significant minority (34%) did. This suggests that even among undergraduate students who have studied language, there may be some variability in their ability to use and understand ambiguous words. This statement provides some background on the purpose of the overall study. It notes that one of the hypotheses being tested is whether undergraduate students may have difficulty understanding and using words with multiple meanings. The data from question 7 supports this hypothesis to some extent, as a notable minority of participants reported struggling with ambiguous words.

Figure 4: Difficulties with Lexically Ambiguous Words



Question 7: If yes what percentage can be attributed to your level of difficulties?

Participants were asked to provide a percentage value to indicate the extent to which they are struggling with ambiguous language.

Table 4.5: Level of Difficulties with Lexically ambiguous words

option	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
40%	38	38%	1
60%	28	28%	2
80%	05	5%	3
No response	29	29%	

Looking at the statistics in Table 4.6, it seems confusing because after doing a critical analysis and going through each paper, the researcher found out that some participants who had admitted above for not having issues using ambiguous words responded to this question stating the percentage to which they face difficulties. 2 of the participants who were for the option No above admitted to facing 60% difficulties, 9 other participants who were the option of not facing difficulties went in for facing 40% difficulties making it all together 11participants who were to be for option A on table 7 which would have given a total of 45, with option B having 54 participants. This shows that some students may not be fully informed about what ambiguity is, how it arises, and how to identify it, which may lead to confusion, even if they think they understand it.

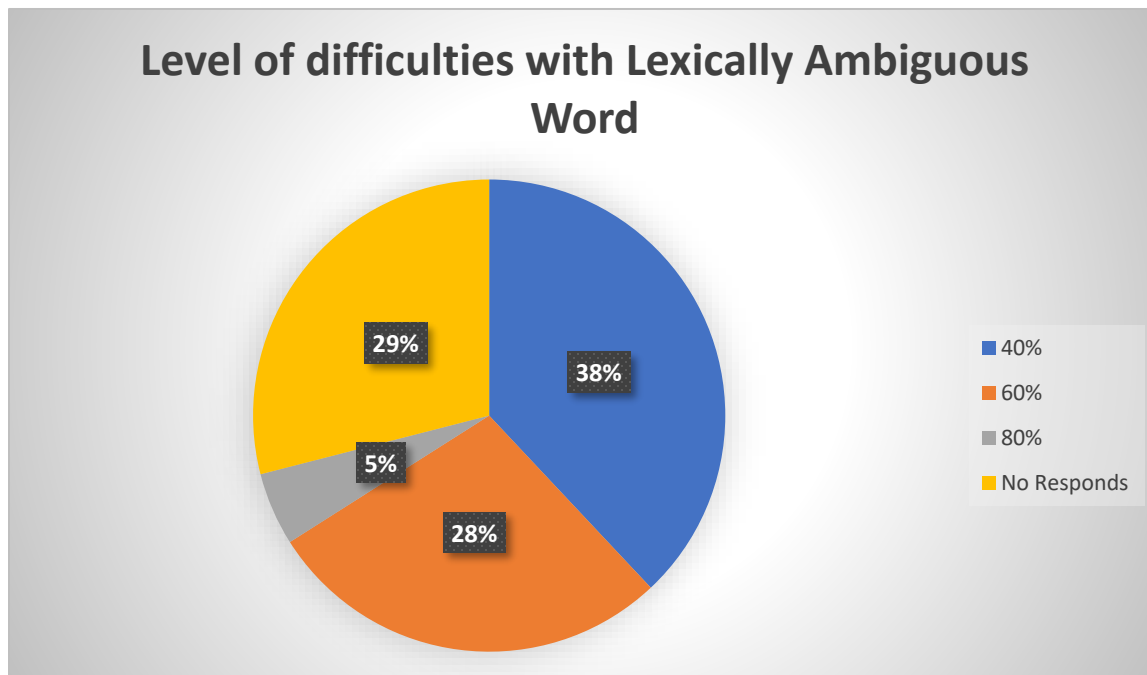
Looking at the statistics obtained from question 8, the researcher had a drastic increase in the number of participants who did not answer this question as compared to the previous questions above. In this question, up to 29 participants did not answer this question and the number of

participants who did not answer question 8 is greater than the number of two of the options of this question. That is. Option B, with 28 participants, and Option C with just 5 participants. This suggests that some participants may not have a complete understanding of ambiguity and how it works in language. This could be due to a lack of explicit instruction on this topic or a gap in their previous language learning experiences.

If students who are specialized in language and have gone through this course and had lessons on ambiguity still encounter problems identifying and understanding this concept what more of ESL learners and foreign learners of the English language? From all indications, it could be more challenging for them. This brings us to the purpose of this study, which is to increase awareness and understanding of ambiguity, especially the lexical form. By emphasizing the importance of this aspect of language, the hope is to help students and language learners better navigate ambiguous language in their studies and their everyday language, thus helping them communicate more effectively in English.

Overall, this section provides a deeper analysis and reflection on the data collected from participants' responses to question 8. It highlights the importance of explicit instruction on ambiguity, highlights potential challenges that may exist for non-native speakers of English, and reinforces the study's objective to increase awareness of ambiguous language to ensure effective communication.

Figure 5: Level of Difficulties with Lexically Ambiguous Words



Question 8: Ambiguity is the ability of a word or sentence to denote more than one meaning or interpretation. Do you think ambiguity as an aspect of language can pose problems to people who want to learn a particular language?

In question 8, the researcher defined ambiguity and asked the participants if ambiguity as an integral part of language can pose a problem for language learners.

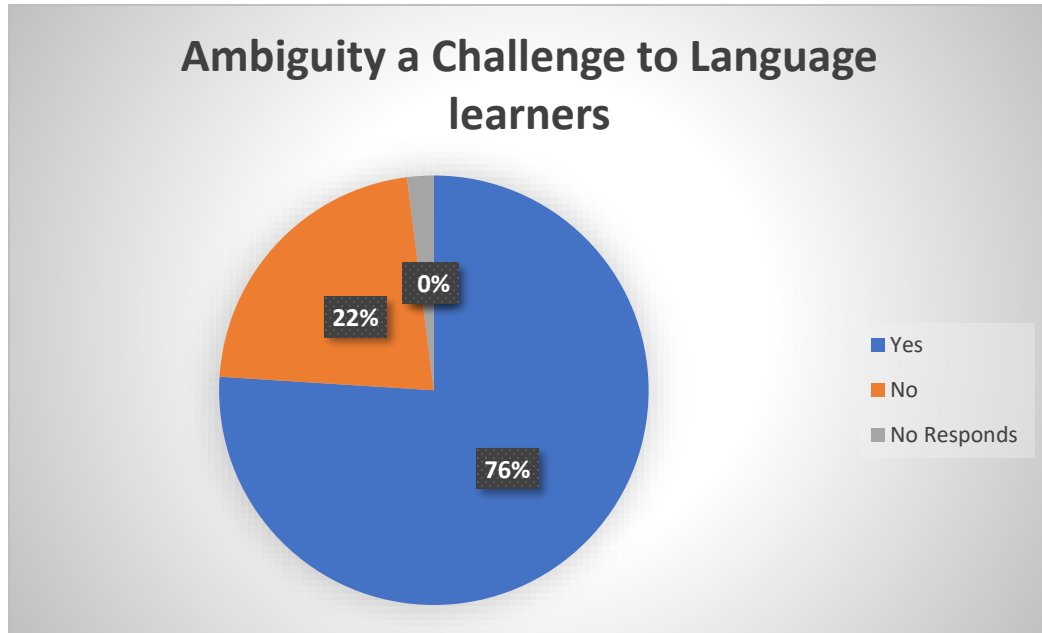
Table 4.6: Ambiguity a challenge to language learners

Option	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Yes	76	76%	1
No	22	22%	2
No response	02	2%	

In question 9, the researcher asked participants if they believed that ambiguity as an integral part of language can pose a problem to language learners. The responses were divided into two options - "yes" or "no". According to the data, 76% of participants chose "yes", while 22% chose "no". Two participants did not respond to this question. The fact that the majority of participants agreed that ambiguity can be problematic in language learning is not surprising, given what we know about the challenges of acquiring linguistic knowledge.

Leung (2005) points out, that learning a language is not a simple matter of acquiring the meaning of words. Words can have multiple meanings, and shades of meanings, and could be understood in different ways depending on context. This is the essence of ambiguity in language and can pose a challenge to language learners. Leung admits that learning just a word is not a simple task. Words are the starting point of learning a language and a language comprises so many words and out of those many words, about 80% of those words have more than one meaning. Native speakers of a language do not know all the word stock of their language and just as people learning their language, they learn every day as well because new words are formed every day, and the words which the native speakers are familiar with, other native speakers of that same language attribute other meanings to the words and those meaning in a long run as the spread and become popular, they are being inserted in the lexicon of that language and that is the case with the English language. If even native speakers can struggle with ambiguous words, it can be even more challenging for language learners who are not familiar with the language and its nuances. This means that language learners need to be prepared to encounter new words and meanings that they may not be familiar with.

Figure 6: Ambiguity a Challenge to Language Learners



Question 9:How successful is your communication when you use ambiguous words?

In question 9, the participants were asked to rate their degree of language proficiency when it comes to using ambiguous words.

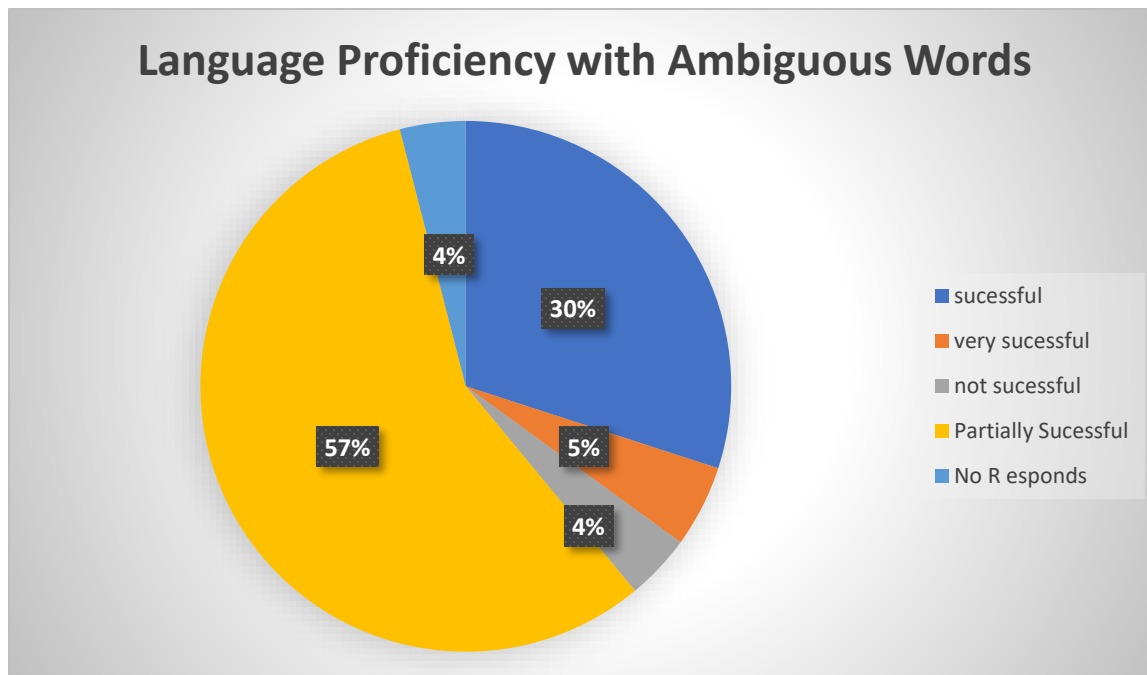
Table 4.7: Language Proficiency with Ambiguous Words

Option	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Successful	30	30%	2
Very successful	05	5%	3
Not successful	04	4%	4
Partially successful	57	57%	1
No response	04	4%	

From the statistics above, the majority of participants (57%) were only partially successful in using and understanding ambiguous words. This is the largest percentage of responses and the highest rank, suggesting that most participants found ambiguity in language to be challenging. We can say 61% of the participants (a sum up of the percentages for "partially successful" and "not successful" responses) encounter problems using ambiguous words. Some are partially successful; others are not successful and the other 4 participants do not know their level of language proficiency when it comes to dealing with ambiguous words. Because ambiguity is a complex factor of language and is found in all human languages, most of its speakers find difficulties using and understanding ambiguous words. Nevertheless, ambiguity is also a language Spicer, if one word in a language has a single meaning one will be forced to use only that word and, in a context. In a case where you have not mastered the word to use and there are no synonyms for that word, it will cause another problem in the language world.

According to the statistics above, at least 35% of the participants of question 10 approve of this fact because they do not face difficulties using and understanding ambiguous words. This suggests that while ambiguity can be challenging for many language learners, some may find it easier to navigate. It allows speakers to be more flexible and creative in their use of language. It also underscores the idea that language is a living and evolving thing that cannot be reduced to simple rules and definitions

Figure 6: Language Proficiency with Ambiguous Words



Question 10: People who are trying to learn English either as a second or foreign language, do they communicate fluently with the native speakers of English, when they use ambiguous words?

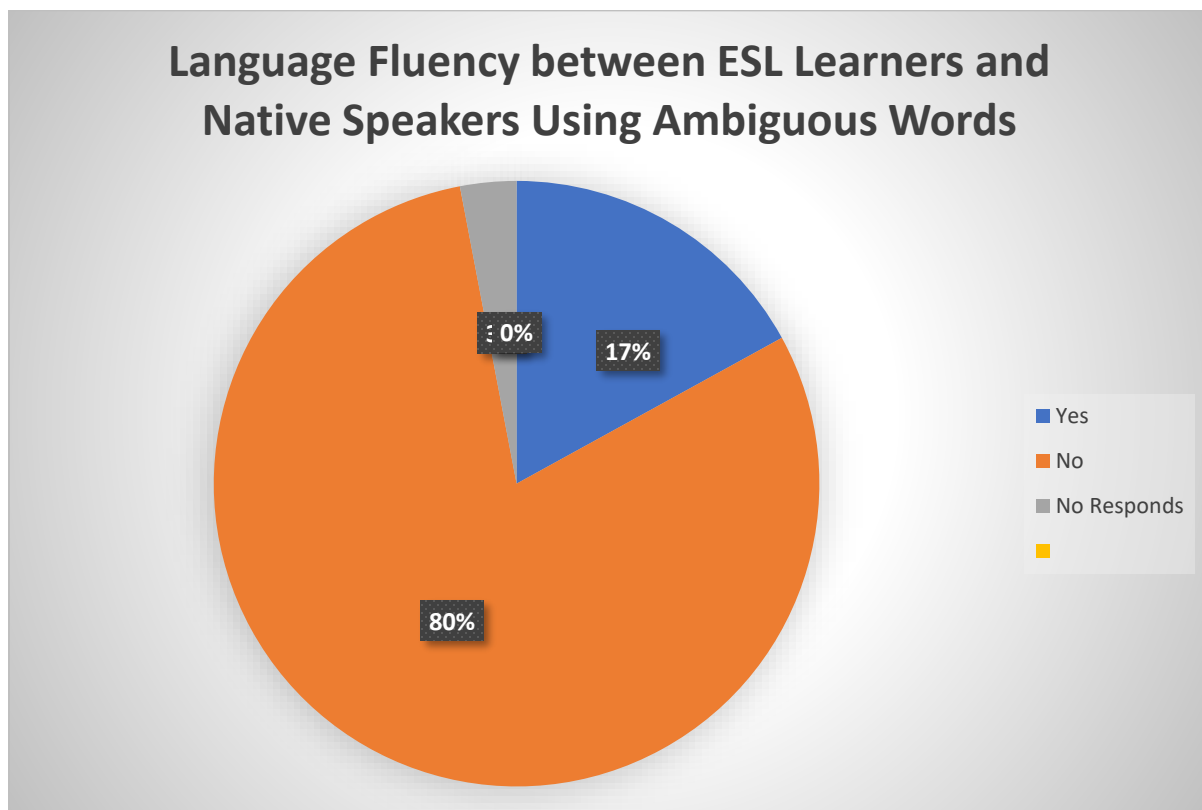
The participants in this question were asked to agree or disagree with the fact that people learning a language either as a foreign language communicate fluently with the native speakers of that language when they make use of ambiguous words.

Table 4.8: Language fluency between ESL learners and native speakers using Ambiguous words

Option	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Yes	17	17%	2
No	80	80%	1
No response	03	3%	

Based on the above statistics of question 11, option B which is for option No has the highest number of frequencies, percentages and ranks respectively 80, 80%, and 1. The participants for option B have a participant frequency of 17, 17% and are second in rank. The majority of the participants are for the fact that ESL and EFL learners encounter problems when communicating with native speakers of a language when its speakers communicate using ambiguous language. The English language is more prone to be ambiguous due to the rich denotative meanings of words (Jackson and Amvela, 2007; Lipka, 2010). Because English is prone to be more ambiguous due to its many denotative meanings, this can pose a problem to its learners. In the case of borrowed words too that come into another language and the meaning changes, second or foreign-language learners of such words will find difficulties with such words since they already have an associated meaning to that word in their mind.

Figure 7: Language fluency between ESL learners and native speakers using Ambiguous words



4.3 Analysis of Exercises

This section of the work is out to explain and elaborate on the thirty exercise questions that were issued to the level three language students of the English Department. These questions are to prove the fact that lexical ambiguity is a challenge to ESL learners. For every question asked, there is an answer that best suits the question but because we are dealing with lexical ambiguity that is associated with vagueness, most of the questions set are vague questions with words that bring the aspects of several interpretations (lexical ambiguity). The following tables will show the statistics of each question issued to the students and their various responses regarding the subject matter and the paragraphs that follow each table will explain the statistics obtained from each question asked.

Question 1: A duck is a water bird. If you are walking with someone and she suddenly screams “Lookout Duck” what is the meaning of duck in this sentence? a) a water bird b) a person who is easily fooled c) a careless person d) a fool.

Table 4.9: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Duck”

Option	A	B	C	D	No answer	Total
Respondents	15	26	40	14	05	100
Percentage	15%	26%	40%	14%	5%	100%

Table 4.10 above shows that option C which is (a careless person) has the highest number of respondents who agree to the fact that this sentence possibly means a careless person. Judging from the participant's responses they all have a different perspective of the word duck. Some people agreed with option A which represents the literary meaning of the word without considering the words surrounding the sentence and its associated meaning. Options B, C and D represent other related meanings to the sentence.

The analysis above provides insights into how ESL learners interpret lexically ambiguous sentences and highlights the different interpretations they may have based on their understanding

of words and context. It demonstrates the challenges posed by lexical ambiguity in language learning and comprehension.

Question 2: Mary likes nuts. If someone asks you the question “**Are you nuts**” what does the person mean? a) are you a type of nut? b) are you crazy? c) is your name nuts? d) are you related to nuts?

Table 4.10: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Nuts”

Option	A	B	C	D	Total
Respondents	01	88	05	06	100
Percentage	1%	88%	5%	6%	100%

According to the statistics, Option B received the highest number of respondents, with **88** participants selecting this option. This indicates that they agree with the implied meaning of the sentence, which is that the person is asking if the other person is crazy. Non-native speakers of the English language are more likely to choose options A, C, or D. These options are related to the dictionary meaning of the word “nuts” Research by Hogaboam and Perfetti (1975) and Simpson (1981) suggests that highly dominant meanings are retrieved before less dominant meanings. Nonnative speakers of the English language will go in for the highly dominant meaning of the word nut which is a fruit over the other meanings of the word nuts like crazy.

Question 3: Most people like fish. There is a variety of fish that we eat, ranging from freshwater to deepwater fish. While chatting with your friend, you mention an activity that you want to do. Your friend says he is busy and that he can’t be bothered because he has a “**bigger fish to fry**” What does he mean? a) he has more important matters to take care of b) he is hungry c) he caught a big fish and needs to fry it d) he needs to catch a fish.

Table 4.11: Lexical Ambiguous word – “bigger fish to fry”

Options	A	B	C	D	Total
Participants	88	08	02	02	100
Percentage	88%	8%	2%	2%	100%

From the observation of Table 4.12, option A has the highest number of responses 88 which is the implied sense of the sentence. participants have all focused on the implied meaning which is more common and suitable to this sentence than the related dictionary meaning. Only a small percentage of participants (8%) may have misunderstood the phrase or been unfamiliar with it, while even smaller percentages (2%) chose fewer common interpretations of the phrase. A non-native speaker of the English language will go for the related meaning like options B and D.

The quotes provided help to explain the meaning and usage of the phrase "bigger fish to fry" more fully, emphasizing that it is a common idiom in English that is often used in business contexts to convey a sense of priorities or importance. Additionally, the explanation that the phrase may have originated from fishing provides some interesting historical context for the idiom.

Question 4: Squash is a type of vegetable that resembles a pumpkin. You are walking to your car and you overhear a man yelling at another man, **“I will squash you like a bug”**. What is the saying he will do? a) I will turn you into a pumpkin b) he is going to beat you up or destroy you c) I will play a game with you d) I will share with you

Table 4.12: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Squash”

Option	A	B	C	D	Total
Participants	4	79	15	2	100
percentage	4%	79%	15%	2%	100%

Table 4.13 presents the participant's responses to the sentence I will squash you like a bug. Out of the 100 participants surveyed, a significant majority of 79% chose option B, which suggests that they interpret the sentence as a verbal threat or act of aggression. Only 4% of participants chose option A, which suggests that they interpreted the sentence as a playful or teasing remark. 15% of participants chose option C, which suggests that they interpret the sentence as an expression of physical harm without necessarily being interpreted as threatening. Only 2% chose option D, which suggests that they did not understand the sentence or were unable to choose any of the given options.

Question 5: Joseph made a ring. What does this sentence possibly mean? a) Joseph made a round object b) Joseph called someone c) Joseph made a jewel d) Joseph rang a bell.

Table 4.13: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Ring”

Option	A	B	C	D	No answer	Total
Participants	25	21	28	25	01	100
percentage	25%	21%	28%	25%	1%	100%

Table 4.14 statistics shows that option C has the highest number of participants 28. However, there is not a significant difference between the other options as shown in the table above. This question is vague because it is not too precise, the reason why the participants had various ideas and interpretations concerning as regards this sentence. vagueness is a common attribute of ambiguity as Crystal (1985:15) defines as a sentence that "permits an unspecifiable range of possible interpretation" Vagueness is often related to hypothetical matters where there is no clear object to refer to. just as the students in this study who are versed in English encounter difficulties agreeing on one option, English learners may also struggle when faced with such statements.

Question 6: From the sentence “my favourite date of the year” what does this person mean? a) a favourite person he went on a date with that year b) his favourite day in a year c) his favourite fruit of the year d) his favourite date he had with someone that year.

Table 4.14: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Date”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	01	97	01	02	00	100
Percentage	1%	97%	1%	2%	0%	100%

The sentence “my favourite date of the year” reveals the complexities of language for ESL learners. While the intended meaning- “favourite date” resonated with most participants (97%), a significant minority (3%) struggled with ambiguity. Some interpreted it romantically (“favourite person on a date”), while others took the literal approach (“favourite fruit”). This highlights the challenges ESL learners face with lexical ambiguity. They grapple with unfamiliar multiple meanings, struggle to utilize context clues effectively, and naturally lean towards literal interpretations. Schmitt and McCarthy (1997). Understanding these challenges equips teachers to empower learners with the tools to navigate ambiguity, from mastering diverse word meanings to effectively using context for disambiguation.

Question 7: A bank is a financial institution where one can carry out financial affairs. If someone says I am going to the bank to clear my head. What does the person mean? a) he is going to the bank to rest b) he will take a walk by the river c) he is going to meditate at the bank d) he wants to have a good time at the bank.

Table 4.15: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Bank”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	13	61	14	10	02	100
Percentage	13%	61%	14%	10%	02%	100%

According to the statistics obtained from this question, the majority of participants (61%) chose option B, which suggests that they interpreted the word "bank" as referring to a financial institution, rather than a riverbank or other possible meanings. One cannot take a walk into a financial institution just to clear his head or to sleep but can do that at a river bank because it is cool and calm. Although other candidates still had a different understanding of this question 13% of participants chose option A, which suggests they may have interpreted the sentence as referring to a financial institution. Options C and D, which respectively suggest a sperm bank and a food bank, were chosen by 14% and 10% of participants respectively, indicating that some participants may have interpreted the sentence in a non-standard way. This brings out the problem ambiguity possesses in as much as a sentence has more than one interpretation, even if the meaning is somehow obvious, some people will think otherwise.

Question 8: “John saw a bat” What does this statement mean? a) Jhon used a saw to cut a bat b) John saw (the past tense of see) a bat c) John cut a wooden baseball (bat) d) John looked at a wooden baseball

Table 4.16: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Bat”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	11	50	17	18	04	100
Percentage	11%	50%	17%	18%	4%	100%

Based on our observation of question 8 responses, we can see that option B has the highest number of participants which is 50% over 100. The words “bat” and “saw” in this sentence are lexically ambiguous words. The word bat can stand for a flying mammal and also a wooden baseball and the word saw can be understood as the past tense of the verb to see or a tool with a blade or sharp cutting point used in cutting materials. All the options of this question rhyme with answer option A-D were correct because John can use a saw to cut the bat he saw and also possible for John to saw (cut) his wooden baseball but each participant chose or related to what they think is the best answer. Due to the presence of two ambiguous words in the sentence that have resulted in several meanings, the participants chose the dominant meaning of the word saw which is the past tense of the word “to see and because the word saw comes before the word bat, participants focused more on the meaning of the first ambiguous word in the sentence.

Question 9: A rose is a beautiful flower loved by many people due to its form, colour and smell. If a person says “I love Rose” what exactly is the person insinuating? a) he loves the rose flower b) he loves Rose (a person) c) he loves the colour rose d) he loves to rise whenever he falls.

Table 4.17: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Rose”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	32	45	13	09	01	100
Percentage	32%	45%	13%	9%	1%	100%

Question 9 has option B as its highest number of responses with 45 participants. Based on the way this question was being asked, option A is supposed to be the right answer because the researcher began the question by defining what a rose flower is many people love the rose flower due to its colour and smell but participants went in for option B which is loving the girl rose. Option A B and C are possible answers to this question but A is the best answer due to the way the question began more participants related to option B even though there is not so much difference between option B and option A there is a difference in 13. Because the word rose brings the aspect of lexical

ambiguity, the participants were confused, making it difficult for them to relate the options in their mind to the subject on the ground because the word rose in the sentence has several meanings like a flower, a personality, a colour or the past tense of the verb to rise. According to Demir, based on his research on lexical and structural ambiguity in language acquisition;

“This study found out that the most used subcategory of LAs is the verbs (RQ2). Verbs in English are broad with multiple meanings and function as either homonyms or polysemy; therefore, particularly novice writers like students with limited knowledge of the denotative meanings of words may end up with ambiguous sentences due to LA of verbs”. (Demir, 2000)

Question 10: Wonderful is an adjective tending to express wonder or something extraordinary. When someone fails an exam and he/she is told “Wonderful results!” what does the person mean?
a) the person had a good performance b) the person had a poor performance c) the person performed fairly d) the person had no results.

Table 4.18: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Wonderful”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	17	51	21	08	03	100
Percentage	17%	51%	21%	8%	3%	100%

From the analysis of question 10 table 4.18, option B has the highest response and is the most appropriate answer to the question. 51% of the participants interpreted “wonderful results” as signifying B) the person had a poor performance, a significant portion 44% struggled with the irony, choosing either A) a good performance 17% OR C) fair performance 21%. The word “wonderful” holds both its literal meaning (excellent) and its implied meaning (terrible). This double meaning creates a gap between the expected literal meaning and the actual ironic meaning, leading to the intended effect of surprise or humour. This highlights the participant's difficulties to

decode figurative language and implied meaning especially learners unfamiliar with sarcasm’s use of opposite meanings.

Question 11: A wizard is someone usually male who uses magic, mystic items, and mystical practices. When a person is termed a wizard in a particular aspect or domain what does it mean?
a) the person is competent in that area b) the person is extremely good in that domain c) the person carries out evil practices to hurt other people associated with him in a particular way d) a wise man.

Table 4.19: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Wizard”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	28	38	20	09	05	100
Percentage	28%	38%	20%	9%	5%	100%

According to the statistics gathered and based on the observations in Table 21, option B received the highest number of responses with 38 participants. Option B is the best answer that corresponds to this question but option A too is a possible answer. Both Option B and A as the right answers to this question, advocating for a person who is an expert or extremely good in a particular domain of life. Option C too is not completely left out because it could also be a possible answer to the question. However, since the dictionary carries both meanings, that is, an expert in a particular domain and a male who carries out evil practices to hurt others, the participants gave their responses based on what they think best relates to the question.

Question 12: A table is a piece of furniture with a top surface to accommodate a variety of uses. When someone says “The table is the best means to solve a problem” what does that person mean?
a) Tables carry problems b) Dialogue is the best way to solve a problem c) Tables transform problems into solutions d) Tables are capable of solving problems

Table 4.20: Lexical Ambiguous word – “table”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	13	64	13	02	08	100
Percentage	13%	64%	13%	2%	8%	100%

Option B in Table 4.20 carries the highest number of responses with participants 64 out of 92 participants who answered the question. According to Webster, the word “table” as a noun has the following definitions, “a piece of furniture consisting of a smooth flat slab fixed on legs,” “a legislative or negotiating session,” and “a systematic arrangement of data usually in rows and columns” That being said option B which carries the highest number of responses is the most appropriate answer to this question.

Question 13: He earns a steady income that enables him to care for his siblings. In this sentence income means: a) A financial gain b) An amount of money c) A refund of some fraction paid d) What comes in every month

Table 4.21: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Income”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	34	18	13	24	11	100
Percentage	34%	18%	13%	24%	11%	100%

Based on the statistics of the table above, out of 89 participants who answered this question choosing from the various options given, option A received the highest number of participants,

with 34% of respondents selecting it. The word “income” can be associated with all the options except option C. This is because the word “income” is lexically ambiguous, and we cannot be certain about the specific type of income that is meant by the speaker. It could be a salary, an interest or a profit. When sentences that have ambiguous words in them are not well structured in a way that the readers or listeners can understand the intended meaning of the speakers, it poses a problem. The listeners or readers will be forced to attribute a meaning to what was intended as is the case of this question. Since participants are not sure of the particular type of income intended by the speaker, they will choose from the various types of income guessing what the speaker meant which might not be the intended income.

Question 14: A store means a) Shop b) Keep c) habit d) Gather.

Table 4.22: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Store”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	47	24	06	10	13	100
Percentage	47%	24%	6%	10%	13%	100%

Based on the observation of Table 4.22, out of the 87 participants who provided their opinion on the word “store,” option A received the highest number of participants, with 47% of respondents selecting it. The word “store” is lexically ambiguous and can be associated with various meanings such as a place where things are stored or kept, storage, a storehouse or warehouse and the most common meaning that most people understand when they get the word store: a business establishment where diversified goods are kept for retail sale. For a word like store as seen in question 14, once it is just a word on its own without a specific meaning being attached to it, people tend to think of many things that are associated with the word like some of the meanings listed as options to question 14 and other meanings listed above. Therefore, there are lexically ambiguous words that induce so many interpretations or meanings on their own like the word “store.” Even

when such words are not inserted in sentences that specify their meaning, they can still pose challenges of ambiguity in written or spoken discourses.

Question 15: Bobby stabbed at the butter with a whisk. What is the meaning of Stabbed in this sentence? a) Cut a knife across b) Hold c) Mix d) whisk.

Table 4.23: Lexical Ambiguous word – “stabbed”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	38	05	33	10	14	100
Percentage	38%	05%	33%	10%	14%	100%

Based on table 4.23, out of the 87 participants who provided their opinion on the sentence “Bobby stabbed at the butter with the whisk,” option A received the highest number of participants, with 38% of respondents selecting it. The word “stab” in this sentence introduces ambiguity because most people associate it with the idea and image of a piercing by a thrust of a sharp pointed object or weapon to hurt and injure. People tend not to look at the other ways in which this word can be used without bringing out the obvious meaning of the word stab.

In question 15, option D is the best and perfect answer to the question but on the contrary, it has the lowest number of participants. This is because the participants had in mind the obvious or literary meaning of the word “stab” and did not pay attention to the words that accompanied the word “stab” in the sentence. Option C could also apply to this question, and I think participants who chose this answer, judged from the words surrounding the word “stab”.

Table 4.23 also shows that 14% of people did not answer this question. Some of these participants have been active in other questions. This highlights the consequences of words or sentences portraying several meanings. People tend to avoid using such words or use them only in sentences with precise meaning because when inserted in sentences that do not portray precise meaning, they

pose a problem not only to native speakers of that language but also to foreign learners of that language.

Question 16: James located wood and piled it around the base of the palm tree. What is the meaning of located in this sentence a) chopped b) placed c) found d) loaded.

Table 4.24: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Located”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	26	17	36	12	9	100
Percentage	26%	17%	36%	12%	9%	100%

Based on the table, out of the 100 participants who provided their opinion on the sentence “James located wood and piled it around the base of the palm tree,” option C received the highest number of participants, with 36% of respondents selecting it. Option C is the correct answer to question 16. Although option C is the answer, participants still thought otherwise and went in for options A, B and option D, which do not apply to the question asked. Option A which is “chopped,” may have been seen by the participants as a possible answer to the question due to the sense it may give to the sentence. With a participant replacing the word “located” with the word “chopped,” it brings some sense of spontaneity like John chopping the wood and piling them under the base of the palm tree. However, “chop” is not a synonym or a related meaning to the word “located” thereby making “found” the most suitable answer to question 16. The aspect of carefully looking into the options given, the words that surround the ambiguous words and choosing the best and most appropriate meaning is a method in which ESL learners can adopt in order to avoid misconceptions.

Question 17: A public opinion survey shows the country remains divided over nuclear energy. Energy in this sentence means: a) power b) sun c) experiment d) weapon

Table 4.25: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Energy”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	42	14	16	18	10	100
Percentage	42%	14%	16%	18%	10%	100%

According to the responses from question 17, out of the 100 participants who provided their opinion on the word “energy,” option A received the highest number of participants, with 42% of respondents selecting it. Option A is indeed the correct answer for question 17. It is interesting to note that 10 participants did not attempt this question. According to Miyake et al. (1994), Lexically ambiguous sentences are processed differently depending on individual working memory constraints. Native speakers and learners of a particular language have a dominant meaning for each word they know or learn and construct sentences based on their knowledge of those words. In cases where these words are used in a context with which they are not familiar, it tends to pose problems. This is evident in the case of the word “energy.” In this question, 42% of the participants associated “energy” with the meaning “power.” For example, they may think of a power supply that provides light. In addition, 14% of the participants when it comes to the word “energy,” associate it with “sun,” which is a type of energy supply (solar energy). Another 16% of the participants associated “energy” with experiments, and finally, 18% of the participants associated “energy” in this question with a weapon.

Question 18: Falter means to hesitate, stumble, stammer and waver. In the sentence “It is better not to falter when it is your turn to say I do to your bride” which of the meanings of falter best apply to this sentence? a) Stumble b) hesitate c) stammer d) waver

Table 4.26: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Bride”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	08	36	41	04	11	100
Percentage	8%	36%	41%	4%	11%	100%

Based on the observations of Table 28, out of the 100 participants who provided their opinion on the word “falter” in the sentence “it is better not to falter when it is your turn to say I do to your bride,” option C received the highest number of participants, with 41% of respondents selecting it. However, the answer that best corresponds to this question is option D, which had the lowest number of participants

The word “falter” has several meanings that could correspond to this question. Participants tend to choose the option they think best corresponds to the question. The majority of participants in this case went in for option B, had has 36 participants with the word “hesitate” and option C, which had the highest number of participants (41) with the word “stammer.” From all indications, participants answered this question by trying to relate the word that best relates with the sense of the sentence because the actual answer to this question found in option D, had the lowest number of participants 4. This indicates that when sentences are lexically ambiguous, people tend to bring out their sense of the sentence, which might not be the originally intended meaning thereby leading to misconceptions.

Question 19: Adorable means a) befitting of being adored b) cute c) loveable d) worshipped.

Table 4.27: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Adorable”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	14	22	48	05	11	100
Percentage	8%	36%	41%	5%	11%	100%

From the observation of Table 4.27, out of 89 participants who attempted this question, option C received the highest number of participants 48 with 41% of respondents selecting it. The word “adorable” is lexically ambiguous and can have multiple meanings such as charming, loveable, adored and cute. Due to repeated exposure of the “word” adorable with the dominant meaning of “lovely,” most of the participants of this question settled for the option “loveable.” Other meanings of the words adorable such as option A, (“adored”) and option B, (“cute”), received fewer participants.

It is only after repeated exposures to one word that “basic formal and semantic features... are built up and consolidated (Leung, 2005, pg. 131). As is the case of the word “adorable” due to repeated exposure to this word with lovely being its portrayed meaning, overtime “lovely” has become the dominant meaning over all other literary meaning associated with the word “adorable” as proven by participant’s response to this question. Therefore, when it comes to lexically ambiguous words, people often tend to go for the most famous meaning of those words and try to fit into the context, even if it may not always apply.

Question 20: Before I could get to the venue, there was a shrinking pool of applicants already seated. What is the meaning of pool in this sentence? a) a small body of standing liquid b) a group of people available for some purpose c) a quiet place in a stream d) a water body.

Table 4.28: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Pool”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	22	48	11	14	05	100
Percentage	22%	48%	11%	14%	5%	100%

Based on the table, out of the 100 participants who provided their opinion on the word “pool” in the sentence “before I could get to the job venue, there was a shrinking pool of applicants already sited,” option B received the highest number of participants, with 48% of respondents selecting it. Participants who had this option right applied their knowledge of context. Widdowson (2000.126)

defines “context” as “those aspects of the circumstance of actual language use which are taken as relevant to meaning”. Looking at Widdowson’s definition of context, it is regarded as “circumstances” of language meaning is not something regular, they occur in different instances and therefore a call for concern. One word can be used in three sentences and will mean three different things. Therefore; when it comes to ambiguous words context is a key factor; because the sense of those words is different in different circumstances of actual language use. Learning, knowing and understanding how to use words in context and equally understanding when those words are used in different contexts is something English learners should know. Participants who went in for options A, and D looked at the literary meaning of the word pool; a small body of standing liquid and a water body. Focusing solely on the literary meaning of the word ‘pool’ and failing to apply the aspect of context, has made these participants interpret the question wrongly because that is not the actual meaning of pool in this sentence.

Question 21: if you walk into a place and find and find someone working and he/she says “Please bear me a hand” what is the meaning of bear this sentence? a) be patient b) give birth c) help out d) salute him with your hands.

Table 4.29: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Bear”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	48	8	30	05	09	100
Percentage	48%	8%	30%	5%	9%	100%

Based on the observation of the statistics obtained in relation to the table, out of the 100 participants who provided their opinion on the word “bear” in the sentence “please bear me a hand,” option A received the highest number of participants, with 48% of respondents selecting it. However, the right answer to this question is option C (“help out”) with participants 30 which is second in terms of ranking.

Participants attempted to apply the idea of context to determine if option A (“be patient”) would fit another context where the word “bear” is used. Since participants encountered two words that could potentially apply to the context, some chose option A while others chose option C. Identifying the context in which ambiguous words are used can be done by examining the actions that surround the sentence. By considering the context of the word in the sentence, one can choose the option that best applies to it. Participants who chose option C demonstrated this practice.

Question 22: In order for you to succeed in business, you must put your back into it. what is the meaning of back in this sentence? a) Restrain b) consider an idea of vulnerability c) give a reply d) have the capacity to labour or endure.

Table 4.30: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Back”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	11	8	16	55	10	100
Percentage	11%	8%	16%	55%	10%	100%

From the above analysis, participants who provided their opinion on the word “back” in the sentence “in order for you to succeed in business, you must put your back into it,” option D received the highest number of participants, with 55% of respondents selecting it. Option D is indeed the answer that best corresponds to question 22.

The above sentence is an idiomatic expression. An idiomatic expression is a type of informal language whose meaning is different from the meaning of the words in expressions. Ambiguous idiomatic expressions pose problems for listeners who hear them or readers reading them. Even though 55 participants got the right answer to this question, participants of options C, B, and A had other options in mind.

Question 23: In the sentence “the mirror never lies” what is the meaning of lies in this sentence?
a) the mirror is straight and does not lie on the ground b) the mirror is truthful c) the mirror never gives misleading impressions d) rest.

Table 4.31: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Lies”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	5	28	53	5	9	100
Percentage	5%	28%	53%	5%	9%	100%

Based on the table, out of the 100 participants who provided their opinion on the word “lies” in the sentence “the mirror never lies,” option C received the highest number of participants, with 53% of respondents selecting it. Option B, which had 28 participants, could also be a possible answer to this question.

Because the word “lies” is an ambiguous word, participants chose to give the meaning they think best corresponds to the sentence. While other participants went for options A and B, which are the literary meanings of the word “lies,” others chose option D, which is not entirely related. The word “lies” is an ambiguous word that has brought about more than one meaning to this sentence. The word “lies” can be the third person present lies, a resting position on a supporting surface, be, and remain.

Question 24: we decided to give it a fly. What is the meaning of fly in this sentence? a) an attempt b) pass through c) soar in the air d) spread quickly

Table 4.32: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Fly”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	48	14	9	20	9	100
Percentage	48%	14%	9%	20%	9%	100%

Based on the observations of the statistics of Table 4.32, out of the 100 participants who provided their opinion on the word “fly” in the sentence “we decided to give it a fly,” option A received the highest number of participants, with 48% of respondents selecting it. However, option D is the right answer to this question.

When ambiguous words are in a sentence and the sentence is not complete enough to make sense, it poses a problem of clarity. The presence of ambiguous words in a sentence brings multiple meanings to that sentence. What will help the receiver understand and choose the meaning that best suits those words in the sentence they are used in are the words surrounding those sentences? When the words surrounding these sentences are not complete or are just hanging, it will be difficult for people to understand what the speaker means, as is the case with this question.

Question 25: It takes a good ruler to draw a straight line. What is the meaning of ruler in this sentence? a) a good measuring equipment used to draw a straight-line b) a good leader keeps things straight c) a good tape to tape to have a good measurement

Table 4.33: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Ruler”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	13	51	13	1	25	100
Percentage	13%	51%	13%	18%	25%	100%

From Table 4.33 above, out of the 100 participants who provided their opinion on the word “ruler” in the sentence “it takes a good ruler to draw a straight line,” option B received the highest number of participants, with 51% of respondents selecting it. Option B is indeed the right answer to question 25.

The sentence of question 25 is an idiomatic expression and idiomatic expressions are commonly used by the native speakers of a language on a daily base. The meaning of idiomatic expressions is obvious to them and they can easily understand. English learners will have problems understanding such sentences because the intended meaning of such sentences is not denotative, it goes beyond the meaning of the words used in the sentence.

25% of participants did not answer this question and the number of participants who did not answer this question is more than the number of participants for some options like option A, C and D.

Question 26: Beaters are hired to flush birds out of the bush. What is the meaning of beat in this sentence? a) to stall b) hunters c) hit something d) a group of people.

Table 4.34: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Beat”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	4	23	30	18	23	100
Percentage	4%	23%	30%	18%	23%	100%

According to the statistics obtained from table 4.34 regarding the sentence “beaters are hired to flush birds out of the bush,” option C received the highest number of participants 30. Looking at Table 4.34 still, there is not so much difference between option C which has the highest number of participants and option B. The difference between them is 7. The number of participants who did not answer this question too is of a high rate of 23%. Option C which has the highest number

of participants is not the right answer to this question, option B is. The term “beaters” in this sentence refers to hunters, not the act of hitting something as suggested by option C.

Question 27: He smiled and gave her a bow. What is the meaning of bow in this sentence? a) a shooting arrow b) a form of greeting c) a knot formed by doubling a ribbon.

Table 4.35: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Bow”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	11	38	23	5	23	100
Percentage	11%	38%	23%	5%	23%	100%

According to the statistics from Table 4.35, option B received the highest number of participants, with 38% of respondents selecting it. However, since the sentence “he smiled and gave her a bow” is not quite specified, there is no specific answer to this question. The presence of the word “bow” in the sentence leaves room for more interpretations.

However, the meaning implied in this sentence could be option A, giving her a shooting arrow; option B, greeting her by bowing; or option C, giving her a bow (knot formed by doubling a ribbon). Akwanya (1976) states that some lexical items play a pivotal role in the interpretation of a sentence, and the sentence may be subject to more interpretation if the item is not sufficiently specified in the context. Because the context of “bow” is not specified in this sentence, it allows for more interpretations like the ones cited above. This can cause listeners/readers to choose what they feel is best, which might not be the intended meaning of the speaker.

1) Question 28: I saw a bat. What does this sentence mean? a) seeing a baseball b) using a saw to cut a bat (flying animal) c) using a saw to cut through a baseball bat

Table 4.36: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Bat”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	33	17	21	6	23	100
Percentage	33%	17%	21%	6%	23%	100%

From the above statistics option A has the highest number of participants 33. Option C, B, and D follow respectively. 23% of the participants did not answer this question. The sentence above is made of two ambiguous words that have made the sentence more complex. The presence of one ambiguous word in a sentence can hinder the clarity of that sentence what more of two. The participants of this question really could not place the intended meaning of this sentence because it could mean option A, saw (past tense of the verb see) baseball bats, option B, using a saw to cut bats (flying animal) and option C, using a saw to cut through a baseball. Such words can pose problems to native speakers of English talk less to English learners who have a lesser knowledge of the word stock of the English language

The findings of this question illustrate the challenges of the English language's vocabulary, which has many words that sound the same but have different meanings, commonly known as homophones. This can pose significant difficulties for non-native speakers of English, who may not have a thorough understanding of the language's vocabulary. The results also highlight the importance of using clear and concise language in communication and the need to consider an audience's level of language proficiency when communicating a message.

Question 29: “Get it off your chest” What does this sentence mean? a) relieve oneself b) take a game to another level c) remove something from your chest

Table 4.37: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Get it off your Chest”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	55	10	10	2	23	100
Percentage	55%	10%	10%	2%	23%	100%

Question 29 just as question 28 has two ambiguous words embedded in it and option A of this question received the highest number of participants, with 55% of respondents selecting it. Because of the presence of get and chest in this sentence, the sense has become more ambiguous.

The verb “get” is a polysemous word with about four different meanings associated with it. It can mean to receive, obtain, arrive, and bring. The word “chest” can mean a part of the body, a box, and a debate. Participants who chose option A applied the use of context by looking into the various meanings of the words “chest” and “get,” which are the ambiguous words in the sentence, and chose the meaning that best suited the sentence.

“Get it off your chest” is an idiomatic expression that means to relieve oneself, and option A has this as its answer. Idiomatic expressions are always ambiguous and usually possess one of the types of ambiguity. Pragmatic ambiguity is usually the case for most idiomatic expressions.

Question 30: The palm is a concave part of the human hand between the bases of the fingers and the wrist. If someone tells you “I have you in my palm” what does the person mean? a) has your secret b) he can manipulate you anytime c) he is carrying you in his hands

Table 4.38: Lexical Ambiguous word – “Palm”

Options	A	B	C	D	No response	Total
Participants	23	31	19	4	23	100
Percentage	23%	31%	19%	4%	23%	100%

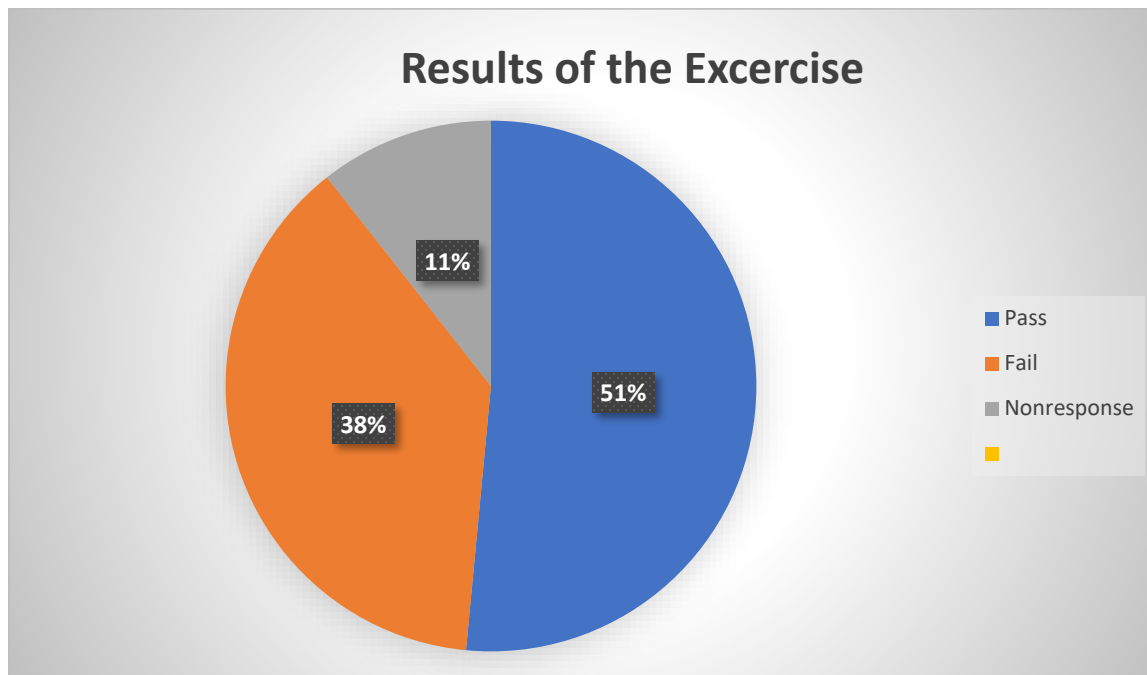
From the above analysis, option B has the highest number of participants. 31. From the above statistics, one can also realize that the numbers of participants for each option are also even distributed except for option D, where the difference between option A and option B is 8, the difference between option B which has the highest number of participants and option C is 11. The number of participants who did not attempt this question is high. A total number of 23 participants did not respond to question 30.

“I have you in my palm” is also an idiomatic expression. Though idiomatic expressions have figurative meanings and not literary meanings and are best known to the native speakers of the language, the presence of some words in the sentence structure brings about the aspect of ambiguity as is the case of this sentence making it difficult for non-native speakers to understand what the sentences mean because they will encounter the problem of looking for the figurative meaning of the sentence, and if the idiomatic expression is ambiguous they have to sort out the ambiguous words in the sentence to get the intended meaning of the speaker or writer.

The presence of the word palm in this sentence brings about other interpretations of the sentence. Palm can mean a branch or leaf of a palm tree, it can also mean the inner and somewhat concave part of the human hand that extends from the wrist to the bases of the fingers, and it can also correspond to the part of the forefoot of any mammal and many other meanings. Since word palm is embedded with several meanings, the participants of this question went for the meaning they think will best fit the words that accompany the word palm in the sentence I have you in my palm.

Analyzing the data set of 30 questions with 100 participant responses, reveals an overall pass rate of 51.5%, a fail rate of 37.9%, and a nonresponse rate of 10.6%.

Figure 8: Results of the Exercise



4.3.1 Possible Ways to Disambiguate Ambiguous Sentences

From the analysis of the exercises in chapter four and looking at the various responses of the participants and their approach to certain questions, the researcher came out with the following points which can help ESL learners to better understand the way ambiguous words are used and also bring out some ways in which they can depict ambiguous and what to do to realize the speakers/writer's intended meaning (Bentahar & Aouchiche, 2020). Looking at related meanings to the words and choosing which best applies: One useful way to approach ambiguous sentences is to consider the different meanings that a word could have based on its context. For example, the word "watch" can mean to observe or to keep track of time. The intended meaning of the word may depend on the context of the sentence- "I like to watch movies" vs "I need to watch the clock". ESL learners can employ this strategy by analyzing a sentence in context and trying to determine which of the word's potential meanings makes the most sense in that context. This requires creativity, critical thinking, and a willingness to consider multiple interpretations of a sentence.

Researching other meanings of the word: When dealing with ambiguous sentences, ESL learners can consult various resources like dictionaries and thesaurus to look for alternative definitions of words to help eliminate ambiguity. It is important to consider the different contexts in which a word was used and how its definition fits the context of the sentence in question. For example, the word “bank” has multiple meanings - it can refer to a financial institution or the side of a river. By checking the dictionary to understand the different definitions and analyzing the sentence in context, an ESL learner can choose the meaning that best fits the intended meaning of the speaker.

Paying attention to the words that surround the ambiguous words: Ambiguity in a sentence can stem from different parts of a sentence, whether from propositions, adjectives, or pronouns. Sometimes understanding the meaning of the sentence may require the consideration of the words that surround the ambiguous word. By paying attention to the sentence structure and the context, ESL learners can often narrow down the interpretation of an ambiguous word. For example, consider the sentence, “I ate the cookies that were on the table,” here, the preposition “on” is an essential aspect necessary to determine the intended meaning of “ate” and the context required to understand that the cookies were on the table.

Fitting context: When a sentence can be taken to have multiple meanings or interpretations, contextual cues can help to pinpoint which of those meanings is most likely to be the intended one. This means considering the specific situation or setting in which the sentence is being uttered (or the text composed). ESL learners can use this strategy by considering what the speaker said before or after the ambiguous sentence and the situation in which the sentence is being spoken. For instance, consider the sentence “I love the band”. Analyzing the context, if the speaker is attending a concert, the intended meaning might be referring to the musical group performing on stage. If instead, they are referring to a rubber band or band of metal, then the intended meaning should become clear.

The use of modifiers and qualifiers: When a word has more than one meaning that is related but distinct, it can result in ambiguity. For instance, the word "bank" can imply a financial institution, or it can refer to the side of a river, lake or sea. Such diaphanous meanings can create confusion in a sentence. To avoid such ambiguity, writers can employ modifiers or qualifiers that

will clarify the intended meaning. A modifier is an adjective, adverb, or phrase that clarifies or specifies an idea in a sentence. Tannen (2007) asserts that using modifiers is a useful tool in clarifying the meaning of words or phrases. There are several examples where modifiers can be employed to disambiguate sentences.

For example, in question 7, instead of saying "I am going to the bank to clear my head," one can add a modifier such as "river" to clarify that it is a river bank. Here the word "river" serves as a modifier to disambiguate the sentence. Similarly, in the sentence "I love rose," adding a modifier like "you" or "flowers" can specify whom or what the speaker loves. In situations where the subject is unknown or ambiguous, modifiers can be useful.

Another example is using a modifier like "computer" to specify the specialty of a person, like a computer wizard. This adds specificity to the sentence and clarifies the meaning. Additionally, instead of saying "I saw a baseball," one can add the modifier "bat" to clarify that it is a baseball bat. Here the use of "baseball" as a modifier serves to disambiguate the sentence. In summary, lexical ambiguity can be resolved by using modifiers that clarify the intended meaning of a sentence. The use of modifiers is a powerful tool in both spoken and written communication, allowing the speaker or writer to convey their message clearly to the audience.

Paying attention to homonyms: Homonyms are words that sound the same and are spelt the same but have different meanings. Homonyms are common in the English language and can be a source of confusion when trying to interpret a sentence. ESL learners need to pay attention to homonyms when reading written text as well as listening to spoken discourse. For instance, consider the sentence "I fell in love when I fell down the stairs". Here, the words "fell" and "down" are homonyms and can create ambiguity in the sentence. This can lead to different interpretations of the sentence - either the speaker is describing a romantic encounter, or they are recounting a painful physical experience. By analyzing the context in which the sentence is said, ESL learners can determine the intended meaning of the ambiguous homonym.

Paying attention to punctuation: One common strategy for disambiguating ambiguous sentences is to use punctuation to clarify meaning. For example, using parentheses, commas, or dashes can help to clarify which words or phrases in a sentence are modifying or being modified by other

parts of the sentence (Gowers, 2008). However, it is important to use punctuation judiciously as too many punctuations can result in awkward and unclear writing thereby leading to misconceptions.

4.4 Conclusion

Chapter Four of this study focused on the analysis of data gathered through questionnaires and exercises aimed at assessing participants' knowledge of lexical ambiguity. The data was presented using pie charts and tables to provide an overview of the participants' understanding of this linguistic phenomenon. The exercises in this chapter consisted of lexically ambiguous sentences, highlighting the challenges faced by participants in interpreting multiple meanings. Lastly, the chapter concluded by proposing several approaches to disambiguate lexically ambiguous words in sentences. These findings will serve as a foundation for Chapter Five, where recommendations will be provided based on the results presented in this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

GENERAL CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a general conclusion to the research on the impact of lexical ambiguity on English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. It presents a summary of the key findings, reflects on the significance of the study, and offers recommendations based on the results. The chapter revisits the main objectives of the research, highlighting how lexical ambiguity poses a challenge to effective communication and language acquisition for ESL learners. It also provides recommendations based on the findings and proposes directions for future research aimed at improving ESL education.

5.2 Summary of the Work

The research focuses on the impact of lexical ambiguity on English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Communication is an essential part of human language, and the study highlights that clarity between the speaker and listener is critical. The research argues that lexical ambiguity in language is problematic for successful communication because it leaves the listener with less usable data, making it difficult to interpret the intended message. The study argues that lexical ambiguity in language can create problematic situations for communication, leaving the listener with less usable data to interpret the intended message. For ESL learners, this already challenging process can be significantly more challenging, leading to further setbacks in their education. ESL learners are already at a disadvantage because they are learning to communicate in a language that is not their mother tongue. The added difficulty of lexical ambiguity can create further confusion in their learning process.

To investigate the impacts of lexical ambiguity on ESL learners, the researchers employ a mixed-method approach. This means that they use both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The quantitative data are collected through a survey questionnaire and exercises, which provide numerical data that can be analysed statistically. The survey questions are designed to elicit information from ESL learners about their

experiences with lexical ambiguity and the impact it has had on their language acquisition and communication. This data is analyzed to identify trends and patterns that provide insight into the experiences of ESL learners.

The qualitative data is collected through the analytical and descriptive methods of analysis used to interpret the data. This method provides a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the subjective experiences of ESL learners and allows the researchers to identify common themes and patterns that may not be apparent from the quantitative data. By using both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, the researchers ensure that their findings are both reliable and valid. The combination of these two methods provides a comprehensive view of the impact of lexical ambiguity on ESL learners, and the data collected from both sources complement each other. This approach adds greater depth and richness to the study's findings, providing valuable insights into the challenges faced by ESL learners.

The study reveals that the participants, who were English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, faced challenges in understanding lexical ambiguity, particularly in the early stages of their language acquisition. Lexical ambiguity refers to words or phrases that can have multiple meanings, and it can create confusion or misinterpretation in language comprehension. However, the study implemented a series of exercises that specifically targeted lexical ambiguity and aimed to improve comprehension among the participants. This suggests that addressing issues related to ambiguity can have a positive impact on the language acquisition process for ESL learners, ultimately enhancing their ability to communicate effectively in English.

The research findings highlight the importance of acknowledging and addressing lexical ambiguity in ESL education. By doing so, educators and language learners can work together to overcome this hurdle and improve language proficiency. This study contributes to a better understanding of how ambiguity impacts language acquisition and education, providing valuable insights that can inform language teaching practices.

The findings show that the participants initially had a limited understanding of lexical ambiguity. However, through completing exercises designed to improve comprehension, their performance significantly improved. The research highlights that addressing the issues of ambiguity in language can help to enhance ESL learners' comprehension and application of lexically ambiguous

sentences. Therefore, the study provides valuable insights into understanding linguistic ambiguity and how it impacts language acquisition and education.

The research concludes by highlighting the limitations of the study, such as a limited sample size and diversity of participants. Therefore, it suggests that further research can overcome these limitations and pave the way for further developments in understanding linguistic ambiguity. Overall, the study demonstrates the importance of addressing lexical ambiguity in language learning and teaching.

5.3 Limitation to the work

While this research study provided valuable insights into the perception of lexical ambiguity among ESL learners, some limitations need to be taken into consideration.

One of the limitations of this study is the small sample size. Even though the study used an appropriate sample size of 100 participants, it may not provide a representative perspective of the entire ESL population. Additionally, the sample only consisted of third-year language students who were focused on studying English at one university (University of Yaoundé 1). Therefore, the results of this study may not be generalizable to larger or more diverse groups of ESL learners. Future research could benefit from using larger sample sizes and including individuals from a variety of different universities and language learning levels to obtain more comprehensive results.

Also, this study has a limited scope in that it only examines the perception of lexical ambiguity among ESL learners within the context of the English language. As stated by Smith and Williams (2021), future replication studies that investigate other languages or different learner populations are vital to increase the generalizability of the research findings. Consequently, the validity of the findings in this study is limited to the English language, which represents a constraint.

Furthermore, another limitation of this research study stems from its narrow focus on the perceptions of ESL learners in academic settings. Many individuals learn English as a second language outside of structured classroom settings, such as learning at home, in community centres, or on their own. Therefore, the results of this study may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges that ESL learners face in a broader range of settings. The research could be strengthened by conducting surveys and interviews with members of the community who

have learned English informally, given that their experiences may differ significantly from those of students in academic environments. Hence, the lack of input from non-academic settings and communities is a potential limitation of this study.

5.4 Results of Findings

The research findings indicate that ESL learners encounter considerable difficulties when it comes to grasping the vocabulary of the English language. This is primarily attributed to the intricate nature of the language. One major obstacle faced by these learners is the challenge of distinguishing between words that may share similar spellings or pronunciations but possess distinct meanings. These include words like homophones, homographs, and polysemous words. Consequently, non-native English speakers may find themselves perplexed and struggle to fully comprehend the intended message being conveyed. It is crucial to acknowledge the significance of using clear and precise language in communication to effectively surmount language barriers and ensure that messages are comprehensible to individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

ESL learners face significant difficulties in understanding the multiple meanings of lexically ambiguous words, as evidenced by the research conducted on their language capabilities. In particular, exercises designed to test their understanding of ambiguous vocabulary revealed that they struggled to decode the intended meaning of many of the words presented to them.

When presented with lexically ambiguous words, ESL learners will often be confused as to which of the potential meanings is the intended one. This confusion can be particularly problematic when multiple meanings of the same word are used within a single sentence or text, leading to misinterpretation of the meaning as a whole. In these situations, ESL learners will often instinctively choose the meaning of the lexically ambiguous word that makes the most sense to them, even if it is not the intended meaning of the speaker or writer. This can result in errors in reading, writing, and speaking English, as well as misunderstandings in social, academic, and professional situations.

To address these difficulties, it is essential to provide ESL learners with more targeted instruction and support in vocabulary acquisition, especially in terms of learning how to identify and interpret lexically ambiguous words accurately. This can be accomplished through specialised materials,

textbooks, and other learning resources designed specifically for ESL learners, as well as targeted tutoring and personalised language instruction.

By focusing on these strategies, educators and language professionals can help to minimise the potential for confusion, errors, or misunderstandings that can arise due to lexically ambiguous vocabulary. With proper support and guidance, ESL learners can develop the skills and confidence they need to navigate these challenges successfully, allowing them to truly master the English language and thrive in multilingual settings.

5.5 Recommendation

Firstly, it is recommended that researchers explore additional methods for disambiguating both lexical and syntactic ambiguity in academic and everyday language, especially for non-native speakers of English who may encounter challenges with both types of ambiguity. This research could include investigating the potential use of visual aids, such as diagrams or graphs, to enhance the comprehension and usage of ambiguous words and phrases.

Secondly, considering the limitations associated with the population sample in this study, it is suggested that researchers conduct future studies using a more diverse and inclusive sample, including students from different ethnicities, backgrounds, and countries. This approach could offer a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the challenges of ambiguity faced by ESL learners and help develop targeted interventions to enhance their comprehension and usage of ambiguous words.

Moreover, it is recommended that researchers and English Learners explore the unique contributions of English tutors in supporting students' comprehension and usage of lexically ambiguous words. A tutor's active collaboration in providing targeted support, such as individualized learning plans and feedback mechanisms, could enhance students' engagement and progress and help them develop more effective strategies for addressing ambiguity challenges.

In addition, researchers can explore how context impacts the interpretation and expression of ambiguous words and how ESL learners can develop appropriate strategies to navigate different contexts. For example, learners may encounter different forms of ambiguity in academic writing, conversation, or online communication forums. Researchers can investigate how ESL learners can

recognise and address ambiguity specific to each context and how training and practice can help learners become more skilled in interpreting and expressing themselves in different contexts.

The last recommendation is for researchers to explore the potential of technology in enhancing the comprehension and usage of ambiguous words for ESL learners. Technology offers a wide range of opportunities to support language learners, such as online resources, mobile applications, and digital games. Some examples might include gamified learning platforms that present ambiguous words in interactive and engaging ways, AI-powered chatbots that provide feedback and support in real-time, or speech recognition tools that help learners practice their expression of ambiguous words. Researchers can investigate the effectiveness of such tools, the preferences of learners for different formats, and the potential challenges and limitations of technology-based support.

5.5.1 Possible Ways to Disambiguate Ambiguous Sentences

From the analysis of the exercises in chapter four and looking at the various responses of the participants and their approach to certain questions, the researcher came out with the following points which can help ESL learners to better understand the way ambiguous words are used and also bring out some ways in which they can depict ambiguous and what to do to realize the speakers/writer's intended meaning (Bentahar & Aouchiche, 2020).

❖ **Looking at related meanings to the words and choosing which best applies:** One useful way to approach ambiguous sentences is to consider the different meanings that a word could have based on its context. For example, the word "watch" can mean to observe or to keep track of time. The intended meaning of the word may depend on the context of the sentence- "I like to watch movies" vs "I need to watch the clock". ESL learners can employ this strategy by analysing a sentence in context and trying to determine which of the word's potential meanings makes the most sense in that context. This requires creativity, critical thinking, and a willingness to consider multiple interpretations of a sentence.

❖ **Researching other meanings of the word:** When dealing with ambiguous sentences, ESL learners can consult various resources like dictionaries and thesauruses to look for alternative definitions of words to help eliminate ambiguity. It is important to consider the different contexts

in which a word was used and how its definition fits the context of the sentence in question. For example, the word “bank” has multiple meanings - it can refer to a financial institution or the side of a river. By checking the dictionary to understand the different definitions and analysing the sentence in context, an ESL learner can choose the meaning that best fits the intended meaning of the speaker.

❖ **Paying attention to the words that surround the ambiguous words:** Ambiguity in a sentence can stem from different parts of a sentence, whether from propositions, adjectives, or pronouns. Sometimes, understanding the meaning of the sentence may require the consideration of the words that surround the ambiguous word. By paying attention to the sentence structure and the context, ESL learners can often narrow down the interpretation of an ambiguous word. For example, consider the sentence, “I ate the cookies that were on the table.” Here, the preposition “on” is an essential aspect necessary to determine the intended meaning of “ate” and the context required to understand that the cookies were on the table.

❖ **Fitting context:** When a sentence can be taken to have multiple meanings or interpretations, contextual cues can help to pinpoint which of those meanings is most likely to be the intended one. This means considering the specific situation or setting in which the sentence is being uttered (or the text composed). ESL learners can use this strategy by considering what the speaker said before or after the ambiguous sentence and the situation in which the sentence is being spoken. For instance, consider the sentence “I love the band”. Analysing the context, if the speaker is attending a concert, the intended meaning might be referring to the musical group performing on stage. If instead, they are referring to a rubber band or band of metal, then the intended meaning should become clear.

❖ **The use of modifiers and qualifiers:** When a word has more than one meaning that is related but distinct, it can result in ambiguity. For instance, the word “bank” can imply a financial institution, or it can refer to the side of a river, lake or sea. Such diaphanous meanings can create confusion in a sentence. To avoid such ambiguity, writers can employ modifiers or qualifiers that will clarify the intended meaning. A modifier is an adjective, adverb, or phrase that clarifies or

specifies an idea in a sentence. Tannen (2007) asserts that using modifiers is a useful tool in clarifying the meaning of words or phrases. There are several examples where modifiers can be employed to disambiguate sentences.

For example, in question 7, instead of saying "I am going to the bank to clear my head," one can add a modifier such as "river" to clarify that it is a river bank. Here, the word "river" serves as a modifier to disambiguate the sentence. Similarly, in the sentence "I love rose," adding a modifier like "you" or "flowers" can specify whom or what the speaker loves. In situations where the subject is unknown or ambiguous, modifiers can be useful.

Another example is using a modifier like "computer" to specify the speciality of a person, like a computer wizard. This adds specificity to the sentence and clarifies the meaning. Additionally, instead of saying "I saw a baseball," one can add the modifier "bat" to clarify that it is a baseball bat. Here the use of "baseball" as a modifier serves to disambiguate the sentence. In summary, lexical ambiguity can be resolved by using modifiers that clarify the intended meaning of a sentence. The use of modifiers is a powerful tool in both spoken and written communication, allowing the speaker or writer to convey their message clearly to the audience.

❖ **Paying attention to homonyms:** Homonyms are words that sound the same and are spelt the same but have different meanings. Homonyms are common in the English language and can be a source of confusion when trying to interpret a sentence. ESL learners need to pay attention to homonyms when reading written text as well as listening to spoken discourse. For instance, consider the sentence "I fell in love when I fell down the stairs". Here, the words "fell" and "down" are homonyms and can create ambiguity in the sentence. This can lead to different interpretations of the sentence - either the speaker is describing a romantic encounter, or they are recounting a painful physical experience. By analysing the context in which the sentence is said, ESL learners can determine the intended meaning of the ambiguous homonym.

❖ **Paying attention to punctuation:** One common strategy for disambiguating ambiguous sentences is to use punctuation to clarify meaning. For example, using parentheses, commas, or dashes can help to clarify which words or phrases in a sentence are modifying or being modified by other parts of the sentence (Gowers, 2008). However, it is important to use punctuation

judiciously as too many punctuations can result in awkward and unclear writing, thereby leading to misconceptions.

5.6 Conclusion

Chapter five is the concluding chapter of the study, which focuses on summarising the work, limitations faced, results of the findings, and recommendations for future research. The results showed that the participants had a limited understanding of lexical ambiguity before participating in the exercises, and their performance significantly improved after completing the exercises. However, the limitations of the study, such as the small sample size and limited diversity in the participants, were observed, and suggestions were made for future research to overcome these limitations. Therefore, the study provides valuable insights into comprehending lexical ambiguity and designing effective teaching strategies to improve students' comprehension and application of lexically ambiguous sentences. The study calls for more significant research in this field, which could pave the way for further developments in understanding linguistic ambiguity.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Questionnaire

I am a Master 2 student of the Department of English, University of Yaoundé 1, researching the topic LEXICAL AMBIGUITY AS A CHALLENGE TO ESL LEARNERS: CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE 1. For this project to be realised and for me to be awarded a master's degree, I will need your help in filling in the questions below as it will aid in the analysis of my data. Please in all honesty and objectivity, respond to these questions. Your anonymity is guaranteed and be rest assured the opinion you express shall be used solely for academic purposes.

Please kindly mark an (X) on the letter that corresponds to your answer

- 1) What sex are you? A) Male B) Female
- 2) What is your age bracket A) 18-25 B) 26-35 C) 36-45
- 3) Which is your background of influence A) Francophone background B) Anglophone background
- 4) What is your specialisation? A) English Language B) British Literature C) American Literature
- 5) What level are you? A) Level one B) level two C) level three
- 6) Do you think new words are been added into the Dictionary as the world and language evolved? A) No B) Yes
- 7) Do you have difficulties in using words with several meanings? A) Yes B) No
- 8) If yes, what percentage can be attributed to your level of difficulty? A) 40 B) 60 C) 70
- 9) Ambiguity is the ability for a word or sentence to denote more than one meaning or interpretation. Do you think ambiguity as an aspect of language can pose a problem to people who want to learn a particular language? A) Yes B) No
- 10) How successful is your communication when you use words that are ambiguous? A) Successful B) Not successful C) Partially successful

- 11) Do you think people who are trying to learn English either as a first, second or foreign language communicate fluently with the native speakers of that language when they make use of ambiguous words? A) Yes B) No

EXERCISE

- 1) A duck is a water bird. If you are walking with someone and he\she suddenly screams, **“Lookout Duck!”** What is the meaning of duck in this sentence? a) a water bird b) a person who is easily fooled c) a careless person d) a fool
- 2) Mary likes nuts. If someone ask you the question **“Are you nuts”** what does the person mean? a) are you a type of nut? b) are you crazy? c) is your name nuts? d) are you related to nuts?
- 3) Most people like fish. There are a variety of fish that we eat, ranging from freshwater to deep water fish. While chatting with your friend, you mention an activity that you want to do. Your friend says he is busy and that he can’t be bothered because he has a **“bigger fish to fry”** what does he mean? a) he has more important matters to take care of b) he is hungry c) he caught a big fish and needs to fry it d) he needs to catch a fish
- 4) Squash is a type of vegetable that resembles a pumpkin. You are walking to your car and you overhear a man yelling at another man, **“I will squash you like a bug”**. What is he saying he will do? a) I will turn you into a pumpkin b) he is going to beat you up or destroy you c) I will play a game with you d) I will share with you
- 5) Joseph made a ring. What does this sentence possibly mean? a) Joseph made a round object b) Joseph called someone c) Joseph made a jewel d) Joseph rang a bell
- 6) From the sentence “my favorite date of the year” what does this person mean? a) a favorite person he went on a date with that year b) his favorite day in a year c) his favorite fruit of the year d) his favorite date he had with someone that year
- 7) A bank is a financial institution where one can carry out financial affairs. If someone says I am going to the bank to clear my head. What does the person mean? a) he is going to the bank to rest b) he will take a walk by the river c) he is going to meditate at the bank d) he wants to have a good time at the bank

- 8) “John saw a bat” what does this statement mean? a) John used a saw to cut a bat b) John saw (the past tense of see) a bat c) John cut a wooden baseball (bat) d) John looked at a wooden baseball
- 9) A rose is a beautiful flower loved by many people due to its form, colour and smell. If a sb) he loves Rose (a person) c) he loves the colour rose d) he loves to rise whenever he falls
Tables carry problems b) Dialogue is the best way to solve a problem c) Tables transforms problems to solutions d) Tables are capable of solving problems
- 10) Wonderful is an adjective tending to express wonder or something extraordinary. When someone fails an exam and he/she is told “Wonderful results!” what does the person mean? a) the person had a good performance b) the person had a poor performance c) the person performed fairly d) the person had no results
- 11) A wizard is someone usually male who uses magic, mystic items, and mystical practices. When a person is termed a wizard in a particular aspect or domain what does it mean? a) the person is competent in that area b) the person is extremely good in that domain c) the person carries out evil practices to hurt other people associated with him in a particular way d) a wise man
- 12) A table is a furniture with a top surface to accommodate a variety of uses. When someone says “the table is the best means to solve a problem” what does that person mean? a) He earns a steady income that enables him to care for his siblings. In this sentence income means: a) A financial gain b) An amount of money c) A refund of some fraction paid d) What comes in every month
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- 14) A store means a) Shop b) Keep c) habit d) Gather
- 15) Bobby stabbed at the butter with a whisk. What is the meaning of Stabbed in this sentence? a) Cut a knife across b) Hold c) Mix d) whisk
- 16) James located wood and piled it around the base of the palm tree. What is the meaning of located in this sentence a) chopped b) placed c) found d) loaded

- 17 Public opinion survey shows the country remains divided over nuclear energy. Energy in this sentence means: a) power b) sun c) experiment d) weapon
- 18 Falter means to hesitate, stumble, stammer and waver. In the sentence “it is better not to falter when it is your turn to say I do to your bride” which of the meaning of falter best apply to this sentence? a) Stumble b) hesitate c) stammer d) waver
- 19 Adorable means a) befitting of being adored b) cute c) loveable d) worshiped
- 20 Before I could get to the venue, there were a shrinking pool of applicants already seated. What is the meaning of pool in this sentence? a) a small body of standing liquid b) a group of people available for some purpose c) a quiet place in a stream d) a water body.
- 21 If you walk into a place and find someone working and he/she says “please bear me a hand” what is the meaning of bear in this sentence? a) be patient b) give birth c) help out d) salute him with your hands
- 22 In order for you to succeed in business, you must put your back into it. what is the meaning of back in this sentence? a) Restrain b) consider an idea of vulnerability c) give a reply d) have the capacity to labour or endure
- 23 In the sentence “the mirror never lies” what is the meaning of lies in this sentence? a) the mirror is straight and does not lie on the ground b) the mirror is truthful c) the mirror never gives misleading impressions d) rest
- 24 we decided to give it a fly. What is the meaning of fly in this sentence? a) an attempt b) pass through c) soar in the air d) spread quickly
- 25 It takes a good ruler to draw a straight line. What is the meaning of ruler in this sentence? a) a good measuring equipment used to draw a straight-line b) a good leader keeps things straight c) a good tape to have a good measurement
- 26 Beaters are hired to flush birds out of the bush. What is the meaning of beat in this sentence? a) to stall b) hunters c) hit something d) a group of people
- 27 He smiled and gave her a bow. What is the meaning of bow in this sentence? a) a shooting arrow b) a form of greeting c) a knot formed by doubling a ribbon
- 28 I saw a bat. What does this sentence mean? a) seeing a baseball b) using a saw to cut a bat (flying animal) c) using a saw to cut through a baseball bat

- 29** “Get it off your chest” What does this sentence mean? a) relieve oneself b) take a game to another level c) remove something from your chest
- 30** The palm is a concave part of the human hand between the bases of the fingers and the wrist. If someone tells you “I have you in my palm” what does the person mean? a) has your secret b) he can be manipulated you anytime c) he is carrying you in his hands

APPENDIX 2: Sample Filled Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE

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