

LEXICAL AMBIGUITY ON NEWS HEADLINE OF CNN NEWS' OFFICIAL TIKTOK ACCOUNT VIDEOS

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to find out the types of lexical ambiguity in CNN News' official TikTok account videos. This study applied the theory of lexical ambiguity proposed by Murphy (2010). The descriptive-qualitative research method was used to explain the final results. The data in this study were taken from headlines of TikTok videos published from May 2023 to July 2023. The data was collected by documentation and observation methods. The results of the data analysis showed that 5 headlines considered lexical ambiguity in the news video on CNN News' official TikTok. Polysemy and homonymy were found in this study as the types of lexical ambiguity. There were 2 words and 1 phrase identified as polysemy, and 2 words identified as homonymy. The type of lexical ambiguity mostly found is polysemy.

Keywords: lexical ambiguity; news headlines; TikTok video

INTRODUCTION

News is no longer limited to newspapers and television; it can now be conveniently accessed through various social media platforms. According to Mustătea & Balaban (2019), some audiences rely on social media as their main source of information. This allows news media to reach a wider audience, interact directly with the readers or viewers, and spread the latest news quickly. Nowadays, TikTok is one of the fastest-growing social media around the world, with its addictive algorithm producing tons number of entertaining short videos (Newman, 2022). TikTok allows users to make and share short videos (from 15 to 60 seconds) that can be quickly and easily edited using the various effects and sounds provided in the app (Fiallos et al., 2021). This makes it possible for people to easily enjoy news in the form of videos with text added in the beginning which is the headline of the news.

The headline is the first thing readers or viewers will see when searching for a news story. Tereszkiewicz (2012) said that news headlines function similarly to

telegrams, succinctly guiding readers toward important details and focusing on crucial information within a news story (as cited in Khalifa, 2018). Nurradiatummardiah (2020) emphasized that news headlines are often designed with catchy words to entice readers and encourage them to read the stories. In addition, a headline should do more than just convey the story's subject; it should also evoke curiosity and motivate readers to explore the entire article (Laksman-Huntley & Dwiputri, 2020). In other words, a news headline is the highlight of a news story before people decide to read or watch the full story. This means news writers must carefully choose the right words to achieve this engaging effect. Hence, news writers often create concise and compact headlines. Furthermore, to add an element of curiosity, they may intentionally or unintentionally incorporate ambiguous words to make the headlines more captivating and engaging. In line with Puspitasari & Beratha (2019), journalists, on some occasions, make decisions to utilize ambiguity in the presentation of news. As stated by Khalifa (2018), using ambiguous words in news headlines achieves multiple effects such as adding a touch of humor, drawing readers' attention, and leaving them curious to know more. However, Tirangga (2014) explained that if a news headline has multiple meanings, it can confuse the reader.

In linguistics, the science of meaning is known as semantics. According to Griffiths (2006), semantics is concerned with investigating the meaning of words and sentences without being influenced by specific contextual factors. If a word has a variety of meanings, this can be referred to as lexical ambiguity. Ramadani, 2015 emphasizes that lexical ambiguity occurs when a word can be interpreted in multiple ways based on its various dictionary definitions. Lexical ambiguity is highly prevalent in the English language. It is supported by Rodd (2017) that a vast majority (over 80%) of words in the English language have multiple definitions in the dictionary. Moreover, some words possess numerous diverse meanings, making lexical ambiguity a highly common phenomenon in English (Ardiani et al., 2022). Therefore, lexical ambiguity can also arise in a news headline. When news headlines contain phrases or sentences with multiple meanings, it can cause readers to become unsure about the intended message

(Fitri, 2019). This will create confusion for readers and misunderstandings in interpreting the meaning of the news headline.

According to Murphy (2010), lexical ambiguity is divided into polysemy and homonymy. Polysemy is a word with several meanings that are connected and related but still distinct from each other. Meanwhile, homonymy is two different lexemes that coincidentally share the same spoken or written form. A previous study conducted by Saputri et al. (2022) analyzed the lexical ambiguity and its factors in news headlines of the Jakarta Post using Ullmann's (1967) theory and found that 4 words in the news headlines were considered lexical ambiguity: 2 words were classified as homonymy and the others 2 words were polysemy. In addition, Salsabila et al. (2021) in their study on lexical ambiguity in Haninpost newspaper advertisements applied theories from Ullmann (1972), Yoon Pyeong Hyeon (2008), Han Jae Yeong et al. (2013), and Kim Ji Hyeong & Lee Min Woo (2015). This study explained that 27,27% of the analyzed data showed instances of both local and global ambiguity. The factors contributing to lexical ambiguity were identified as polysemy and homonymy. Moreover, a previous study written by Shan & Mutty (2022) investigated the lexical and syntactic ambiguity found in news headlines of the Star related to Covid-19 vaccination in 2021. This study classified five cases of lexical ambiguity and three cases of syntactic ambiguity in vaccine-related news headlines published by the Star. The data of the study indicated that ambiguities in the use of words (lexical) and sentence structure (syntactic) were found in The Star's news, but this did not affect the participants' understanding of the headlines. Although participants felt confused and needed time to think about the meaning of the headlines, the ambiguity did not have a significant impact on their comprehension. Another related article to this study is authored by Makroum (2021) which analyzed lexical ambiguity and verbal humor in some English jokes and riddles. The research findings indicated that the prevalent forms of lexical ambiguity identified in the chosen riddles and jokes were primarily homonymy (85%), with absolute homonymy (58.9%) being the most prominent, followed by polysemy (15%). Further, the theory of incongruity

in humor emerged as the key factor of lexical ambiguity that contributed to the rise of humor.

The previous study about lexical ambiguity convinced that using ambiguous words in news headlines can attract readers' or viewers' attention. Nevertheless, it is essential to be cautious because some ambiguous headlines can lead the readers or viewers to confusion and make it difficult for them to grasp the intended message. Consequently, the readers might feel frustrated and opt to refuse to read the article (Al-Janaby & Abed, 2011). Therefore, it is interesting to find out the types that lead to this phenomenon in the headlines of CNN News' official TikTok account videos. As can be seen in previous studies, news headlines on TikTok social media videos have not been researched on similar topics even though TikTok's dynamics and audience are different from other news media. Therefore, this research is interesting as it attempts to understand a new form of news on a platform that is more focused on short videos and younger audiences. Furthermore, CNN's official TikTok account has 2,1 million followers that actively upload breaking news every day. Based on the explanation given, this study was conducted to analyze the lexical ambiguity and the types that lead to lexical ambiguity occurring in news headlines of CNN's official TikTok videos. This research may provide a foundation for further research on how lexical ambiguity is used in news on various social media platforms.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study was investigated by using the descriptive-qualitative research method. Lambert (2012) emphasized that qualitative descriptive studies aim to provide a comprehensive and understandable summary of specific events, in everyday terms, experienced by individuals or groups. The data for this study were obtained from headlines on TikTok videos of CNN News that were published from May 2023 to July 2023 which contained ambiguous words, phrases, or sentences. The method of collecting the data was documentation and observation methods. The technique involved reading the headlines of the videos, taking screenshots, and analyzing the data. There were several steps applied in analyzing the data, such as: (1) taking notes of ambiguous words, phrases, or

sentences found in the headline, (2) identifying the meaning by using several online dictionaries such as Oxford Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary, and Collins Dictionary, (3) analyzing and identifying lexical ambiguity types applied to Murphy's (2010) theory.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presented the details of results and discussion regarding the types that may lead to lexical ambiguity found in news headlines on TikTok videos of CNN News. The finding is based on the theory proposed by Murphy (2010) about the type of lexical ambiguity. The results of this study showed that there are 5 headlines in the CNN News' TikTok videos that contained ambiguous words, which are presented in the table below.

Table 1. Type of Lexical Ambiguity

| No | News Headlines | Type of Lexical Ambiguity |
|----|--|---------------------------|
| 1 | Sharon Stone recalls iconic 'Basic Instinct' <i>scene</i> | Polysemy |
| 2 | Possible cocaine found at <i>white house</i> | Polysemy |
| 3 | The <i>hardest</i> dish on the planet | Polysemy |
| 4 | McConnell appears to <i>freeze</i> during press conference | Homonymy |
| 5 | She fights <i>trolls</i> with an army of kindness | Homonymy |

The data in Table 1 revealed that there are 5 news headlines considered lexical ambiguity and two types that lead to lexical ambiguity. The first, second, and third headlines were ambiguous because the words *scene*, *white house*, and *hardest* could have multiple interpretations but the meanings are still related which is categorizing as polysemy. On the other hand, the fourth and fifth headlines were unclear due to the words *freeze* and *trolls* which have the same spelling and pronunciation, but the senses are unrelated to each other indicating a case of homonymy.

Type of Lexical Ambiguity

Datum 1: "Sharon Stone recalls iconic 'Basic Instinct' *scene*"

The word "scene" in the headline is not explicitly clarified and leaving room for ambiguity. Due to the word "scene," the headline above is categorized as an instance of lexical ambiguity. In this case, the word "scene" is classified as

polysemy, which is when a single word has multiple meanings that are related but different. According to the online Cambridge dictionary, the word “scene” has several distinct meanings that can be seen below.

scene (noun)

a part of a play or movie in which the action stays in one place for a continuous period.

a view or picture of a place.

Based on the different meanings of the word “scene”, the headline above could be interpreted as follows.

First interpretation:

“Sharon Stone recalls iconic “Basic Instinct” *part of the movie.*”

Second interpretation:

“Sharon Stone recalls iconic “Basic Instinct” *view.*”

The first interpretation could refer to a specific part or sequence of events in the movie ‘Basic Instinct,’ while the second interpretation might be a place or setting related to the film. Since it has different definitions, trying to figure out the meaning just from the headline can cause misunderstandings for the reader. Hence, the readers need to look at the whole content of the news story to know the intended context. After watching the news on CNN’s official TikTok video, it seems that the precise meaning of this headline is the first interpretation. This could be noticed at the beginning of the video, which showed footage of Sharon Stone’s acting in the movie ‘Basic Instinct’ instead of the scenery of the place where the movie was made.

Further, it is followed by an explanation from Sharon about the footage which says, “*That scene, my acting teacher, Roy London said to me “...this is an action movie, and this scene stops all the action, and...every single moment in that scene has to be very specific, you have to be super present on the moment... ”.*” This evidence clearly shows that the word “scene” is used to convey *a part of the movie in which the action.* In this context, the word “scene” possesses a distinct definition, but the meaning is still related which refers to two relevant senses in the movie production, namely part of the action and the view of the place in the

movie. Therefore, it can be concluded that the type of lexical ambiguity in the word “scene” refers to polysemy.

Datum 2: “Possible cocaine found at *white house*”

The phrase “white house” in the headline is ambiguous and considered lexical ambiguity. This is because the phrase “white house” has two possible interpretations. In this context, the word “house” is classified as polysemy, which is when a single word has multiple meanings that are related but different. Based on the online Collin dictionary, the word “house” is defined by several meanings as follows.

house (n)

a building in which people live, usually for people belonging to one family.

the names of office buildings and large private homes or expensive houses.

The phrase “white house” in the news headline mentioned earlier can refer to different interpretations, such as.

First interpretation:

“Possible cocaine found at *a building where a family lives that is painted white.*”

Second interpretation:

“Possible cocaine found at *office buildings and large private homes of the President of the United States namely White House.*”

The first interpretation refers to a painted white house, meanwhile, the second interpretation means the official residence of the President in the United States which is famously known as the White House. By only reading the news headline, the readers or viewers will find it difficult to determine which meaning the headline is referring to. Therefore, the readers or viewers should dive into the whole news story to get the intended meaning before it turns into a misunderstanding of the readers or viewers. After looking at the news story, the researcher found that the second interpretation is the precise meaning of the headline. The video showed the large white buildings with the presenter’s explanation that said: “...*but we should know, Phil, President Biden was not at the White House over the weekend when this was found in when there was an evacuation...*”. This evidence clearly shows that the phrase “white house” is used

to refer to *the names of office buildings and large private homes of the President of the United States*, as they mentioned President Biden's name in the news video. In this case, the phrase "white house" possesses a distinct definition, but the meaning is still related which refers to a building or place. Therefore, it can be concluded that the type of lexical ambiguity in the phrase "white house" refers to polysemy.

Datum 3: "The *hardest* dish on the planet"

The word "hardest" in the headline is not explicitly clarified, which could lead to confusion and uncertainty due to lexical ambiguity. This is because the word "hardest" has two possible interpretations. In this context, the word "hardest" is classified as polysemy, which is when a single word has multiple meanings that are related but different. Based on the online Oxford dictionary, the word "hardest" is defined by several meanings as follows.

hardest (adj)

difficult to do.

solid or stiff and difficult to bend or break.

The word "hardest" in the news headline above can refer to different interpretations, such as.

First interpretation:

"The *difficult* dish on the planet."

Second interpretation:

"The *solid* dish on the planet."

The first interpretation means that the dish mentioned is the most difficult or complex one to cook, meanwhile, the second interpretation indicates that the dish is physically solid or firm. By only reading the news headline, the readers or viewers will find it difficult to determine which meaning the headline is referring to. Therefore, the readers or viewers should dive into the whole news story to get the intended meaning before it turns into a misunderstanding of the readers or viewers. After looking at the news story, the researcher found that the second interpretation is the exact meaning of the headline. In the video, it showed someone stirring the rocks in the frying pan. The news video also explained the

dish, which says “*This Chinese stir fry features rocks as the main ingredient and social media calls it quote the world’s hardest dish...suck off the flavors then spit out the rocks...*”. Thus, it could be assumed that the exact meaning of the word “hardest” in the headline above is *solid or stiff and difficult to bend or break* which indicates the rocks. In this case, both meanings of “hardest” possess distinct definitions but the meaning is still linked since it indicates qualities of difficulty or firmness. Therefore, it can be concluded that the type of lexical ambiguity in the word “hardest” is polysemy.

Datum 4: “McConnell appears to *freeze* during press conference”

The word “freeze” in the headline above leads to the potential for ambiguity which is known as lexical ambiguity. In this case, the word “freeze” is classified as homonymy. Homonymy is two different words that have the same spelling and pronunciation, but the senses are unrelated to each other. Derived from the online Collins dictionary, the word “freeze” can have various meanings such as.

freeze (v)

feel extremely cold.

stops suddenly and becomes completely still and quiet.

Both meanings of the word “freeze” above might lead to the interpretation of the news headline as follows.

First interpretation:

“McConnell appears to *feel extremely cold* during press conference.”

Second interpretation:

“McConnell appears to *stop suddenly* during press conference.”

The first interpretation could mean that McConnell is physically feeling cold due to the low temperature during the press conference and the second interpretation might refer to McConnell momentarily stopped or became rigid in his speech during the press conference. Due to its multiple definitions, the readers are unable to determine the actual meaning simply from reading the headline, as this may lead to misinterpretation. Therefore, the readers or the viewers have to watch the news story to get the correct message from the headline. Based on the CNN News video that the researcher watched, the second interpretation aligns

more accurately with the context of the headline rather than the first interpretation. This can be seen from the video that Mitch McConnell was doing his speech saying “*This week been good bipartisan cooperation and a string of...*” before suddenly starting to stop and completely pause. From this, it could be assumed that the exact meaning of the word “freeze” in the headline above is to *stop suddenly and becomes completely still and quiet*. The word “freeze” in the headline above has the same spelling and pronunciation but different unrelated senses. Therefore, it can be concluded that the type of lexical ambiguity in the word “freeze” is categorized as homonymy.

Datum 5: “She fights *trolls* with an army of kindness”

The word “trolls” in this headline is recognized as a case of lexical ambiguity since it can be understood in several ways. In this context, the type of lexical ambiguity in the word “trolls” is identified as homonymy. Homonymy is two different words that have the same spelling and pronunciation, but the senses are unrelated to each other. According to the online Oxford dictionary, the word “troll” has several senses as follows.

troll (n)

a creature that looks like an ugly person (in Scandinavian stories).

a message that someone leaves on the internet that is intended to annoy people.

The news headline could be interpreted in two ways based on the distinct meanings of the word “troll” above, such as.

First interpretation:

“She fights *the ugly creature* with an army of kindness.”

Second interpretation:

“She fights *a message that someone leaves on the internet to annoy her* with an army of kindness.”

In both interpretations of the word “troll”, the first interpretation could refer to a mythical creature in Scandinavian stories, while the second one could mean the individual who intentionally posts offensive or provocative content to elicit strong reactions from others. Due to the double meaning, reading the headline will

not reveal the intended message of the news. In addition, reading the news headline without seeing the whole news story can confuse the readers or viewers. After watching the whole news, the researcher assumed that the second interpretation of the word “trolls” is the exact meaning of the headline above. The video explained that Niki has regularly become a target of online hate from a prominent figure in the country, former Prime Minister Janez Jansa. In the video, Niki showed some hate tweets from the ex-Prime Minister and another journalist about her and some other activists. This evidence clearly shows that the word “troll” is used to convey *a message that someone leaves on the internet that is intended to annoy people*. Moreover, the word “troll” in the headline above has the same spelling and pronunciation. However, both meanings are unrelated to each other. Therefore, it can be concluded that the type of lexical ambiguity in the word “freeze” is categorized as homonymy.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the data analysis, it could be seen that this study found 5 headlines containing ambiguous words in the CNN News’ TikTok videos. From the data, it can be concluded that two categories were identified that led to lexical ambiguity, namely polysemy and homonymy. Polysemy is a word with several meanings that are connected and related but still distinct from each other. Meanwhile, homonymy is two different lexemes that coincidentally share the same spoken or written form. The researcher found 3 polysemy in the words *scene*, *white house*, and *hardest*, and 2 homonymy in the words *freeze* and *troll* which means the dominant type of lexical ambiguity found was polysemy. This research is expected to be a reference for further researchers who examine the same topic, namely lexical ambiguity. Moreover, further researchers may investigate different types of ambiguity when analyzing news headlines on TikTok, including syntactic ambiguity. They might also extend their investigation to other media such as advertisements, books, television, movies, and more.

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