S. EFSTATHIADIS

INSTANCES OF AMBIGUITY

[ΛΕΥΚΗ ΣΕΛΙΔΑ]

"TO THE POINT:
A notice outside a church in Headingley, Leeds, reads:

'CH . . CH
What is missing? U. R.'

Personally, I think that's very neat and more penetrating than many a long and cliché-riddle sermon".

York Evening News (22/8/1962)

1. Introduction

Ambiguity, or multiplicity of interpretation, in natural languages is commonly viewed as a by-product of those general linguistic processes which convert abstract, underlying structures to superficial phonetic realizations. To the extent that quite different deep structures can be mapped on to a single phonetic form that has a number of distinct meanings,[1] the phenomenon becomes, despite its relative rarity, both interesting and linguistically significant; because then it becomes a central notion (along with the notions of 'grammaticality', 'synonymy', and 'anomaly' or 'deviance'. Cf. Derwing, 1974: 161) in the evaluation of grammars as this term is conceived by generativists.

The aim of this paper is to attempt a concise and, where possible, systematic categorization of certain instances of ambiguity and to show the *centrality* of the phenomenon in the methodology of linguistic investigation.

Ambiguities can be usefully separately considered at (a) the phonological, (b) the lexical, (c) the syntactic levels. Here, cases relating to (a) will not be elaborated upon; those connected with (b) will be exemplified[2] and briefly discussed; it is primarily instances of (c) that will be focused upon and treated in some detail.

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1. This number is equal to the number of distinct underlying structures.

2. The language of exemplification is English, though a few relevant examples from Greek will be cited.

2. Phonological ambiguity

Ambiguity at the phonological level is observed whenever distinct lexical entries happen[3] to be identically realized at the phonetic level, as the following examples of *homophony* indicate:

(1) (a) colonel — kernel
night — knight
(b) brake — break
mane — main

As can be seen from these examples, the pairs of words[4] may (cases in (a)) or may not (cases in (b)) belong to the same category. Whether they do or not is immaterial to what is being discussed here and seems to be entirely accidental.

Notice that this type of ambiguity can survive context[5] — whether phrasal or sentential:

(2) (a) (i) The night was still young.
(ii) The knight was still young.
(b) (i) We enjoyed the view from the plane.
(ii) We enjoyed the view from the plain.
(c) (i) Nitrates are cheap.
(ii) Night rates are cheap.[6]

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3. This statement will be modified presently.

4. It is worth noting that there are, more rarely, triplets, etc. as well: *sent - cent - scent; right - rite - write - wright.*

5. In Greek, this statement is true if the ambiguity occurs inside the domain of the 'phonological word' (cf. EFSTATHIADIS, 1973: 8 and *passim*):

(a) (i)	τὴ σέρνει	/ti serni/	[tisérni]	he/she drags her
(ii)	τῆς σέρνει	/tis serni/	[tisérni]	he/she speaks ill of her
(b) (i)	τὸ μῆλο	/to milo/	[tomílo]	the apple
(ii)	τὸν μύλο	/ton milo/	[tomílo]	the mill (acc.)

Such examples show clearly how distinct phonological matrices may be so processed as to receive the same phonetic shape. They also indicate that what we have labelled 'phonological ambiguity' is not an altogether accidental phenomenon (cf. CHAFE, 1971:9) but can be predicted by language-specific rules; a rule of this form could read: "Inside the Greek phonological word, independently of semantic or syntactic import, successive, homorganically articulated phonemes across morphemes will be identically realized in (reduced) phonetic form".

6. For their effect, puns often depend on homophony functionally utilized, as in:

Chemistry teacher: What do you know about *nitrates,* John?
John: Well, sir, they're a lot cheaper than *day rates.*

where the humorous effect is created by the single phonetic realization [naitreits]

Notice also that, like the underlying phonological and unlike the superficial phonetic, the orthographical representations are generally unambiguous.

3. Lexical ambiguity

At the lexical level, ambiguity may occur as a result of the association of two or more underlying messages with a single form, a single dictionary entry. At this point, it would be constructive to make the distinction between *polysemy*[7] and (perfect) *homonymy*, a distinction that guides the lexicographer in listing different senses of one form under one or more than one entry, respectively. Thus, under the polysemous item SEE we can find at least the following distinct meanings, given here with illustrative examples of their use:[8]

(3)

See	make use of the eyes	: "The blind cannot *see*".
	understand	: "Do you *see* what I mean?"
	call on, talk with	: "I must *see* my lawyer".
	experience	: "He has *seen* better days".
	prove, make sure	: "*See* for yourself!"
	find out, learn	: "Would you *see* if the mail has come, please?"
	think, reflect	: "Now, let me *see*".
	imagine	: "She always *sees* things".
	attend to	: "We must *see* (to it) that our customers are satisfied".
	accompany	: "John will *see* you home".
	let, watch	: "You cannot sit back and *see* your own children starve".
	look, refer	: "For more details, *see* p. 6".

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of the underlying *nitrates* and *night rates*.

While on the question of punning, we should stress the linguistically important and empirically verified observation that *interpreting puns* is a *competence* skill, which is typical of native speakers of a language, while *using puns* is a *performance* skill, which not all natives have — or have developed to the same degree.

7. See LYONS, 1968 : 405 f.

8. A host of parallel examples can be readily found in any dictionary: nouns like *table, sense, mouth, nose, eye, leg, bread, fan,* etc.; verbs such as *run* (no fewer than fifty-seven distinct meanings in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary), *hear, get, beat,* etc.; adjectives like *good, weak, light, sharp, mean,* etc., are all potentially ambiguous.

Polysemous items are potentially, though rarely, ambiguous. In the overwhelming majority of cases context will make clear the one meaning intended.

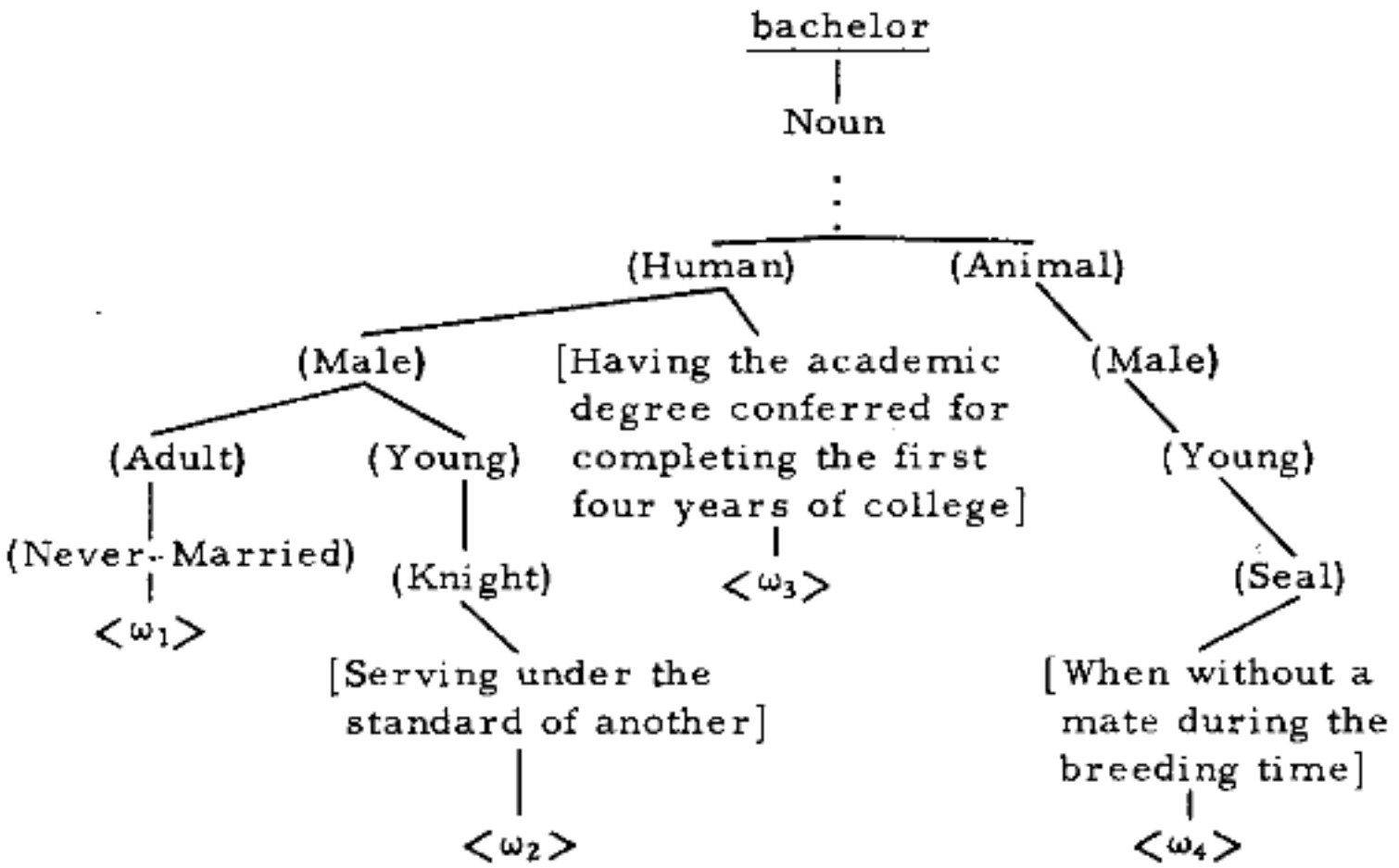
On the other hand, homonymous items, which are separately listed and defined in dictionaries, are far more likely to appear in environments which cannot always resolve the potential ambiguity that the use of these items may involve; it is for this reason that they are also linguistically more interesting than polysemous entries. The examples below illustrate this point:

(4) (a) The Smiths live by the *bank*.
(b) *Dates* are no good for him.
(c) I felt an *ass*.
(d) He gave me a *sock*.
(e) She can't *bear* children.
(f) How do you like my new *light* suit?

A great number of philosophers and linguists have concerned themselves with this type of ambiguity in an effort to explicate semantic complexity. Their arguments have been rarely conclusive; more often than not they contradict each other, which is an indication that investigation into the semantic import of lexical items is still in its infanthood, still groping its way through (at least relative) darkness. In a monograph KATZ and POSTAL (1964) held the view that in the feature composition of 'words there must be, among other things, *semantic markers* and *distinguishers* that differentiate the particular meanings of both homonymous and polysemous items.[9] For example, the composition of the entry BACHELOR is represented diagrammatically as follows:

9. Semantic markers are shared with other lexical items in a dictionary, whereas Distinguishers define the idiosyncratic properties of individual items and Selection Restrictions determine collocationability.

For a full discussion of these notions, see KATZ, 1964 : 522 f.; KATZ and FODOR, 1964 : 495 ff.; KATZ and POSTAL, 1964 : 13 ff.



(Photocopied from KATZ and POSTAL, 1964: 14. In this figure, semantic markers appear in parentheses, distinguishers in square brackets, and selection restrictions in angles. Syntactic markers remain unenclosed).

The meaning expressed by each branch of the tree is subsequently 'projected' (from bottom to top) by special rules, they maintain. Their argument implies that (a) in their deep structure 'words' are uniquely specified and so never ambiguous (a thesis which has never really been questioned), and, most important, (b) which meaning (technically, 'path' of the tree) is projected is a matter of collocation; that is to say, the meaning of an item is made specific in terms of the meanings of other items with which it may co-occur. An analysis of lexical items along these or similar lines would tend to support the view (expressed or implied in most philosophical treatments) that the meaning of the entire sentence is a function of the meaning of its individual constituents.[10] If the context is such that it permits more than one sense of a 'word' to be projected, then the item in question is said to be ambiguously used *in that particular context.* To illustrate this point, let us return

10. See for example, KATZ and FODOR, 1964: *passim.*

briefly to the use of *light* in (4 f), given here as (5). The two obvious readings of

(5) How do you like my new *light* suit?

are

(6) (a) How do you like my new *light-weight* suit?
(b) How do you like my new *light-colour* suit?

That is to say, *light* contains a marker associated with *weight* (as well as with items like *carry*) and another marker related to *colour* (but not shared with *carry* and the like); it is precisely this fact that makes *light* potentially ambiguous. Thus, if in a certain semantic environment *light* occurs with items positively specified for 'weight', only the first of the above markers will be projected, and the 'colour' meaning will be blocked, thus rendering

(7) It's too cold a day to wear such a *light* suit.

quite unambiguous. Similarly, contextual specification of the sort just mentioned may obstruct the projection of the 'weight' interpretation yielding an unambiguous sentence like

(8) My new suit is *light* enough to make this shirt look dark.

4. Syntactic ambiguity

At the level of syntax, ambiguity is observed when a sentence or part of a sentence is analysable, at some non-superficial level, in more than one way, i.e. when a sentence can be shown to be derivable from more than one deep structure. It was already hinted that the phenomenon of ambiguity becomes linguistically interesting and significant mainly to the extent that it is essential in showing that there must be a *deep* as well as a *surface* layer of syntactic structures. That this must be so is demonstrated in the unambiguous

(9) (a) Helen promised her mother to tidy up the room.
(b) Helen asked her mother to tidy up the room.
(10) (a) Tom is eager to please.
(b) Tom is easy to please.

where the relationships in each of the superficially identically structured pairs of sentences are not in fact the same; it is also shown in

(11) (a) They can fish.
(b) He is a Russian history professor.
(c) Flying planes can be dangerous.

which are typical examples of syntactically ambiguous utterances.

We may distinguish three kinds of syntactic ambiguity: (i) Distribu-

tional, (ii) Constructional, (iii) Transformational, each of which is exemplified by a sentence in (11). In what follows, we will consider each type separately in some detail.

4.1. Distributional ambiguity

What causes ambiguity of this kind is the fact that one or more of the constituents of a structure may have more than one function, i.e. the distribution of such constituents may be multiple. Thus,

(12) They can fish.

is two-ways ambiguous in that *can* may be either an 'auxiliary' or a transitive verb; additionally, *fish* can serve as an intransitive verb or as a noun. Note that it is the collocation of the two items that renders the sentence ambiguous:

(13) (a) They can sleep.
(b) They can fruit.

are quite unambiguous utterances. Note also that in a normal 'structural' representation, there is no way of showing the different distributional classification of both *can* and *fish;* hence the arguments for rejecting *linear structuring* and adopting multi-layer representations.

The same observations can be made on the sentences:

(14) (a) She will tell us all about her trip.
(b) Let me know how old Mr Smithson is.
(c) They all looked hard.

Resolving the type of ambiguity examined in this section is generally no difficult affair; it can be done in any or all of the following ways: by adding, deleting, substituting, permuting an element in the original sentence. For instance, 'they can fish' can be disambiguated like this: 'they could fish', 'they canned fish', 'he cans fish', 'they can the fish', 'fish is/are canned', etc.

4.1.1. One fairly common and quite systematic instance of distributional ambiguity deserves special mention: the phenomenon of *anaphora.* Under certain conditions,[11] a pronominal element will have ambiguous reference in a sentence. In

(15) (a) Jim told Bill that it would be difficult to shave himself.
(b) Ann asked her aunt if she could stay the night with her.

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11. For example, in cases of agreement as to Person, Number, and Gender with a Noun or Noun-Phrase in the same environment.

we have no 'structural' way of knowing who is going to get shaved, in (a), or, in (b), what Noun-Phrase *she* and the second occurrence of *her* refer to: *Ann* or *her aunt?*[12] That is, there is no indication whether the sentence is to be understood as in paraphrase (16a) or as in (16b):

(16) (a) Ann asked her aunt: can I stay the night with you?
(b) Ann asked her aunt: can you stay the night with me?

A somewhat different case of ambiguity caused by pronominalization is illustrated by

(17) Ann fed her dog biscuits.

Here, *her* may either express the property of possession (*her dog* = Ann's dog)[13] or serve as an indirect object to *fed*. Notice, however, that in the absence of *dog* (which receives double distributional classification: Noun — *her dog* — and Noun Modifier — *dog biscuits*), the sentence would be unambiguous. Notice also that in both (15b) and (17) there would be no question of ambiguity of the type being discussed if *Ann* were to be replaced by some male name, say *George;* or, alternatively, if *aunt* and *her* in (15b) and (17), respectively, were converted to their masculine counterparts.[14]

4.2. Constructional ambiguity

Constructional ambiguity is a by-product of the way in which 'words' appear to be strung together on the surface; it is caused because of the possibility of analysing a superficial construction in different ways. For example,

(18) He is a Russian history professor.

is ambiguous as it can be derived from either of the strings

(19) (a) He is a professor of Russian history.
(b) He is a Russian professor of history.[15]

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12. This is not taking into account the possibility of interpreting the first occurrence of *her* as referring to some third female and of *she* as standing for this third or some fourth female: "Ann asked Alice's aunt if Alice . . .", "Ann asked Alice's aunt if Helen . . .". When such variants are considered, the sentence becomes multiply ambiguous.

13. In this case, *her* may refer back to Ann or some other female. See note 12.

14. Other changes in (15b), necessitated by the proposed alteration, would not affect the issue; they would rather strengthen the point being made.

15. The paraphrases in (19), as in fact the ambiguous sentence in (18), are of course transformationally derived. See also sections 4.3 and 5.

The different derivations are shown by the different bracketings

(20) (i) (Russian history) (professor)
(ii) (Russian) (history professor)

in much the same way as in the ambiguous mathematical question, "How much is *twice two plus one?*", the answer to which may be either "Five" or "Six" depending on how the underlined phrase is analysed:

$(2 \times 2) + 1 = 5$, or $2 \times (2 + 1) = 6$.

Similarly with the phrases

(21) (a) new car contest
(b) foreign language teacher
(c) approved type dealer
(d) Spanish wine merchant

In general, English constructions of the form *Adjective* + *Noun* + *Noun* are potentially ambiguous — but they are unambiguously paraphrasable.

Another interesting kind of ambiguous construction is observed when Nouns (or Noun-Phrases) are *conjoined:*

(22) Old men and women are hard to live with.

where *and* is readily shown to conjoin either *old men* and *old women* (the second occurrence of *old* being later deleted), or *women* (in general) and *old men*. A similar case of ambiguity, one combining the processes of conjoining and 'disjoining', is demonstrated by

(23) Barbara and Bob or Jim will do the job.

A third instance of constructional ambiguity is illustrated below:

(24) The Mafia wanted protection from attack by the police.

where, at a superficial structural level, there is no way of telling whether *by the police* serves as an agent to *attack* or to *protection*, i.e. whether the police will attack the Mafia, or some other organization will and the police will be called to protect the Mafia. Note the role of collocation of both lexical items (*Mafia, protection, attack, police*) and grammatical formatives (*with, by*). In the structurally partly similar sentence

(25) Mr Smith wanted protection from the Mafia by the police.

context renders the sentence unambiguous. Note also that phonological features will generally (but not always) suffice to remove the ambiguity in many of the sentences discussed in this paper. In this section, for in-

stance, extra-long pause before *and* in (22), before *and* or after *Bob* in (23), and before *from* in (24).[16]

4.3. Transformational ambiguity

4.3.1. When a sentence is derived from a number of underlying structures or of pairs, triplets, etc. of such structures through the operation of singulary or generalized transformations, the sentence (more precisely, the sentence-structure) is potentially ambiguous.

(26) Lynching farmers will offend the law.

is obviously derived through Gerundive Nominalization from

(27) (a) Farmers lynch people. This fact will offend the law.
(b) People lynch farmers. This fact will offend the law.

This transformation systematically yields potentially ambiguous surface structures; in other words, sentences with the superficial description *V-ing* + *N* may be ambiguous.[17] The examples in (28) illustrate this point further.

(28) (a) Flying planes can be dangerous.
(b) Eating apples can be fun.[18]

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16. Nevertheless, cases like

(i) Bob decided on the boat.
(ii) He found an old book on Main Street.

will resist phonological disambiguation.
For a more detailed treatment of the ambiguities in (i-ii), see sections 4.3.3. and 5.

17. Whether such sentences will ultimately be ambiguous depends mainly on the semantic properties of the items that are selected for insertion at the lexical substitution stage of the derivation and also on the morphology of the verb. Thus, the sentences

(i) Stealing farmers will offend the law.
(ii) Lynching farmers offend/offends the law.

are clearly unambiguous.
For an explication of the difference in the behaviour of the 'participial V-ing' and the 'gerundive V-ing', see LYONS, 1968 : 249 ff.

18. On the distinction between the ambiguities exhibited in sentences (28a-b), see LYONS, 1968 : 249 ff. Roughly, the difference lies in that *fly* is either transitively or intransitively used, whereas *eat* can be only transitive. This linguistically interesting function of transitivity and of other related notions is also seen in the Greek sentence

Ὁ Γιάννης βάφει τὰ παπούτσια του κάθε μέρα.
(—John polishes his shoes every day.
—John gets his shoes polished every day).

which is ambiguous depending on whether *βάφει* is conceived transitively or causatively.

(c) Nobody likes murdering peasants.
(d) Hiding criminals may offend the law.[19]

The disambiguation of sentences containing the string *V-ing* + *N* can be done in any of the ways mentioned in (4.1.).[20]

4.3.2. Another structure involving gerundivization, a structure of the form *the* + *V-ing* + *of* + *NP*, deserves mention as it also is systematically ambiguous.

(29) The shooting of the colonels pleased the people.

can be analysed roughly as

(30) (a) Someone shot the colonels. This fact pleased the people.
(b) The colonels shot someone. This fact pleased the people.

In the derived sentence (29) there is no way of telling whether *the colonels* is the deep subject or the deep object of *shooting*.[21]

Note that gerundivization of a verb is not the only kind of nominalized element that may cause ambiguity. Other nominal transforms[22] may exhibit the same systematic property, for example

(31) (a) The professor's appointment was shocking.
(b) It was the love of children that made him act like this.
(32) (a) The chickens are ready to eat.
(b) The manager is the man to ask.

4.3.3. A very interesting and quite common as well as systematic case of transformational ambiguity results from the process of Relativization when this operation is followed by the reduction of the relative clauses so generated to relative phrases.

(33) (a) Jim said "Hello" to the girl *in the car*.
(b) Alice painted the picture *in the attic*.

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19. See also section 5.

20. For instance, the ambiguity in (28a) may be resolved as follows:

(i) Flying planes is dangerous.
(ii) Flying planes are dangerous.
(iii) Flying the planes can be dangerous.
(iv) The flying planes can be dangerous.
(v) To fly planes can be dangerous.
(vi) It can be dangerous to fly planes. Etc.

21. Whether the genitive is realized as in (29) or as in

The colonels' shooting pleased the people.

is immaterial to the point at issue here.

22. For an exhaustive treatment of nominalization in English, see Lees, 1960.

(c) He hit the boy *with a stick.*
(d) The manager fired the foreman *with zeal.*[23]
(e) The seniors were told to stop demonstrating *on campus.*[24]

In all the sentences of (33), the italicized prepositional phrases have resulted from regular relative clauses after deletion of the readily recoverable elements 'Relative Pronoun' and 'BE'. To the extent that the adjunct can be attached to (i.e. bracketed with) more than one constituent in the sentence, the sentence is *n*-ways ambiguous. For instance, in (33a) it is not clear whether only Jim was in the car when he said "Hello" to the girl, or only the girl was, or whether they were both in the car.

4.3.4. The application of the deletion transformation in comparisons may render a sentence ambiguous.

(34) Peter wanted the job more than Fiona.

receives two different interpretations whereas the different structures from which it is derived (after deletions of constituents which are identical with some other constituents in the same sentence — and thus recoverable — but which are quite different in each application of this transformation) are obviously unambiguous:

(35) (a) Peter *wanted the job* more than Fiona *wanted the job.*
(b) *Peter wanted* the job more than *Peter wanted* Fiona.

Further examples pertaining to this erasure process include:

(36) (a) I know more successful lawyers than Bill.
(b) Tim loves Mary more than his brother.
(c) Russians love Greeks as much as Americans.

The conditions under which the structures underlying (34) and (36) may become ambiguous are apparently easy to formulate. Again, disambiguation of such sentences is no problem; for example, (36c) receives the following interpretations:

(37) (a) Russians love Greeks as much as Americans do.
(b) Russians love Greeks as much as they do Americans.

5. Overlapping types of ambiguity

In the discussion of cases of Syntactic ambiguity we indicated that a large number of *structures* transformationally derived are potential-

23. See also section 5.

24. This sentence can receive no fewer than six different interpretations. See JACOBS and ROSENBAUM, 1968 : 6.

ly ambiguous. By that statement we meant that they are ambiguous before the application of the rules of lexical insertion; once the latter have applied, whether or not the resulting strings will be ambiguous depends largely on the compatibility of the semantic content of the lexical entries chosen for insertion in the 'abstract' representations generated by the grammar, in particular by its phrase-structure and transformational sub-components. This means that deep structures are never ambiguous in themselves; most frequently, ambiguity is a *combined* function of polysemous lexical items in potentially ambiguous (i.e. non-surface) structural frames.

5.1. To take a few examples

(38) Smoking grass is nauseating.

is four-ways ambiguous, lexically and transformationally, as is shown in the paraphrases

(39) (a) Grass that gives out fumes is nauseating.
(b) To smoke grass is nauseating.
(c) Marihuana that gives out fumes is nauseating.
(d) To smoke marihuana is nauseating.

In the sentence

(40) I like her drawing.

what causes the ambiguity is the form *drawing*, which can be either a lexical item in itself (= picture/s) or transformationally derived (= the fact that she draws / while she draws / the way she draws). Additional ambiguity is introduced by *her* ("I like him drawing." is unambiguous, and "I like his drawing." is not ambiguous in the same way as (38)).

Similarly with

(41) I don't approve of his cooking.

If *approve of* were to be replaced by *eat*, the resulting sentence would be unambiguous.

5.2. In the case of

(42) He found an old book on Main Street.

at least one of the three meanings involved is transformationally derived ("... while he was on Main Street"). The semantic contribution of the context (*book, on, Main Street*) to making the sentence ambiguous is shown in the unambiguous

(43) (a) He found an old dime on Main Street.
(b) He found an old book on Medieval History.
(c) He found an old book on the shelf.

Analogous observations can be made on

(44) He decided on the boat.

where *on* can be considered either part of the phrasal verb *decide on* or part of the prepositional phrase *on the boat*, a reduced form of the transformationally derived "while he was on the boat". Hence the ambiguity involved in (42) and (44) can be termed as both lexical and syntactic (distributional, constructional, transformational).

5.3. Regardless of whether *more* in

(45) We need more competent clerks.

modifies *competent* or *clerks*, i.e. whether it serves as a comparative marker (and is bracketed with *competent*) or as a quantifier (and is strung together with *clerks*), the sentence demonstrates a case of ambiguity which is caused both by different distributional classification and by different constituent structure.

5.4. Sentence (28d), given here as (46)

(46) Hiding criminals may offend the law.

is multiply ambiguous owing to a convergence of a variety of reasons: the transformationally derived nominal *hiding criminals* may be interpreted (i) as "criminals who hide themselves", (ii) as "people who hide criminals", or even (iii) as "criminals who hide others (e.g., other criminals)"; in addition, each of these interpretations is still lexically ambiguous as *hide* is polysemous, meaning (i) to conceal, and (ii) to strike/beat with a hide. Note that in the case at hand the syntactic ambiguity will be resolved after infinitivization but not after passivization — as it is in many other cases;[25] of

(47) (a) To hide criminals may offend the law.

(b) The law may be offended by hiding criminals.

(47a) is syntactically unambiguous but (47b) is not; and as they both still contain the item *hide*, they are still lexically ambiguous. This, incidentally, implies that grammatical transformations do not affect lexical content.

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25. The passive transformation is (where it is applicable) a good way of disambiguating sentences and sentence-parts, as is shown below:

(i) They can fish.

(ii) Fish is canned (by them).

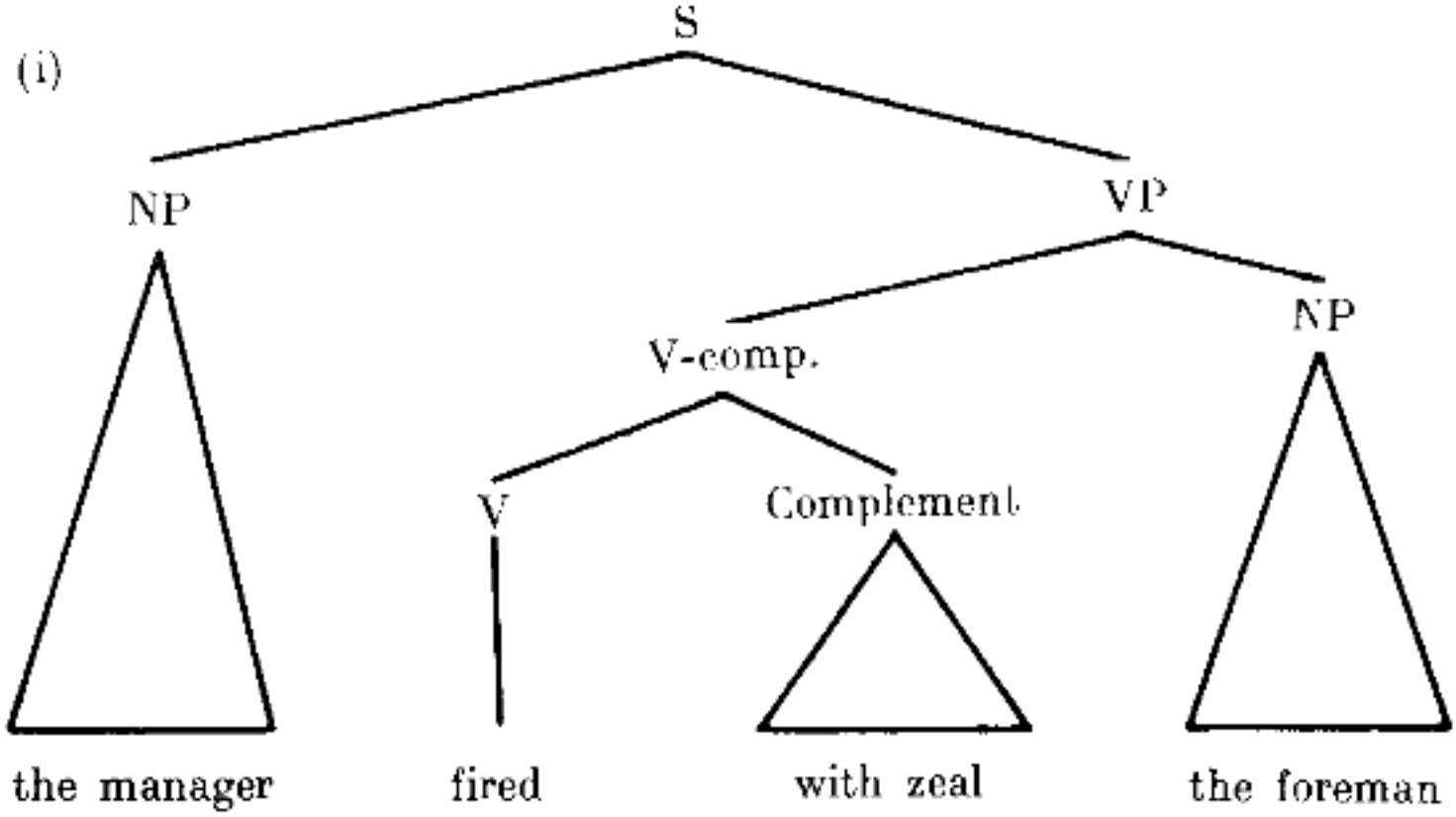
Nevertheless, as we have just seen, certain ambiguities survive passivization.

5.5. Finally, the following three deep P-markers of sentence (33d), re-cited here as (48)

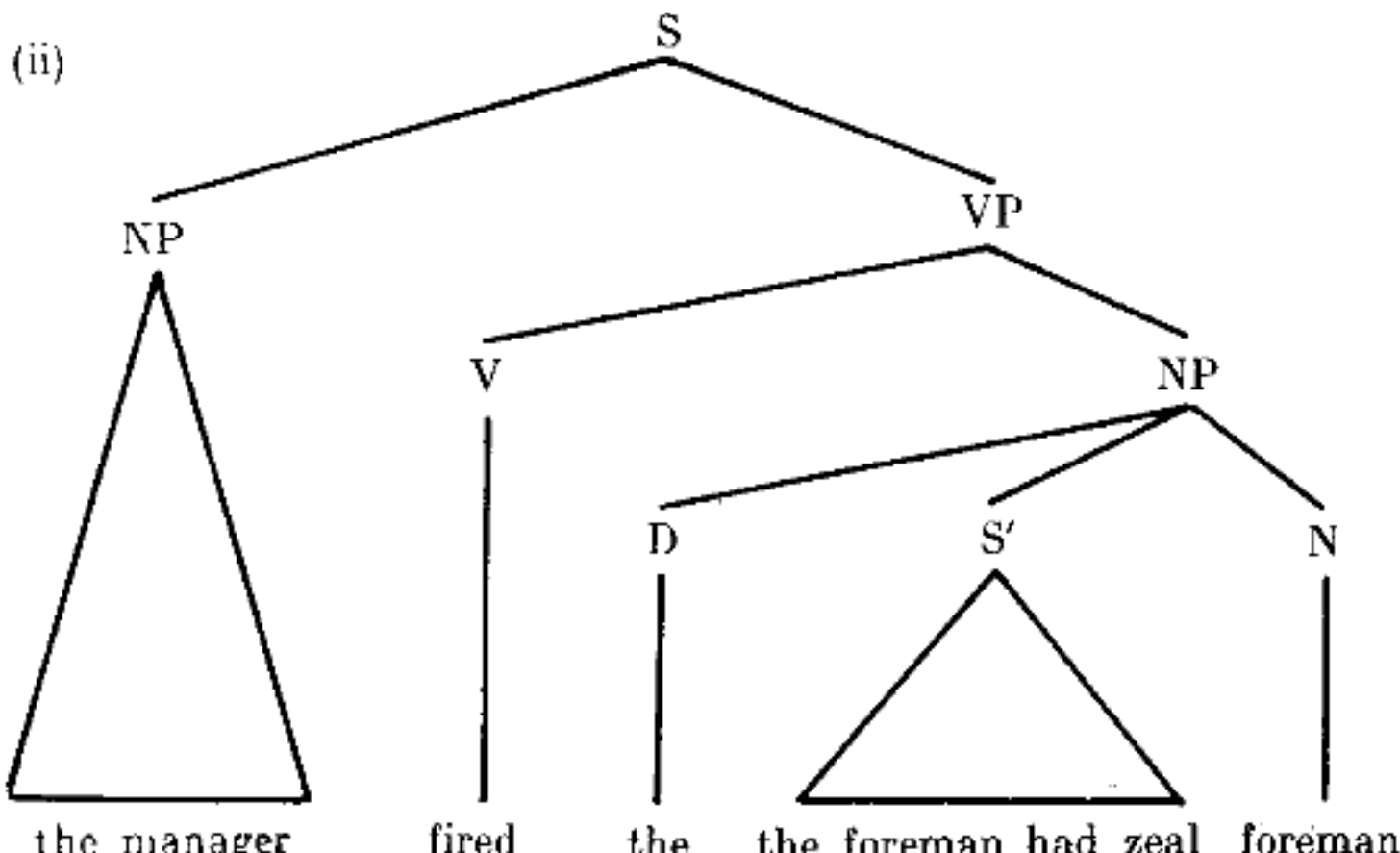
(48) The manager fired the foreman with zeal.

are meant to demonstrate how ambiguity of the constructional and/or of the transformational type can co-exist in a sentence; more specifically, the P-markers below illustrate the distinct ways in which phrases like *with zeal* can be transformationally derived or bracketed together with other sentence constituents, each different structuring yielding a syntactically different meaning.

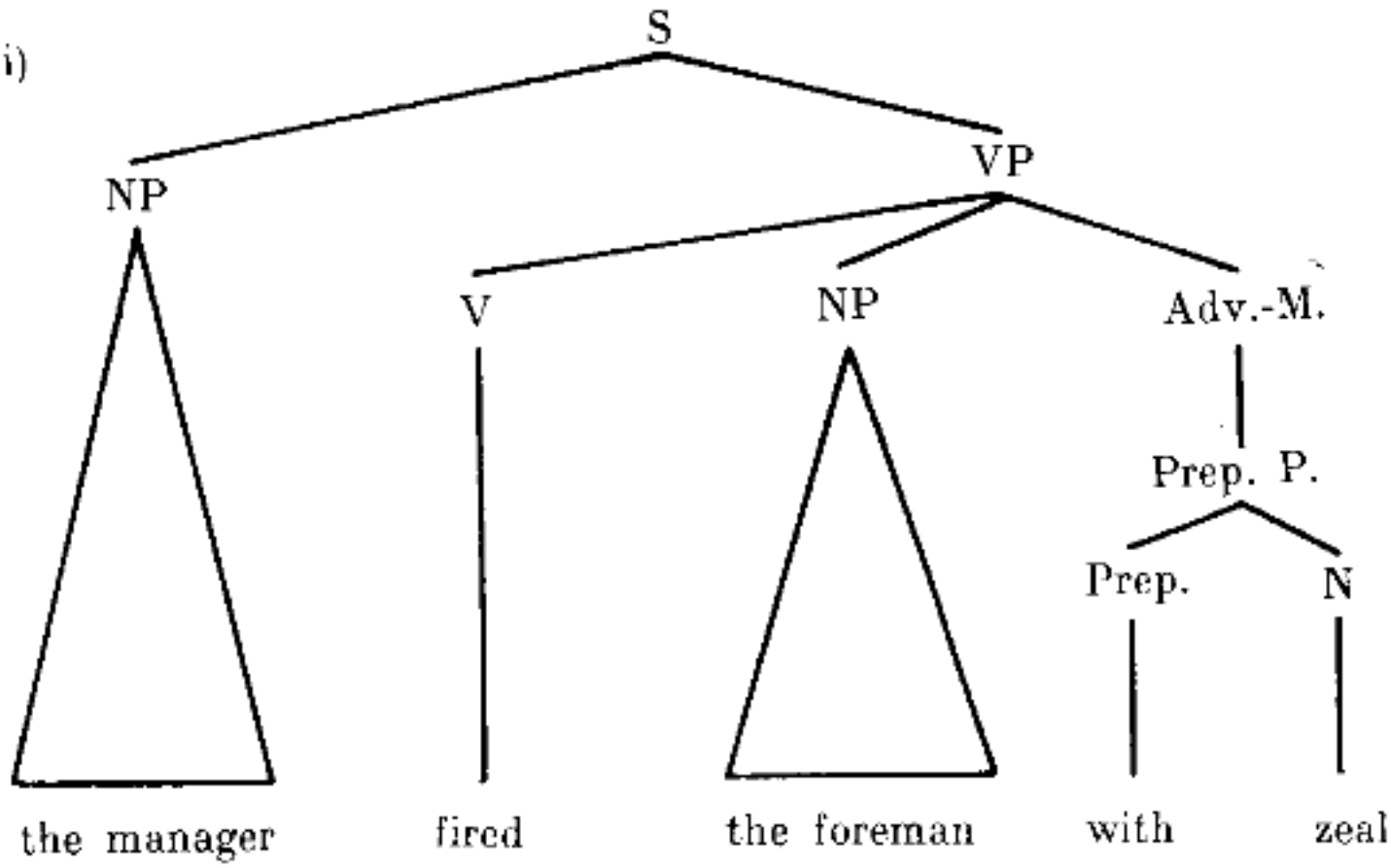
(i)



(ii)



(iii)



6. Summary

This paper has examined, selectively, some instances of ambiguity in English as these are manifested at the phonological, the lexical, and the syntactic levels. Within general linguistic theory, the discussion of ambiguity is justified not so much on the grounds that it is of some major importance in itself, but because an explicit account of phenomena like that of ambiguity has triggered off the extension of linguistic theories and the positing of grammars that claim to be more highly valued than those so far in existence, grammars that are capable of handling such phenomena more satisfactorily. In particular, it has been shown that language structure cannot any longer be accounted for by enumerating the rules for a mere linear concatenation of linguistic elements, but that a variety of layers ('deep', 'intermediate', 'high'/'low', 'surface') must be given recognition in an explanatory theory of language.

In connection with language acquisition, it has been hinted (though not really elaborated) that for a native speaker (or a foreign learner) who is unaware of all the meanings of a potentially ambiguous form, this form is unambiguous. This fact has important behavioural repercussions[26] — which, nevertheless, go beyond the restricted scope of this paper.

26. See Bever, 1970.

As regards the phenomenon itself, the discussion finds justification to the extent to which it shows (i) that there is no regular one-to-one correspondence between sound and meaning in English, and (ii) that ambiguities are observed whenever two potential messages may fail to be distinguished *formally* at a superficial level.

Finally, the claim that ambiguity is a fortuitous and altogether unsystematic language phenomenon has been refuted here by showing that it is *predictable* whenever there is constructional homonymy.

Σπουδαστήριο Ἀγγλικῆς Γλώσσας καὶ Φιλολογίας

S. EFSTATHIADIS

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