LESSON FIFTEEN
REFERENTIAL AMBIGUITY

In referential ambiguity, we make reference to a certain entity but realize that the entity (ies) we are pointing to is more than one.

SOURCES OF REFERENTIAL AMBIGUITY

Referential ambiguity can result because of the presence of pronouns.

For example,

The boy told his father the theft. He was very upset.

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

Referential ambiguity can result from the presence of substitution items.

For example,

Adwoa was asked to send the things and go to the hospital afterwards and she **did** it.

Referential ambiguity can result because we do not know whether to treat *common nouns* in context to refer to more than one thing.
For example,

All the lecturers, Mr. Appiah, Mr. Owusu and Mr. Acquah applied for the post of dean, but the man was given the position.

Is it the sending of the things Adwoa did or going to the hospital?

Referential ambiguity can result because there is confusion of a noun being considered as:

- A compound noun
- A single noun and its appositives
- A pile of names or attributes for a single referent.

A single noun and its appositives

The president and the chairman of cabinet will meet all ministers of state.

A compound noun

My aunt, Ekua’s mother, Ata’s niece is/are coming here tonight.

How we see the sentence will help us to choose is or are.

Other examples by students.

Functions of Ambiguity

As a way of escape.
One may have a meaning to whatever he is saying, yet he will use ambiguity to play on people’s intelligence.

For example,

**Lumba’s song, News papers advert on Clinton-Free vaccinations for every child by Clinton, e.t.c.**

- Used by advertisers to pay for less time.
- It brings popularity-Pronunciations made by people in public create arguments among the populace. As people argue about it, the issue or the person becomes more popular.
- As an index to measuring proficiency-To detect ambiguous constructions, interpret them, correct them and maybe, construct some and also to avoid them is a mark of one’s proficiency in a language.