

## Some Aspects of Ambiguity and Ways of Disambiguation

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1. I would like to point out three seemingly contradictory characteristics of ambiguity. The first characteristic is that ambiguity is the inevitability of language but that we don't suffer any inconvenience in our daily life. Without consulting dictionaries we know that almost all words have plural meanings. This is called economy of language. If each word had only one meaning, language would be a severe burden on our memory. Therefore, the economy of language is not a defect but a characteristic of great importance which makes language very effective. In other words, polysemy is a very important characteristic in natural language.

The economy of language is true not only of the lexical level but also of the syntactic level. To give an example, Chomsky's famous sentence, "Flying planes can be dangerous," is interpretable at least in two ways.<sup>1)</sup> The phrase "flying planes" can be analyzed as "adjectival modifier + headword" or as a transformed structure of "(abbreviated subject) + transitive verb + object." As this example shows the linguistic fact that two different deep structures are transformed into one and the same surface structure is considered to be one aspect of language economy.

On the other side of polysemy exists ambiguity. The discrepancy between the limited number of linguistic forms and the unlimited phenomena in this universe, which may be thought the inevitable result of the language economy, produces ambiguity. But, language, in which economy of language and ambiguity are like a double-edged sword, does not always give us inconvenience, because language is not an abstract existence, but usually is used in concrete context. As I will discuss later, context is not the only means of disambiguation and context does not solve all the

linguistic problems, but it can be said that context guarantees our smooth language behavior. When we consider our daily language behavior, we can tell by experience that misunderstanding is not caused so often by ambiguity of expressions.

The second characteristic is that our daily conversation is not so clear and logical as we expect it to be. There is an interesting study on the clarity of conversation. Wardhaugh (1985) analyzes daily conversation and concludes that conversation is so uncertain and ambiguous that the participants in conversation must have tolerance. His opinion is summarized in the following passage:

You must be prepared to tolerate a considerable amount of uncertainty and ambiguity ; people tend to be vague, imprecise, non-committal and equivocal.<sup>2)</sup>

According to him, occasional gaps, sudden leaps, a lack of explicitness, and a considerable and sometimes pervasive unclarity are found in the actual conversation and fully detailed, adequately structured, and completely explicit conversation is not expected.<sup>3)</sup> He says that conversation which is clear to the minutest details is very rare and that such conversation would seem to be a legal document. It is true that we are not so strict in the use of, for example, demonstrative pronouns,<sup>4)</sup> and that we are often likely to avoid definite expressions.<sup>5)</sup>

The third characteristic is that often we don't notice ambiguity embedded in expressions. This is also true in spite of the first characteristic that ambiguity is the inevitability of language. Clark and Clark (1981) quotes the following sentence to show this feature:

- (1) The farmer put the straw on a pile beside his threshing machine.<sup>6)</sup>

This sentence seems to be unambiguous, but a moment's thought will tell us that the word "straw" is a polysemous word and that the meanings are (a) dried stems of grain plants, (b) a thin tube for sucking up liquid, (c) the smallest value, and (d) a straw hat. But, when the word is used in the structure: They put the \_\_\_\_\_ on a pile beside his threshing machine, the meaning (a) is considered to be more appropriate than any other meaning, so we automatically adopt the meaning without hesitation and

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we usually don't notice the potential ambiguity.

I have used the word "ambiguity" so far without defining it clearly. The polysemous word is often used in the following two ways:

1. having two or more possible meanings
2. not clear; indefinite; uncertain; vague<sup>7)</sup>

Ikegami (1978) classifies ambiguity into two types. His classification coincides with the above-mentioned definition.<sup>8)</sup> In the first and the third characteristics I mentioned earlier, the word "ambiguity" is used in the first sense and in the second characteristic it is used in the latter sense. In this paper, I use the word in the first sense and the purposes of this paper are to classify the types of ambiguity on lexical and syntactic levels and to consider how people deal with ambiguous expressions.

## 2. Classification of ambiguity

In this chapter I would like to classify the types of ambiguity in English.

It has been the custom of the linguists to separate language into various levels like the phonological level, morphological level, syntactic level, and semantic level since the appearance of American structural linguistics. Some linguists classify ambiguity and although there are minute differences among them, their classification is basically founded on the separation of linguistic levels.

Tanaka et al. (1978) introduces the classification of ambiguity based on Morris's semiotics.<sup>9)</sup> According to them, the ambiguity caused by the relation between signs and referents is semantic ambiguity, the ambiguity caused by the relation between signs and signs is syntactic ambiguity, and the ambiguity caused by the relation between signs and the users of the signs is pragmatic ambiguity. My classification in this paper is made on the basis of the classification.

### 2.1. Ambiguity on the lexical level

Ullmann (1962) insists that the most important type of ambiguity is caused by lexical elements. This lexical ambiguity is caused by homonymy and polysemy.<sup>10)</sup>

When two different words have the same sound patterns, they are

in homonymy. The words in homonymy may have the same spelling (=homonym), or they may have different spelling (=homophone). For example, the words "key" and "quay" are equally pronounced as [ki:]. If the sentence "How did you find the [ki:]?" is uttered, it is possible to substitute both words for the sounds [ki:]. And this kind of ambiguity involves some risk of misunderstanding.

A polysemous word is the word that has plural meanings. As a result of the meaning expansion of a word, the meanings of the same word are sometimes wide apart. Problems in communication arise when two different meanings of the same word can be used in the same situation. In the following example, a communication gap occurs because a participant of the dialogue uses the word "bill" in the sense "a draft of a law," but, as this word is a polysemous word, the addressee interprets it in the sense "an account for goods sold":

(2) A convertible, driven by a young girl in curlers, passed before them. It was a New York. Wilfred turned to Stanton. "If the President gets them bills through, Stanton, it'll mean more taxes."

"Bills? What did he buy?" Stanton leaned forward eagerly.

"He didn't buy nothing. A bill's when..." He stopped. Stanton's face was blank as mud.<sup>11)</sup>

(underline is mine)

We usually rely on etymology to see whether a word shows homonymy or polysemy, but the borderline between them is not always clearly drawn.

Next, I would like to point out ambiguity which Quirk et al. (1986) call potential ambiguity.

(3) The dog is not allowed to run *outside*.<sup>12)</sup>

The word "outside" has potentially two meanings. One of them stands for direction "to the outside" and the other stands for position "on the outside." The sentence (3) is ambiguous in that both interpretations for the adverb are possible. (Particles are always used in Japanese to show direction or position. -e or -ni is used to show direction and -de or -dewa to show position.) The same is true of the following words: near, inside, upstairs, downstairs, etc.

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The words that Levinson (1983) mentions also have potential ambiguity in that the speaker/addressee's point of view decides on one meaning out of plural meanings.

(4) The cat is behind the car.

(5) Bob is the man to the left of Mark.<sup>13)</sup> (underline is mine)

We can't tell whether the car intervenes between the speaker's location and the cat or the cat is at the intrinsic rear-end of the car. Sentence (5) also has two possibilities of interpretation: Bob may be to Mark's own left or to the left from the speaker's point of view.

## 2.2. Ambiguity on syntactic level

In this section I would like to consider ambiguity caused not by individual words but by groups of words or grammatical items.

### 2.2.1. Ambiguity caused by modification

Roberts (1958) devotes a chapter to immediate constituent analysis in his book and explains the ways of applying the methods to English sentences and points out the problems they involve. The IC analysis has strong points in explicating the structure of English sentences, but the structuralists did not introduce the concept of deep structure into their theory then and it soon reached a deadlock. The sentences that Roberts thought it impossible to apply the IC analysis to are after all ambiguous sentences. It is impossible to apply the method to the sentences if we cannot decide which meaning the sentence expresses out of plural meanings. Or, more than two IC analyses are considerable for one sentence. I would like to point out the problems concretely with the following sentences<sup>14)</sup>:

(6) The people who visited us sometimes drank the milk.

(7) He waited while she dressed anxiously.

The ambiguity of sentences (6) and (7) are caused by the position of adverbs "sometimes," and "anxiously" in each sentence. In sentence (6), we can interpret the adverb as a modifier of the verb "visited" or as that of the verb "drank." In sentence (7) also, two interpretations are possible, that is, the adverb "anxiously" may modify the verb "waited" or the verb "dressed." In order to avoid the ambiguity the position of each adverb must be changed as follows:

- (8) The people who sometimes visited us drank the milk.
- (9) The people who visited us drank the milk sometimes.
- (10) Sometimes the people who visited us drank the milk.
- (11) He waited anxiously while she dressed.
- (12) He waited while she anxiously dressed.
- (13) Anxiously he waited while she dressed.

An adverb phrase also causes ambiguity according to the place where it is put in the sentence:

- (14) She married the man she met in the Congregational Church.

The adverb phrase “in the Congregational Church” may belong to the main clause or to the subordinate clause. The church may be the place where she married the man or the place where she met the man. But, if the phrase is moved to the head of the sentence like sentence (15), it is obvious that the phrase belongs to the main clause, that is, it modifies only the verb “married.”

- (15) In the Congregational Church she married the man she met.<sup>15)</sup>

In the next example, there are two nouns “man” and “house” before the prepositional phrase “with the dogs.” The phrase has possibility to collocate with both of the nouns, so two interpretations are possible for the sentence.

- (16) the man by the house with the dogs

But it is evident from the following sentences that this pattern does not always cause ambiguity:

- (17) the man by the house with the red roof
- (18) the man by the house with a smile on his face

Another pattern of postmodification is the relative clause. The relative pronoun “that” can take both a human being and a thing as its antecedent and the fact may cause ambiguity as the following case shows:

- (19) the girl in the car that I love dearly

What I love may be the girl or the car. If another relative pronoun such as “who (m)” or “which” is used instead of “that”, ambiguity can be avoided.

#### 2.2.2. Ambiguity caused by coordination

Quirk et al. (1985) explains coordination in 70 pages. Even though

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coordination seems simple, a close examination shows complicated aspects.

2.2.2.1. Adjective and adjective + noun

(20) He specializes in selling old and valuable books.<sup>16)</sup>

The phrase "old and valuable books" can be interpreted as "books which are old and valuable" or as "old books and valuable books." The former interpretation is called combinatory meaning and the latter segregatory meaning. Sentence (20) is not so complicated, but the following sentence presents complicated possibilities of multiple ambiguity :

(21) Those are the shelves for books on skills, trades, and hobbies.<sup>17)</sup>

2.2.2.2. Adjective + noun and noun

(22) old men and women

The above phrase has two meanings: (a) old men and old women, and (b) [old men] and women. But, in the following sentence, only the interpretation (b) is possible :

(23) Old men and women are left to organize the community.<sup>18)</sup>

2.2.3. Ambiguity caused by ellipsis

There is a phenomenon called ellipsis as one aspect of language economy. Without this device, the energy we spend in our daily linguistic behavior would be very swelling. In ellipsis there is a principle of recoverability, that is, the omitted words whose meaning is understood or implied must be recoverable. If the omitted words are not recoverable, a communicative problem arises.

(24) I love my wife more than my sons.

In sentence (24) we cannot say whether the last phrase "my sons" may be subjective or objective. In other words, we cannot decide whether "I love" is omitted immediately in front of "my sons" or "love her" is omitted immediately after the phrase. If the phrase "my sons" is changed to a pronoun as follows, the problem of case will be solved :

(25) I love my wife more than they.

(26) I love my wife more than them.

But it is not always true that a non-elliptical expression is clearer in meaning than an elliptical one. The following example shows it :

(27) He owns a big house and often goes to Italy for his vacation.

The subject of verb "goes" is omitted, but we can tell that it is the

identical person with the subject of the verb “owns.” On the contrary, in the next sentence where the subject is not omitted, the  $he_1$  and  $he_2$  may be the same person or different persons:

- (28)  $He_1$  owns a big house and  $he_2$  often goes to Italy for his vacation.<sup>19)</sup>

(number is mine)

#### 2.2.4. Ambiguity caused by passive voice

The passive voice has in-built ambiguity. The form “be verb + past participle” expresses meanings of “condition” and “process,” which may cause ambiguity.

(29) The door was closed at six but I don’t know when it was closed. Sentence (29) has no ambiguity on condition / process meaning. The verb phrase “was closed” is used twice in the sentence, but the phrase “at six” and the word “when” signal the meanings and we know the first “was closed” indicates “condition” and that the second one expresses “process.” But the next sentence has possibility of two meanings:

- (30) The floor is polished.<sup>20)</sup>

### 3. Ways of disambiguation

In this chapter I would like to consider the ways people use consciously (or unconsciously) to disambiguate sentences.

#### 3.1. Suprasegmental features

As some linguists point out, there is a type of ambiguity which does not appear in spoken language but appears in written language. I would like to consider it with the sentence I mentioned earlier.

- (3) The dog is not allowed to run outside.

I pointed out that sentence (3) is ambiguous because the word “outside” has two meanings of “direction” and “position.” The movement of the word to the head of the sentence will make the “position” meaning explicit. The other way to explicate the meaning is to make use of stress:

- (3i) The dog is not allowed to RÚN | outSIDE |<sup>21)</sup>

Môri (1980) says the difference of referents can be shown by the stress put on the word “him.”<sup>22)</sup>



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(32) John hit Tom, and Peter hit him.

(33) John hit Tom, and Peter hit him.

The referent of unmarked pronoun in sentence (32) is Tom, and that of marked pronoun in (33) is John.

The examples of phrase level are given as follows. Note the change of meanings.

(34) a dancing girl                      cf. a dancing girl

(35) an English teacher                cf. an English teacher

### 3.2. Collocation

The degree of collocation sometimes serves disambiguation. Sentence (16) is ambiguous because with the equal degree the phrase “with the dogs” can collocate both with “the man” and with “the house.” Sentences (17) and (18) have prepositional phrases as adjectival modifier just like sentence (16), but unlike sentence (16) they are not ambiguous because the nouns with which “with the red roof” and “with a smile on his face” collocate are restricted. We know acceptability and unacceptability of collocation through our knowledge of the world. (See conclusion on the knowledge of the world.)

### 3.3. Context

Context can be defined in a broad sense as linguistic, psychological, logical and perceptual factors to help to explain the meaning of the word, phrase, and sentence. There are a lot of ambiguous sentences when they are isolated, but there is much less confusion in communication than it is expected to be owing to context.

(36) Here he is and he hasn't done a thing for me yet.

If we read only sentence (36), we are forced to think the pronoun “he” refers to “a human being” because of the character of a personal pronoun, but the referent (=a little finger) becomes clear if the sentence is put back where it was:

(37) 'It won't matter. Come to think of it, I can't remember ever in my life having had any use for the little finger on my left hand. Here he is.' The boy took hold of the finger. 'Here he is and he hasn't ever done a thing for me yet.' So why shouldn't I bet him? I think it a fine bet.<sup>223)</sup>

(underline is mine)

Ziff (1972) calls the function of context a coherence factor. Although he does not present a concrete idea on disambiguation in his paper, he hints that a coherence factor must work for disambiguation. The outline of his view is as follows<sup>24)</sup>:

(38) He barked his shin.

The verb "bark" in the above sentence has two completely different meanings: one is "to knock the skin off" as a transitive verb and the other is "to yap" as an intransitive verb. Concerning sentence (38), it seems that only the transitive use of the verb is possible from the sentence pattern S+V+O and the meaning of the noun "shin," but Ziff insists that the intransitive use of the verb is also conceivable when the sentence is put in the following context:

(39) He was a remarkable ventriloquist. First, he made it seem that the cat was barking. Then he made the parrot bark. Then he barked a monkey, and then a shoe, then his hand, and then he barked his shin.

(underline is mine)

If sentence (39) is put back into the context, the sentence is naturally interpreted as "He made his shin bark" or "He made his shin seem as if it barked." He says the coherence factor is working here. Utterances are interspersed with signals which form the stream of thought like mileposts on the long highway in order to make communication smooth.<sup>25)</sup> The following long quotation shows that coherence factor disintegrates in the middle of the dialogue, and that one participant of the conversation cannot follow the person on the other end of the line:

(40) "I just wanted to tell you my mom died." You hadn't meant to be so abrupt. You are moving too fast.

"Oh, God," Vicky says. "I'm sorry. I didn't know she was... when?"

"A year ago." The Missing Person.

"A year ago?"

"I didn't tell you before so I wanted to tell you now. It seemed important."

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"It's all right. It's not so bad. I mean, it was." You can't manage to say what you mean. "I wish you could've met her. You would've hit it off. She had hair like yours. Not just that."

"I m not sure what to say."

"There's something else I didn't tell you. I got married. Bad mistake, but it's all over. I wanted you to know, in case it makes a difference. I'm drunk. Do you think I should hang up?"

In the ensuing pause you can hear the faint hum of the long-distance wire. "Don't hang up," Vicky says. "I can't think of anything to say right now, but I'm here. I'm a little confused."

"I tried to block her out of my mind. But I think I owe it to her to remember."

"Wait. Who?"

"My mother. Forget my wife. I'm talking about my mother. I was thinking today, after she found out she had cancer, she was talking to Michael and me..."<sup>26)</sup>

(underline is mine)

Leech (1981) analyzes the function of context from other point of view. According to him, the effect of context is to attach a certain probability to each sense of an expression.<sup>27)</sup>

(4) Shall I put the sweater on?

The phrase "put...on" allows not only the wearing sense but also the sense of placing on top of something else. But, he says, the former sense is much more probable than the latter sense in this case. His insistence seems to me very suggestive. Because, it seems to me that his opinion points out the gap between theoretical ambiguity and the actual linguistic behavior. Even though a certain expression has plural meanings, each meaning can not be adopted as the reading with equal probability. There seems to be order of meanings to be adopted among plural meanings.<sup>28)</sup>

It is true that context plays a very important role in disambiguation, but context is not always almighty. A study on "deliberate ambiguity" by Weiser (1974) shows it. She defines "deliberate ambiguity" as follows:

It is used in situations where the speaker is uncertain as to which of two states of affairs holds for the addressee, does not

want to speak so as to presume one or the other true, but does want the situation to “carry forward”; therefore, he/she uses a sentence that would fit either of the possible states of the addressee and would “carry forward” the situation in either case.<sup>29)</sup>

She explains “deliberate ambiguity” concretely in the following situation. It is supposed that X is a member of a committee making an investigation whose content is closed to the public until the investigation ends. If Y asks X what went on at the hearing, it means that Y thinks X to be a dishonest person who discloses the content of the investigation. So, instead of saying so, Y says, “I am curious about what went on at the hearing.” X may take this remark as Y’s request of information. If X is an ethical person, he can refuse the request mildly by saying, “Yes, I guess a lot of people are. The reporters would love to get their hands on a transcript.” On this occasion, the deliberately ambiguous sentence shows its real ability. Because, against X’s remark, Y can show that his former remark is not a “request” but a simple “statement about his state of mind” by saying, “Oh, but I wasn’t asking you to tell me! I was just saying I’m curious.” The sentence “I am curious about what went on at the hearing” itself is not ambiguous, but it is ambiguous as to the intent of the speaker. It is unconceivable whether the utterance is a “request” or a “statement of his state of mind.” In other words, the speaker deliberately makes the sentence seem ambiguous. This ambiguity is caused by the relation between language and the users of language, so this type of ambiguity can be called pragmatic ambiguity. Usually various factors, especially context, function in disambiguation, but the importance of the study of Weiser lies in that it indicates that context is not always almighty, or that two interpretations are possible in one and the same context. The structure of natural language is very complex and it gives us a lot of possibilities, and we can say that “deliberate ambiguity” is one of the linguistic strategies which makes use of ambiguity.

#### 4. Conclusion

This may be included in context in a broader sense, the knowledge of the world of each person has much relation with ambiguity. If he or she only knows that the word “glasses” means “a drinking vessel,” the

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sentence "John was looking for the glasses" is not ambiguous at all. But, if the person knows the sense of "spectacles," the sentence has two readings and he or she will assign the more probable meaning to the sentence; besides, if the person knows the sense of "microscope" also, three alternatives are open.<sup>30)</sup> In the sentence "On the trains there are dining-cars and bars where meals are served quickly,"<sup>31)</sup> two words "dining-cars" and "bars" are grammatically thought to be the antecedents of the relative adverb clause, but for the people who know that meals are served more quickly in bars than in dining-cars, the sentence is not ambiguous at all. Concerning the sentence "He had some French onion soup,"<sup>32)</sup> the interpretation varies according to the knowledge of the addressee/reader on the food. As I mentioned earlier, the knowledge on collocation shown in sentences (17) and (18) can be included in the domain of knowledge of the world.

Language is potentially ambiguous, but prosodic features in spoken language, orthographic features in written language, context, and knowledge of the world serve to undo a knot of ambiguity entangled in language. Context is not perfect in disambiguation and the psychology of human beings tries to make use of the phenomenon. These facts show us the great depth of natural language.

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#### Notes

- 1) If the word "planes" is interpreted as a carpenter's tool, the possibilities of interpretation increase.
- 2) Ronald Wardhaugh, *How Conversation Works* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985) 69.
- 3) Wardhaugh 33.
- 4) The ambiguous use of demonstratives is seen in the following quotations:

Veronica answered on the first ring. "Hi, Mother. I am here safe and sound; the traffic was light all the way."

"Where is *here*?"

M. H. Clark, *Stillwatch*, 12.

"The play went badly?"

"It was a disaster. Leila refused to come out for a curtain call. When it was over we went on to Elaine's."

"What do you mean by 'we'?"

M. H. Clark, *Weep No More, My Lady*, 12.

- 5) For example, daily use of such expressions as "I think~" or "maybe."
- 6) Herbert H. Clark and Eve V. Clark, *Psychology and Language*, trans. Shunichi Horiguchi (Tokyo: Kirihara Shoten, 1981) 99.
- 7) The definitions are taken from *Webster's New World Dictionary* (New York: William Collins + World Publishing Company, 1974).
- 8) Yoshihiko Ikegami, *Imi no Sekai* (Tokyo: Nihon Hoso Shuppan Kyokai, 1978) 74.
- 9) Harumi Tanaka et al., *Gengogaku no Susume* (Tokyo: Taishukan Shoten, 1978) 272.
- 10) Stephen Ullmann, *Semantics*, trans. Yoshihiko Ikegami (Tokyo: Taishukan Shoten, 1967) 177-178.
- 11) W. M. Kelley, *Dancers on the Shore* (Washington D. C.: Howard University Press, 1984) 43.
- 12) R. Quirk et al., *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London: Longman, 1985) 518.
- 13) Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 82-83.
- 14) The illustrated sentences in this section are taken from P. Roberts, "Immediate Constituents and Sentence Modifiers", *Introductory Readings in English Linguistics*, ed. Takanobu Otsuka (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1967) 103-124.
- 15) Better examples are found in Quirk et al., 519. Compare the following two sentences:
  - (a) Some of the children are walking to the lake in the park.
  - (b) In the park some of the children are walking to the lake.
- 16) Quirk et al., 960.
- 17) Quirk et al., 958.
- 18) Quirk et al., 960.

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19) JACET, *English Workshop* (Tokyo: Sanshusha, 1987) 102.

20) Turner 93. If the sentence is put in the following context, the distinction between process and condition is easy:

(a) The floor is polished every morning.

(b) Walk carefully; the floor is polished.

As these examples show, expansion of the sentences is one of the ways to avoid ambiguity.

21) Quirk et al., 518.

22) Yoshinobu Mōri, *Eigo no Goyoron* (Tokyo: Taishukan Shoten, 1980) 225.

23) Roald Dahl, *Someone Like You* (Tokyo: Kirihara Shoten, 1972) 13-14.

24) Paul Ziff, "What is Said", *Semantics of Natural Language*, ed. G. Harman and P. Davidson (Dordrecht-Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1972) 709-721.

25) The following quotation shows that the professor consciously tries to put coherence into their conversation, but that the student doesn't understand his effort at all:

One day when we were on the subject of transportation and distribution, it came Bolenciecwcwz's turn to answer a question. "Name one means of transportation," the professor said to him. No light came into the big tackle's eyes. 'Just any means of transportation,' said the professor. Bolenciecwcwz sat staring at him. 'That is,' pursued the professor, 'any medium, agency or method of going from one place to another.'

... (abbreviated) ...

'How did you come to college this year, Mr Bolenciecwcwz?' asked the professor. 'Chuffa chuffa, chuffa chuffa.'

'M'father sent me.' said the football player.

'What on?' asked Bassum.

'I git an' lowance,' said the tackle, in a low, husky voice, obviously embarrassed.

'No, no,' said Bassum. 'Name a means of transportation. What did you ride here on?'

'Train,' said Bolenciecwcwz.

'Quite right,' said the professor. 'Now Mr Nugent, will you tell us-'

(underline is mine)

James Thurber, *The Thurber Carnival* 257-258.

26) J. McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987) 233-234.

27) G. Leech, *Semantics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981) 67.

28) Quirk et al. (1985) points out on pages 966 and 1065, the phrase "my elder brother and sister" is normally understood not as "[my elder brother] and my sister" but as "my elder brother and my elder sister." In the sentence "They liked our singing," the object "our singing" has two meanings: the action of singing and the mode of singing. But in this case, the mode-of-singing reading is normally adopted.

29) A. Weiser, "Deliberate Ambiguity" *CLS* 10 (1974), 724.

30) F. R. Palmer, *Semantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 50.

31) C. Swatridge, *Successful Reading* (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1979) 36.

32) Quirk et al., 1343.

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