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 AMBGUITY

- Referential ambiguity can result because of the presence of *pronouns*.

   For example,

   The boy told his father the theft. <u>He</u> 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 <u>did</u> 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 <u>the man</u> 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.