

A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF LEXICAL AMBIGUITY IN ANIES BASWEDAN'S POLITICAL INTERVIEW

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Abstract:

Ambiguity in communication often leads to misunderstandings among listeners. This issue may arise from a single word carrying multiple meanings, two or more words that share identical pronunciation, and other similar phenomena. This study aims to analyze the phenomenon of lexical ambiguity in political interviews, focusing on statements expressed by Anies Baswedan when he was a guest on ABC News Australia in 2023. The study employed a qualitative method, while the theory adopted is Stephan Ullmann's theory. The results of the study show that polysemy (14 words), homonymy (6 words), homograph (2 words), and homophony (3 words) were found in the interview. Hence, this study successfully proves that ambiguity is also present in political discourse and plays an essential role as a communication strategy.

Keywords:

Semantic, Lexical
Ambiguity, Political
Interview



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INTRODUCTION

As a communication tool, language exists to facilitate human life (Ladini & Heryono, 2022). It plays a significant role in transmitting and receiving information, both in the form of speech and writing (Alsaawi, 2019). There are numerous ways for humans to communicate with each other. With current technological advances, humans could receive information effectively, one of which is through content that could be accessed on the internet. When someone transfers information, especially through utterance, misinterpretation of understanding or meaning could occur because language can create a barrier (Rahmanita & Simatupang, 2022) For example, when one fails to communicate explicitly, the listener or reader may acquire different meanings. This phenomenon of misunderstanding is referred to as ambiguity (Prasetyawan et al., 2017).

For one to study ambiguity, it is crucial to have an understanding of linguistics. Based on Kortmann (2020) "linguistics is a scientific field that entails studying languages, whether one is investigating single languages or cross-comparing multiple ones". In linguistics study, there is a branch that analyses how ambiguity arises. It is known as semantics. Tarsil & Simatupang (2024) stated that "semantics is a significant branch of linguistics, as it addresses the meaning and significance of lexicon, syntactic constructions, and

symbols, thereby occupying a key position in language comprehension”. Simply put, semantics is the study of words’ meaning (Yule, 2020). On the other hand, examining language structure and function, semantics is branched into psychology, philosophy, and anthropology, and thus it is a very broad subject. (A. Leher, 1974, as cited in Ladini & Heryono, 2022) Given its scope, the study remains at the centre of understanding not only language but also human thought and communication across disciplines. In semantics, ambiguity arises when a sentence contains more than one meaning. As a result, ambiguous meanings often need to be clarified through context or paraphrasing to make the interpretation clearer (Leech, 1981). Thus, ambiguity can describe as a condition in which a sentence has a layered meaning or more than one interpretation. This concept is further strengthened by Lyons (1996), who explains that “an ambiguous declarative sentence is one that might be true under one interpretation and false under another interpretation.” As mentioned by Stephan Ullman’s (1962), “dividing ambiguity into three categories. The first is lexical ambiguity, which occurs when particular words have more than one meaning, followed by structural ambiguity, which occurs from syntactic constructions that allow multiple interpretations, and the last is phonological ambiguity, which occurs because some spoken words sound identical but have different meanings”. Diving into lexical ambiguity deeper, there are four categories: polysemy, homonymy, homophones, and homographs (Rahmanita & Simatupang, 2022).

On the other hand, Ullman (1962) mentioned that “lexical ambiguity emerges because one word could have several meanings depending on the context in which the word is spoken, even though the form of the word never changes. Also, there may be several words that are phonetically the same and hence lead to the intricacy of understanding language”. He also elaborated on four dimensions of the lexical ambiguity; polysemy refers to words that develop multiple related meanings through historical usage. For example, the English word "light" demonstrates this phenomenon by signifying both visible illumination and minimal weight. Homonymy describes words that share identical forms but possess completely distinct meanings. One example of such a homonym is the word 'bank' as a financial institution or sloping land by a river. Whereas homophony explains words that sound the same but have different spellings and meanings. Some examples are 'flower' (a plant) and 'flour' (ground wheat product). Finally, homograph. It is a word with the same spelling but different pronunciation and meaning, like 'lead' for lead (To guide someone or an animal in the right direction) and lead (tin). Recognizing these forms of ambiguity is vital for effective communication, as it allows individuals to navigate potential misunderstandings, especially in spoken discourse (Alyson et al., 2024). Additionally, Jian & Chang (2008) mentioned that “if there exists “stress” in the pronunciation of two different words even though they are spelled the same, it is also considered as a homograph phenomenon.”

Reflecting the information above, misunderstandings that are created by ambiguity could arise from various ways including the political context. Referring (Lakoff, 2018), he mentioned that “political language often involves metaphor”. Consequently, it poses various conceptions which are caught by the audience. Meanwhile (Praprotnik & Jedenastik, 2023) stated that “in several cases, political figures deliberately disguise their intentions or are not open about what they mean. As a result, the ambiguity in political

language could be a strategy or a trap for understanding. Apart from political speeches, ambiguity could appear in political interviews (Thomas et al., 2024). Sampurna et al (2024) conceived political interview as the means through which messages on politics are shared, but more specifically between political actors. This type of communication is closely associated with matters of power relations, governance, and public policy within a nation.

The meaning of interview itself by *Cambridge Dictionary* is a structured conversation where an individual responds to inquiries about their personal experiences, views, or background for media purposes such as newspaper features or television programs. Through the interview, the information obtained would be more thorough and in depth (Mashuri et al., 2022). In the process of an interview, both the interviewer and interviewee share their feelings, prejudices, hopes, perspectives, and attitudes towards the phenomena in question (Dunwoodie et al., 2023). Thus, the interview is a dynamic interpersonal communication mode in which systematic questioning provokes spontaneous disclosure of personal opinions. This dialogue process not only pulls out factual reports but also encompasses the intricate interaction of emotions, biases, and personal experiences inherent in human communication.

Building on this foundation, there is a necessity in the contemporary international political scene to comprehend the strategic application of lexical ambiguity in political discourse, particularly in cross-cultural media contexts. This study aims to bridge that void by examining Anies Baswedan's interview on ABC News Australia and how ambiguity could affect political discourse and shape public opinion on an international scale. Anies Baswedan is a renowned person from Indonesia. As both a scholar and political figure, Anies Baswedan brought his experience as Indonesia's Minister of Education from 2014 to 2019. Meanwhile, ABC News Australia is the flagship news program of Australia's public broadcaster. The interview was conducted in 2023. They discussed several topics including regional challenges, Indonesia-Australia relationship, criticism of bureaucracy in Indonesia, political issues and campaign 2017, political vision and development, foreign policy and China and Indonesia's role in the global stage. The interview notably addressed topics where linguistic ambiguity could significantly impact cross-cultural interpretations. This study specifically examines how lexical ambiguity manifests in Anies Baswedan's responses, considering his dual background as both a politician and academic.

METHOD

This research was conducted by a qualitative approach which requires in depth analysis related to the study's focus. Creswell & Creswell (2022) mentioned that "the aim of qualitative research is to examine and comprehend the importance of a social or human issue for individuals or groups". When someone conducts research by applying qualitative methods, there are numerous steps to be taken including setting up and observing the object of study (Lima & McLymont, 2021). Besides that, this approach has an excellence in dealing with complex questions. This was reflected by (Hamilton & Finley, 2020), "The addresses of complex questions could be discovered through the implementation of qualitative methods." This study focused on lexical ambiguity phenomenon in the utterance of an interview video of Anies Baswedan with ABC news

Australia which was published in 2023. The writer accessed the video through Anies Baswedan's YouTube channel account. While conducting the research, the writer followed numerous distinct steps to analyze the object. It involved a listening activity to comprehend Anies Baswedan's statements as he answered the interviewer's questions, paying close attention to potential ambiguities. Additionally, the writer collected and transcribed while he responded to the interviewer's questions, along with collecting the transcript of his speech to facilitate a detailed linguistics analysis.

In this study, the writer manually collected transcripts of the interview word by word through careful collection and notation of the required linguistic data. The data analyzed in this study consists of 25 words identified in the interviews as potentially ambiguous. These words were selected based on several criteria: they appeared in Anies Baswedan's responses during the interviews, have multiple meanings, and have the potential to lead to various interpretations in the context of political communication.

The analysis focused on words in political interviews that have the potential for ambiguity, whether intentional or unintentional, to comprehend how lexical ambiguity may influence the interpretation of political messages. After collecting the data, it was classified into four types of lexical ambiguity explained in Stephan Ullmann's (1962) theory: polysemy, homonymy, homophony, and homograph. In the process of classifying the categories of lexical ambiguity, the writer used the Oxford dictionary website to analyze the phonetic form and meaning of the words. Categorization of the data in this manner not only complied with traditional linguistic theories but also guaranteed a systematic methodology of lexical ambiguity analysis. In particular, additional materials were acquired through verified online academic paper sources to ensure comprehensive coverage of the topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This presented section depicts the outcomes in the evidence that based form that were found. The political interview of Anies Baswedan has been clearly analyzed for the various kinds of lexical ambiguity found in his speech. From the close examination of the interview, the writer has gathered and classified examples of lexical ambiguity, which have been outlined below.

a.) Polysemy

Extract 1

“A man considered in the *running* to become Indonesia's next president”

[00:00:01]

The word “running” can be interpreted as a case of polysemy which has the dual meaning of “being in competition” and “the activity of sport”. However, the word of the case indicates that Anies Baswedan is a presidential candidate to be Indonesia's leader.

Extract 2

“I'm delighted with the invite from the Australian government to *face* it and we both were neighbors”

[00:00:41]

The term “face” is considered as polysemy because it has a double meaning that is

interconnected. It means “to confront” and also “a part of the body” and the word serves as “to confront”

Extract 3

“Climate change is an issue that we have to *tackle* together”

[00:01:18]

The “tackle” is defined as polysemy because it has a double meaning that is still related and is considered as an action taking. It can be interpreted as “address” or “Physical confrontation in sports”. Despite that, the lexis indicates addressing climate change.

Extract 4

“We would like to see more people-to-people *exchange*”

[00:02:01]

The “exchange” may be understood as “Mutual sharing of ideas/customs”. However, it can also be thought of as “a market where shares or financial assets can be bought and sold” (stock exchange). It would lead to misconception. However, the word implies ideas/customs mutual sharing between Indonesia and Australia.

Extract 5

“The potential *development* business-wise between Australia Indonesia”

[00:02:22]

The “development” is intended as “economic progress”. However, it may also be defined as “physical construction”. The context serves as an economic progress

Extract 6

“It also needs to have the right *climate*”

[00:03:21]

The “climate” is categorized as a polysemy. Although the speaker intends to discuss the “societal environment”, this ambiguity could lead to another relevant meaning, namely “climate change conditions”.

Extract 7

“I believe that is the message that we need to *echo* it even louder”

[00:04:15]

“Echo” in the sentence is “to repeat or enlarge a message”. However, the word may also mean “a reflected sound or mimicking someone's actions”. Since all of these relate to repetition or reflection, the word is categorized as a polysemy.

Extract 8

“You teamed up you played the religion *card*”

[00:04:39]

The term “card” is an instance of polysemy. While the argument attempts to focus on some particular strategy or maneuver meant by “played the religion card,” this ambiguity can cause various interpretations, which remain applicable, such as the playing cards utilized for games such as poker. In contrast, the case shows that the anchor asked Anies Baswedan regarding people's statements about him.

Extract 9

“There is no *faith* involved”

[00:05:16]

The “faith” could be defined as a polysemy due to having a related double meaning, while the sound and spelling are the identical. It can be interpreted in the context of religion and also in general (trust). Nevertheless, the lexis refers to religious context.

Extract 10

“I’m inviting everyone to judge me not based on assumption but based on *record*”

[00:06:21]

The term “record” in the sentence is supposed to mean “political achievements”. But it can also be interpreted as “audio recordings/sports statistics”. The statement demonstrates Anies Baswedan requires the public to review him based on his political journey instead of others’ assumptions.

Extract 11

“The *distribution* of that growth our economy has been centralized in Java”

[00:08:34]

The “Distribution” in the sentence means “the allocation of growth or resources.” However, the word may also refer to “the delivery of goods in logistics.” Since all of these meanings relate to the idea of spreading or sharing something, the word is categorized as a polysemy.

Extract 12

“You talked about *balance* in the region”

[00:10:32]

The “balance” in the sentence refers to “geopolitical stability or equilibrium.” It could also be understood as “the ability to stay physically balanced.” Because all the meanings deal with being stable or level, the word is a polysemy.

Extract 13

“How do you feel about China’s growing influence and *grab* for power in Indonesia?”

[00:10:37]

The word “Grab” means an aggressive attempt to gain power or control.” However, the term can also be understood more neutrally as “the act of acquiring something” or literally as “physically seizing an object.” As these meanings all point to the act of taking or acquiring, the term is classified as a polysemy.

Extract 14

“Indonesia needs to *play* more active in the international arena”

[00:11:57]

The term “play” refers to a polysemy phenomenon due to the word having a related different meaning. It might be “getting roles” and “engaging in recreational activity”. The statement refers to “getting roles” in the global stage.

b.) Homonymy

Extract 15

“With these *rising* interest rates”

[00:00:20]

The word “interest” is interpreted as homonymy because it contains two unrelated meanings but possesses the same pronunciation as /'raɪzɪŋ/. In extension to “increase”, rising could be interpreted as “sunrise” and “rebellion”.

Extract 16

“It also needs to have the *right* climate”

[00:03:21]

The phrase “right” in the sentence means “true/accurate”. It is classified as homonymy as there is another word that pronounced as /raɪt/ and written the same, but its meaning is distinct, namely “right/not left”.

Extract 17

“We had work closely on many *issues*”

[00:00:50]

The word “issues” creates ambiguity, it could be interpreted as Australia and Indonesia solving problems (politics), but it might also be interpreted as “publication of something”. The phonetic of the words are /'ɪʃuːs/.

Extract 18

“If the candidates were different in terms of gender one *male* and one female”

[00:04:53]

The phrase “Male” is considered a homophone when put alongside “mail” because both are pronounced the similar as /meɪl/, but have different spellings and meanings. In sentences, “male” is intended as “man/boy”, while “mail” implies a letter or package. Because they sound the same but the meanings are unrelated, this word is included in the homophony category.

Extract 19

“One again is a conservative islamist group islamist *party*”

[00:06:34]

The word “party” here refers to “a political group”. On the other hand, it has a different meaning. Namely, “an event to celebrate something”. They have a similar sound. It is /'paːti/.

Extract 20

“It is not only about *trade*, but it is about our contributions”

[00:12:22]

The phrase “trade” as presented here refers to ‘commerce’ or the buying and selling of goods, especially between countries. However, “trade” can also mean “an act of exchange” that is not necessarily commercial, or “a skilled profession or occupation,” as in “a mechanic by trade.” Given that these meanings are not related in meaning even though they sound and spell the identical, “trade” is categorized as a homonymy. Both of them have the same phonetic. It is /treɪd/.

c.) Homograph

Extract 21

“We *import* more from Australia”

[00:03:02]

The word “Import” is recognized as a homograph because it uses different stress placement despite having the same spelling. In other words, the word also has different meanings, namely “bring in goods”, pronounced as /ɪm'pɔ:rt/ as a verb and “significance”, pronounced as /'ɪmpɔ:rt/ as a noun.

Extract 22

“I'm inviting everyone to judge me not based on assumption but based on *record*”

[00:06:21]

The term “record” is classified as a homograph due to having a different sound or phonetic although the meaning and spelling are the same. The word has a distinct meaning, which includes “to capture video or audio”, pronounced as /rɪ'kɔ:d/ as being a verb and “historical data”, pronounced as /'rekɔ:d/ as being a noun.

d.) Homophony

Extract 23

“We'd like to see that go up a lot *higher*”

[00:02:44]

The word “higher” exemplifies lexical ambiguity through homophony, as it is phonetically identical to “hire”, pronounced as /'haɪə(r)/, despite the two words having distinct meanings.

Extract 24

“In fact we created the feeling of stability the feeling of *peace* in Jakarta”

[00:06:12]

The term “peace” are potential cases of lexical ambiguity called homophony because the word has the similar pronunciation “piece”, pronounced as /pi:s/ despite having clearly different meanings.

Extract 25

“One is *principle* of equality”

[00:07:00]

The “principle” word categorized as a homophony because has an identical sound with “principal”, pronounced as /'prɪnsəpl/ while different in the written and meaning.

The initial investigation of this study provided the final result of analyzing possible lexical ambiguity in Anies Baswedan's interview. In research data analysis, the writer found four types of lexical ambiguity; polysemy, homonymy, homograph, and homophony. The result proves that a lexical ambiguity phenomenon indeed exists in political interviews. Thomas et al. (2024) corroborate this, highlighting that “In interview politics, vagueness and ambiguity are frequent phenomena that are required to be examined.” Furthermore, in accordance with the idea proposed by Ullmann (1962), the findings obtained from the research prove that the phenomenon of ambiguity could lead to misunderstandings among

listeners because the cases involved multiple meanings or even identical sounds. An example can be found in extract 19, where the phrase “Islamist party” may be perceived by listeners as a celebration of Islamic people. Extending this view, Praprotnik & Jedenastik, (2023) claimed that the use of ambiguity is a strategy with a specific purpose for politicians, the political interviews also indicated that linguistic vagueness in politics can be deliberate. In a cross-cultural interview with ABC News Australia, the use of words such as “faith” and “record” provides another concrete example of words with multiple meanings that allow sources to express their views in a safe and diplomatic manner. Thus, ambiguous language serves as a strategy to ensure that messages remain acceptable to international audiences while avoiding potential cultural or politically sensitive misunderstandings.

The findings demonstrate that the analyzed interview reflects the four types of lexical ambiguity outlined by Ullmann (1962): polysemy, homonymy, homographs, and homophones. Among these, polysemy appears as the most prevalent. Ullmann describes polysemy as a condition in which a single word carries several related meanings that develop over time. Within political communication, this linguistic feature allows speakers to present their ideas in ways that remain adaptable and open to multiple interpretations. This is particularly relevant in political interviews, where speakers must convey their views cautiously while engaging with a broad audience.

CONCLUSION

Drawing upon the lexical ambiguity analysis elucidated previously, one may deduce that the phenomena of lexical ambiguity emerge naturally in interviews with a political context. It is clear that all types of ambiguity are represented in the interview based on the 25 data extracts. The data covers the occurrences of polysemy (14 words), homonymy (6 words), homograph (2 words), and homophony (3 words). This suggests that this study shows that politicians use deliberately vague language. Through using words with multiple meanings, they keep their options open. At the same time, by using words that sound or look alike, they create hidden layers of meaning. This helps them tackle sensitive issues without being too direct or provoking a negative response.

In essence, this study proves that polysemy is the most common finding, demonstrating that the use of words with more than one meaning is an effective method used by politicians to give answers that remain open to interpretation, even though this may lead to different interpretations among listeners. Thus, the use of ambiguity can be recognized as a communication strategy for politicians in delivering their ideas or opinions. This strategy allows politicians to convey their messages more carefully, especially in sensitive contexts.

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