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Diplomová práce

Ambiguity in infinitive clauses: the problem of boundaries

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Poděkování

Rád bych poděkoval PhDr. Vladislavu Smolkovi, Ph.D. za cenné rady, věcné připomínky a vstřícnost při konzultacích a vypracovávání diplomové práce.

Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracoval samostatně pouze s použitím pramenů a literatury uvedených v seznamu citované literatury. Prohlašuji, že v souladu s § 47b zákona č. 111/1998 Sb. v platném znění souhlasím se zveřejněním své práce, a to v nezkrácené podobě elektronickou cestou ve veřejně přístupné části databáze STAG provozované Jihočeskou univerzitou v Českých Budějovicích na jejích internetových stránkách, a to se zachováním mého autorského práva k odevzdanému textu této kvalifikační práce. Souhlasím dále s tím, aby toutéž elektronickou cestou byly v souladu s uvedeným ustanovením zákona č. 111/1998 Sb. zveřejněny posudky školitele a oponentů práce i záznam o průběhu a výsledky obhajoby kvalifikační práce. Rovněž souhlasím s porovnáním textu mé kvalifikační práce s databází kvalifikačních prací Theses.cz provozovanou Národním registrem vysokoškolských kvalifikačních prací a systémem na odhalování plagiátu.

České Budějovice, 26. 6. 2024 Bc. Jiří Šesták

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the mechanisms of ambiguity in English infinitive structures resulting from the indistinctness of the boundaries between the main clause and the subordinate infinitive clause. Namely, the nominal element located at their boundary may in some cases function as a clause constituent of the main clause, in other cases as the subject of the infinitive structure, or it may combine both functions. On the other hand, ambiguity does not arise in sentences containing finite subordinate clauses, where the clause member must be explicitly present in each sub-clause of which it is a part. (*I did it for you to be pleased – I did it for you so that I might be pleased / I did it so that you might be pleased / I did it for you so that you might be pleased*).

The author will try to determine to what extent ambiguity is conditioned by the permissibility of a given verb complement, the semantics or logic of individual potential meanings, or other factors.

As a basic source of linguistic material for the research, an electronic corpus (British National Corpus) or other sources of authentic English will be used.

Anotace

Cílem diplomové práce je prozkoumat mechanismy vzniku dvojznačnosti u anglických infinitivních struktur, které vyplývají z nezřetelnosti hranic mezi hlavní větou a vedlejší infinitivní větou. Nominální prvek, který se nachází na jejich hranici, totiž v některých případech může fungovat jako větný člen hlavní věty, jindy jako podmět/konatel děje infinitivní struktury, případně může kombinovat obě funkce. Ke dvojznačnosti naopak nedochází při použití finitních větných struktur, kde musí být větný člen explicitně přítomen v každé dílčí větě, jejíž je součástí. (*I did it for you to be pleased – I did it for you so that I might be pleased / I did it so that you might be pleased / I did it for you so that you might be pleased*).

Autor se pokusí stanovit, do jaké míry je dvojznačnost podmíněna přípustností dané komplementace slovesa, sémantikou či logičností jednotlivých potenciálních významů, případně dalšími faktory.

Jako základní zdroj jazykového materiálu pro výzkum poslouží elektronický korpus (British National Corpus), případně další zdroje autentického anglického jazyka.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Ambiguity may be seen as a topic that often goes unnoticed by most language users. This thesis wants to show how ambiguity works and that it can be found in daily English if we look for it. The thesis is divided into the theoretical and practical parts.

The main topic of the theoretical part is an explanation of the concept of ambiguity and its place in the English language. Initially, the thesis deals with the term ambiguity, showing what it means and indicating its classification. The following chapter deals briefly with lexical ambiguity. Next, the theoretical part introduces structural ambiguity alongside ambiguity arising from the preposition *for*, scope ambiguity and multiple sentences. The largest section of the theoretical part is dedicated to ambiguity in infinitive clauses. Finally, the whole theoretical part is elaborated on with the help of the literature dealing with the issue. Namely, authors referred to most frequently are Quirk, Huddleston and Pullum, Oaks and Dušková, among others.

The practical part focuses on analysing particular sentences containing infinitive phrases in standard English written and spoken texts. For the sake of authenticity, this analysis is carried out with the help of the British National Corpus (BNC). The main aim of the practical part of the thesis is to find sentences which, are at least potentially, ambiguous. The next step is to clarify the two (or more) possible meanings with the help of paraphrases or different positions of the boundary between the superordinate and subordinate clauses. Sometimes, an unambiguous example is provided to show the difference between ambiguous sentences and unambiguous ones.

The results of the practical part summarise the frequency of ambiguity in selected verbs and look at the examples retrieved from the point of semantics and syntax.

II. THEORETICAL PART

1 The definition of ambiguity

First of all, ambiguity is a term which may not be clear to everyone. People usually do not pay much attention to this phenomenon. On the other hand, it is quite understandable that ambiguity is a mystery for the general public because not everyone is as interested in complex language analysis as linguists are. For the purpose of this work, it is necessary to specify what ambiguity is, and which types of ambiguity there are. If we look in a dictionary such as the Cambridge Dictionary, we find a definition like this "*(an example of) the fact of something having more than one possible meaning and therefore possibly causing confusion*".[1] Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary gives similar explanations which are "*the state of having more than one possible meaning*" and "*a word or statement that can be understood in more than one way*".[2]

In another dictionary, ambiguity is specified as "*a word or expression that can be understood in two or more possible ways: an ambiguous word or expression*".[3] The synonym for ambiguity, at least in some contexts, is uncertainty.[4] The history of the word itself comes from Latin. The word "ambiguity" (and its adjective form, "ambiguous") has its roots in the Latin word "*ambiguus*", which was created by combining the prefixes "*ambi-*" (meaning "both") and "*agere*" ("to drive").[5]

Christopher Kennedy, in his chapter Ambiguity and Vagueness: An Overview, says that ambiguity is a pervasive phenomenon in language, arising due to the inherent capacity of linguistic forms to convey multiple meanings. This can be observed at all

[1] Mcintosh, Colin. (2013). *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Fourth edition. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press. ISBN 1107685494.
[2] Hornby, Albert Sydney; Deuter, Margaret; Bradbery, Jennifer; Trunbull, Joanna; Hey, Leonie a Holloway, Suzanne (ed.). (2015). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. Ninth edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-479878-5.
[3] Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Ambiguity. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved January 11, 2024, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ambiguity
[4] Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Ambiguity. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved January 11, 2024, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ambiguity
[5] Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Ambiguity. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved January 11, 2024, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ambiguity

levels of linguistic analysis, from the smallest sounds (phonemes) to the largest units of meaning (discourses).[6]

A distinction should be drawn between ambiguity and vagueness, although it can be challenging to categorize a specific instance of unclear meaning as one or the other. Thomas Wasow, an American linguist at Stanford University, says "*ambiguous expressions have more than one distinct meaning; vague expressions have a single meaning that cannot be characterized precisely*".[7] An expression can exhibit both ambiguity and vagueness if it possesses multiple interpretations, at least one of which lacks precise boundaries. The word *trillion* is an example of an expression that is both ambiguous and vague. It can mean either 10^{12} or 10^{18}, and it can also be used to refer to a very large quantity in a general sense.[8]

D. D. Oaks claims more or less the same in his book, where he suggests that "*When something is vague, its meaning is not sufficiently specific. This is a different matter from ambiguity, which presents more than one interpretation, each of which may be very specific.*"[9] On the other hand, Christopher Kennedy suggests that while ambiguity poses a relatively minor obstacle to modern semantic theory, vagueness holds immense potential as a fertile area for semantic research.[10]

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[6] Kennedy, C. (2011). 23. Ambiguity and Vagueness: An Overview. In C. Maienborn, K. Heusinger & P. Portner (Ed.), *Volume 1* (pp. 507-535). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. ISBN 9783110184709 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110226614.507 p. 510

[7] Winkler, S. (2015). *Ambiguity Language and Communication*. Berlin, München, Boston De Gruyter. ISBN 9783110403589 p. 32

[8] Winkler, S. (2015). *Ambiguity Language and Communication*. Berlin, München, Boston De Gruyter. ISBN 9783110403589 p. 33

[9] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. ISBN 9781441141378 p. 18

[10] Kennedy, C. (2011). 23. Ambiguity and Vagueness: An Overview. In C. Maienborn, K. Heusinger & P. Portner (Ed.), *Volume 1* (pp. 507-535). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. ISBN 9783110184709 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110226614.507 p. 532-533

2 Lexical ambiguity

This type of ambiguity arises when "*a single word form can refer to more than one different concept*".[11] The word *bark* can refer at least to two meanings. One meaning could be the noise of the dog, the second meaning would be the outer thing covering a tree. Some experts prefer to use the term semantic ambiguity instead of lexical ambiguity because "*it clears that it is the meaning of the word that is ambiguous and not its form or grammatical properties*"[12], but both terms are interchangeable.

We could find lexical ambiguity everywhere. This fact could be supported by the information that "*in English over 80% of common words have more than one dictionary entry*".[13] It is interesting that even this sentence:

"*Dawn was casting spun-gold threads across a rosy sky over Sawubona game reserve.*"[14]

bear "*8.8 definitions per word*".[15] To understand anything, the reader must pick one correct meaning for each word. Although we can study every single word and find many meanings, we are usually unaware of this fact. It is not common to think about every meaning of the given words.

People become aware of more meanings of one word when they need to understand jokes, especially puns. To show this, we can consider this joke:

"*What did the fish say when he swam into a wall? Dam.*"[16]

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[11] Rodd, Jennifer M., 'Lexical Ambiguity', in Shirley-Ann Rueschemeyer, and M. Gareth Gaskell (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Psycholinguistics*, 2nd edn, Oxford Library of Psychology (2018; online edn, Oxford Academic, 10 Sept. 2018), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198786825.013.5

[12] Rodd, Jennifer M., 'Lexical Ambiguity', in Shirley-Ann Rueschemeyer, and M. Gareth Gaskell (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Psycholinguistics*, 2nd edn, Oxford Library of Psychology (2018; online edn, Oxford Academic, 10 Sept. 2018), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198786825.013.5

[13] Rodd, Jennifer M., 'Lexical Ambiguity', in Shirley-Ann Rueschemeyer, and M. Gareth Gaskell (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Psycholinguistics*, 2nd edn, Oxford Library of Psychology (2018; online edn, Oxford Academic, 10 Sept. 2018), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198786825.013.5

[14] Rodd, Jennifer M., 'Lexical Ambiguity', in Shirley-Ann Rueschemeyer, and M. Gareth Gaskell (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Psycholinguistics*, 2nd edn, Oxford Library of Psychology (2018; online edn, Oxford Academic, 10 Sept. 2018), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198786825.013.5

[15] Rodd, Jennifer M., 'Lexical Ambiguity', in Shirley-Ann Rueschemeyer, and M. Gareth Gaskell (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Psycholinguistics*, 2nd edn, Oxford Library of Psychology (2018; online edn, Oxford Academic, 10 Sept. 2018), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198786825.013.5

[16] Rodd, Jennifer M., 'Lexical Ambiguity', in Shirley-Ann Rueschemeyer, and M. Gareth Gaskell (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Psycholinguistics*, 2nd edn, Oxford Library of Psychology (2018; online edn, Oxford Academic, 10 Sept. 2018), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198786825.013.5

Naturally, this joke works better in spoken language than written language. The ambiguity is in the word *dam/damn* (the first word means a wall of a reservoir; the second word means an expression of anger). To understand the humour of the pun, you need to be familiar with both meanings. But puns illustrated the situation around lexical ambiguity perfectly – normally people would not care about multiple meanings of one word, but puns are the exceptions proving the rule.[17]

Christopher Kennedy shows another beautiful example:

"*FRY: Something I've always been meaning to ask you: How did you manage to keep Nancy for so long?*

LAURIE: I've never been nancy, John."[18]

The obvious meaning of the word *Nancy* is the name. The second meaning could be harder to identify. *Nancy* (as an adjective) means in the British slang weak or effeminate.[19]

There are different forms of lexical ambiguity. The first type which can be shown in the given example *bark* can occur even if the two meanings are not semantically related. We usually speak about homonyms, homographs or homophones.[20] The second type can occur when the two meanings are semantically related. For these words, we usually use the term polysemy. The word *run* is a perfect example. We could find many meanings such as "*the athlete runs down the track, the mayor runs for election, the film runs at the cinema*".[21] The third type of lexical ambiguity could arise between two

[17] Rodd, Jennifer M., 'Lexical Ambiguity', in Shirley-Ann Rueschemeyer, and M. Gareth Gaskell (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Psycholinguistics*, 2nd edn, Oxford Library of Psychology (2018; online edn, Oxford Academic, 10 Sept. 2018), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198786825.013.5
[18] Kennedy, C. (2011). 23. Ambiguity and Vagueness: An Overview. In C. Maienborn, K. Heusinger & P. Portner (Ed.), *Volume 1* (pp. 507-535). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. ISBN 9783110184709 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110226614.507 p. 511
[19] Kennedy, C. (2011). 23. Ambiguity and Vagueness: An Overview. In C. Maienborn, K. Heusinger & P. Portner (Ed.), *Volume 1* (pp. 507-535). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. ISBN 9783110184709 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110226614.507 p. 510
[20] Rodd, Jennifer M., 'Lexical Ambiguity', in Shirley-Ann Rueschemeyer, and M. Gareth Gaskell (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Psycholinguistics*, 2nd edn, Oxford Library of Psychology (2018; online edn, Oxford Academic, 10 Sept. 2018), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198786825.013.5
[21] Rodd, Jennifer M., 'Lexical Ambiguity', in Shirley-Ann Rueschemeyer, and M. Gareth Gaskell (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Psycholinguistics*, 2nd edn, Oxford Library of Psychology (2018; online edn, Oxford Academic, 10 Sept. 2018), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198786825.013.5

languages. It is more common for written languages since the languages are descended from the same ancestral language. Rodd shows this cross-language ambiguity in "*the Dutch word room, which translates to cream but shares its form with an English word with a very different meaning*".[22] Of course this type of ambiguity is not problematic for only English speakers, but bilingual speakers could find it challenging.

But how can we distinguish which meaning is the one that we need? According to Rodd, when we encounter an ambiguous word, we quickly and automatically consider all the possible meanings which we know, and after that, "*within a few hundred milliseconds, select the single meaning that is most likely to be correct*".[23] The term "exhaustive access" is often used for this type of thinking. Rodd's opinion is supported by experiments which indicate that even in this example "*The man was not surprised when he found several spiders, roaches, and other* ***bugs***"[24], both meanings for the word *bug* (one meaning could be a *spy*, another meaning could be an *ant*) are considered even if we can think that we were provided with enough information to choose the correct meaning.[25] Moreover, Thomas Wasow in his paper Ambiguity Avoidance is Overrated displays an interesting experience. He gave his students this riddle:

"*You're standing on a bridge, and see a boat full of people approaching. It goes under the bridge, and, when it emerges on the other side, there's not a single person on the boat. Nobody climbed onto the bridge or jumped in the water. How is this possible?*"[26]

Out of over a hundred students in his class, according to Wasow, only one figured it out. The correct answer is that everyone on the boat was married. The word *single* can mean

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[22] Rodd, Jennifer M., 'Lexical Ambiguity', in Shirley-Ann Rueschemeyer, and M. Gareth Gaskell (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Psycholinguistics*, 2nd edn, Oxford Library of Psychology (2018; online edn, Oxford Academic, 10 Sept. 2018), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198786825.013.5
[23] Rodd, Jennifer M., 'Lexical Ambiguity', in Shirley-Ann Rueschemeyer, and M. Gareth Gaskell (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Psycholinguistics*, 2nd edn, Oxford Library of Psychology (2018; online edn, Oxford Academic, 10 Sept. 2018), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198786825.013.5
[24] Rodd, Jennifer M., 'Lexical Ambiguity', in Shirley-Ann Rueschemeyer, and M. Gareth Gaskell (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Psycholinguistics*, 2nd edn, Oxford Library of Psychology (2018; online edn, Oxford Academic, 10 Sept. 2018), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198786825.013.5
[25] Rodd, Jennifer M., 'Lexical Ambiguity', in Shirley-Ann Rueschemeyer, and M. Gareth Gaskell (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Psycholinguistics*, 2nd edn, Oxford Library of Psychology (2018; online edn, Oxford Academic, 10 Sept. 2018), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198786825.013.5
[26] Winkler, S. (2015). *Ambiguity Language and Communication*. Berlin, München, Boston De Gruyter. ISBN 9783110403589 p. 45

unmarried.[27] This example could support the claim that it is common to choose one correct meaning of a word.

[27] Winkler, S. (2015). *Ambiguity Language and Communication*. Berlin, München, Boston De Gruyter. ISBN 9783110403589 p. 45

3 Structural ambiguity

A statement "*is structurally ambiguous when it can yield more than one syntactic interpretation or when it implies more than one syntactic relationship between constituents within a structure*".[28] The part of speech or the grammatical function of a constituent might cause a confusion. This can be illustrated in the example below:

"*Call me John.*"[29]

The confusion arises between constituents within a structure. The verb *call* can function as ditransitive or complex-transitive, hence indirect object and direct object, or direct object and object complement can follow the given verb *call*. It is important to say that this situation does not occur all the time. The ambiguity arises only "*if both of the complementing elements are formally and semantically compatible with their potential syntactic roles*".[30]

It is important to show a difference between lexical and structural ambiguities. Oaks says that "*Structural ambiguities may be distinguished from lexical ambiguities in which particular words have a different meaning, but the varying meanings do not necessarily change the structural interpretation of the utterance.*"[31] On the other hand, there is no problem for a structural ambiguity to involve a lexical ambiguity. It can be shown in a given example:

"*I saw her play.*"[32]

There is no doubt that lexical ambiguity occurs in the word *play*, but when we interpret the word *play* differently, the whole structure of the utterance changes its meaning, hence the given example would be structurally ambiguous.[33]

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[28] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 15
[29] Dušková, Libuše (1988) Mluvnice současné angličtiny na pozadí češtiny [Grammar of Present-day English on the Background of Czech], Prague: Academia. p. 511
[30] Smolka, V. "Why We Read What We Think We Are Reading: On Some Aspects of Resolving Ambiguity." In: Procházka. M., Malá, M., Šaldová, P. (2009) *The Prague School and Theories of Structure. Interfacing Science, Literature, and the Humanities / ACUME 2*. Goettingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. p. 211
[31] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 16
[32] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 16
[33] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 16

3.1 Transitive verbs

Some verbs, such as *take*, can set up different clause types. The verb take could constitute SVOO clause type or SVO clause type. For illustration, let's begin with this example:

"*George: (looking at Gracie, who is arranging a large vase of beautiful flowers) Grace, those are beautiful flowers. Where did they come from?*

Gracie: Don't you remember, George? You said that if I went to visit Clara Bagley in the hospital I should be sure to take her flowers. So, when she wasn't looking, I did."[34]

The problematic part here is *take her flowers*. We do not know whether the verb *take* is followed by one object or two objects. Therefore, we are not sure whether she should take flowers that belong to her or take flowers with the motif of giving them to her.[35] Although the verb *take* can be understood as an antonym of *bring* in the directional sense, some native speakers would probably expect the prepositional phrase *take st from sb* for a clear understanding of the meaning of *take*.

It is also important to mention multiple class membership of verbs. We cannot pretend that one verb belongs only to one clause type. "*Verbs often belong to a number of different classes and hence enter into a number of different clause types.*"[36] Quirk et al. deal with the verb *get* which is only excluded from Type SV. This can play a significant role when it comes to thinking about ambiguities. Thanks to multiple class membership of verbs, ambiguities may arise, we should consider these two examples:

"*I found her an entertaining partner.*"

"*She called him her favourite waiter.*"[37]

Both examples can be interpreted as SVOC or SVOO types.[38] The first meaning of the first example could be paraphrased as *I found out that she is an entertaining partner*, or *I found an entertaining partner for her*. The second example could mean that *She called*

[34] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 163
[35] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 163
[36] Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman. p. 720
[37] Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman. p. 722
[38] Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman. p. 722

him by his nickname her favourite waiter, or *She called her favourite waiter for him.* Note that the verb *call* (also *make, appoint* and *choose*) could be structurally ambiguous as we have shown, but "*a great deal depends on the nature of the second object*".[39] These three examples should demonstrate this fact:

"*He called my brother a waitress.*"

"*He called my brother a gambler.*"

"*He called my brother a policeman.*"[40]

The first example is a clear SVOO clause structure because an SVOC clause structure is not semantically possible (unless it is a humorous nickname base on being a hospitable person – this could probably be indicated by the use of the quotation marks "*waitress*"). An SVOC clause structure would be only possible if the sentence would look like this: *He called my brother a waiter*. The second example is an SVOC clause structure, although someone might challenge this example that if we have a number to a gambler and we want to call a gambler so that he (the gambler) will teach us gambling we could, therefore this example would be ambiguous. The last example is a clear ambiguous one when we do not know without context whether this is an SVOO or SVOC clause structure (it is more ambiguous than the second example).[41] As we can see "*the proposed syntactic structures cannot create structural ambiguities automatically and independently without careful coordination with semantic and pragmatic factors"*.[42]

An ambiguity may arise between an SVO and SVOO clause type. It is due to the ability of some verbs to be interpreted as ditransitive or monotransitive structures. It would be verbs such as "*bring, buy, call, cook, find, get, give, leave, make, prepare, sell, send, take, throw, and other*".[43] We could illustrate this on the following joke:

"*I say, George," said the young business man to his friend, "where do you buy your typewriter ribbons?"*

[39] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 166
[40] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 166
[41] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 166
[42] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 166
[43] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 167

"I don't," replied the other. "I usually buy her flowers."[44]

The first speaker speaks about a compound noun *typewriter ribbons*, and hence it indicates an SVO structure. On the other hand, George thinks that *ribbons* are the direct object and the *typewriter* is the indirect object, hence it indicates an SVOO structure. However, ambiguity is possible if *typewriter* is interpreted as a person, as indicated by the pronoun *her*; the indirect object meaning of "recipient" is more or less restricted to vital/personal entities, on the contrary, in the meaning of the element affected, the indirect object can be an inanimate entity. It is also important to note that this type of ambiguity only works when "*the head noun (usually the right-most element in a simple NP) must be a noncount noun or a plural*"[45], in the joke we have *ribbons* which is a plural form. The singular form in the head noun would force us to use an obligatory determiner and therefore the structure would be unambiguous. Dušková also mentions this type of ambiguity, although she calls it homonymy of sentence positions. She uses this example:

"*I am buying her story books.*"[46]

Dušková also notes that this ambiguity not only arises due to the properties of the verb which can be followed by a direct object or direct and indirect object but also because the word *her* is ambiguous since it can be a personal or possessive pronoun "*and the sentence position admits both functions*".[47] It is also interesting that we can see in this example that Oaks' rule (that the head noun must be plural or a noncount noun) is present. If we rewrite this sentence with the singular form of the word *books* and obligatory determiner, the sentence becomes unambiguous: *I am buying her a story book*. Furthermore, we could discuss this example given by Dušková:

"*Take the suitcase downstairs.*"[48]

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[44] Copeland, Lewis, and Faye Copeland, eds. (1965). *10,000 Jokes, Toasts & Stories*. New York: Doubleday. p. 417
[45] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 168
[46] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 108
[47] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 108
[48] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 108

Dušková calls it "*homonymy between adverbial and postmodifying function*".[49] The ambiguity arises within the word *downstairs*. The sentence could have a meaning *Take the suitcase which is downstairs.* (postmodification), or *Take the suitcase to the lower floor* (adverbial of direction). Also, this ambiguity is supported by the verb *take* which allows it to be followed by a direct object or a direct object and adverbial.

Verbs such as *call, consider, drive, find, get, have, like, love, make and want*[50] would commonly allow ambiguity because they can be interpreted as an SVO structure or SVOC structure. This joke would illustrate the ambiguity clearly:

"*How do you make a Venetian blind?"*

"Stick a finger in his eye."[51]

The question is whether *a Venetian blind* is a compound noun, therefore functioning as an object, or *a Venetian* functions as an object and *blind* functions as an object complement (as in this example).

3.2 Ambiguity arising from the preposition *for*

Not only verbs can help ambiguity to arise, but prepositional structures can provide a good environment for ambiguities. Especially the preposition *for*, which "*is perhaps the most polysemous of the prepositions of English, with a plethora of subtly distinct meanings and a small set of grammaticised uses in addition*".[52] Quirk et al. devote a number of pages to this preposition and illustrate its semantic functions which are: duration, cause, purpose, recipient, support, and standard. For better understanding, there is an example for every function from Quirk et al.:

"*We lived in Chicago for 15 years.*"[53] (duration)

"*I hid the money, for fear of what my parents would say.*"[54] (cause)

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[49] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 108

[50] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 173

[51] Rosenbloom, Joseph. (1976). *Biggest Riddle Book in the World.* New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc. p. 103

[52] Huddleston, R. D., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language.* Cambridge University Press. p. 655

[53] Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman. p. 691

[54] Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the*

"*He'll do anything for money.*"[55] (purpose)

"*He laid a trap for his enemies.*"[56] (recipient)

"*Are you for or against the plan?*"[57] (support)

"*It's a dreadfully expensive toy for what it is.*"[58] (standard)

It is possible to add more functions of the preposition *for* like exchange as in this example:

"*buy for $4*".[59]

Oaks notes that, across different linguists, there are terminological differences for other functions of the preposition *for*. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman bring out the "*benefactive vs proxy*"[60] meaning, but "*Quirk et al. might intend to be included under their term, recipient.*"[61] This chapter is going to use the term benefactive for both benefactive and proxy notions. Moreover, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman mention goal as one of the functions of the preposition.[62] Lastly, we could talk about the suitability of the preposition *for* as in:

"*time for reading*".[63]

Therefore, we could find many examples of structural ambiguity caused by the preposition *for*. Here are some of them:

"*Beggar: Pardon me, but would you give me fifty cents for a sandwich?*

English Language. Longman. p. 695-696
[55] Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman. p. 696
[56] Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman. p. 696-697
[57] Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman. p. 702
[58] Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman. p. 711
[59] Celce-Murcia, Marianne, and Diane Larsen-Freeman. (1999). *The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course.* Second edition. N.P.: Heinle & Heinle. p. 410
[60] Celce-Murcia, Marianne, and Diane Larsen-Freeman. (1999). *The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course.* Second edition. N.P.: Heinle & Heinle. p. 410
[61] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 302
[62] Celce-Murcia, Marianne, and Diane Larsen-Freeman. (1999). *The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course.* Second edition. N.P.: Heinle & Heinle. p. 410
[63] Huddleston, R. D., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language.* Cambridge University Press. p. 655-56

Passerby: I don't know. Let's see the sandwich."[64] (Goal vs Exchange)

"*Dit: What are you doing for your cold?*

Dot: Nothing.

Dit: Why not?

Dot: Why should I? What's it doing for me?"[65] (Goal vs Benefactive)

"*A stupid motorist saw this sign: FINE FOR PARKING. So he parked!*"[66] (Cause vs Suitability)

3.3 Scope ambiguity

Another thing we need to take into account is scope ambiguity. This example presents what we will be dealing with:

"*Every chef wasn't a madman.*"[67]

In this case, we don't know whether the quantifier *every* and core subject *chef* is interpreted as taking scope above or below negation. Therefore, there are two meanings of this phrase:

"*No chef was a madman.*"

"*Not every chef was a madman.*"[68]

Scope ambiguities with quantifiers and other logical expressions (negation, other quantifiers, modals, intentional verbs, and so forth) have been an integral part of linguistic theory.[69] Dušková also points out sentences involving ambiguity prompted by quantifiers. We could use her example:

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[64] Rosenbloom, Joseph. (1978). *The Gigantic Joke Book.* New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc. p. 219
[65] Rosenbloom, Joseph. (1978). *The Gigantic Joke Book.* New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc. p. 154
[66] Rothman, Joel. (1986) *1,000 Howlers for Kids*. New York: Ballantine Books. p. 15
[67] Kennedy, C. (2011). 23. Ambiguity and Vagueness: An Overview. In C. Maienborn, K. Heusinger & P. Portner (Ed.), *Volume 1* (pp. 507-535). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. ISBN 9783110184709 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110226614.507 p. 511
[68] Kennedy, C. (2011). 23. Ambiguity and Vagueness: An Overview. In C. Maienborn, K. Heusinger & P. Portner (Ed.), *Volume 1* (pp. 507-535). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. ISBN 9783110184709 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110226614.507 p. 511
[69] Kennedy, C. (2011). 23. Ambiguity and Vagueness: An Overview. In C. Maienborn, K. Heusinger & P. Portner (Ed.), *Volume 1* (pp. 507-535). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. ISBN 9783110184709 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110226614.507 p. 511

"*Three girls sang a song.*"[70]

This example shows typical ambiguity where it is not clear whether there is a combinatory or a segregatory manner. The two possible meanings can be interpretated as "*Three girls sang one song together*" (combinatory meaning) or "*Each girl sang one song alone*" (segregatory meaning).[71] Moreover, in the second meaning it is not clear whether it was one and the same song or three different songs. Dušková mentions another example:

"*This group has an expert for every problem.*"[72]

This example could mean "*This group has an expert who can solve every problem*", or "*For every problem the group has an expert*".[73]

Oaks also mentions that structural ambiguities may arise in the scope of modification. It can be shown in this example:

"*an old book seller*".[74]

The modifier *old* causes confusion. It is not clear whether it is a *book seller who is old* or *a seller of old books*.[75] Dušková views the same problem and calls it "*successive premodification*" illustrating it in this example:

"*this chick woman's clothing*".[76]

The ambiguity arises here due to the adjective *chic*. This adjective could be allocated with the head *woman* or *clothing*. Moreover, the demonstrative *this* could belong to *woman* or

[70] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc. (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 102
[71] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc. (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 102
[72] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc. (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 102
[73] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc. (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 102
[74] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 16
[75] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 16
[76] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc. (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 103

clothing too. Therefore, the two possible interpretations could be "*the clothing of this chic woman*" or "*this chick womanly (adjective) clothing*".[77]

The scope of negation, which could be defined as "*the stretch of language over which the negative item has a semantic influence*"[78], allows some structural ambiguities. When a negative marker like *not*, *no* or *never* appears in the sentence or clause, it might be difficult to determine the scope of negation.[79] Negative followed by conjunction *because* could show ambiguity. An example of that could be this sentence:

"*He didn't leave because he was afraid.*"[80]

We don't know whether he stayed or left because the two possible meanings could be *He left but not because he was afraid.*, and *He stayed because he was afraid*. This example is problematic because we do not know "*whether the (subordinate) clause applies to the entire statement or merely to the phrase immediately preceding.*"[81] We could find similar examples in Huddleston and Pullum such as:

"*He didn't go to New York for two weeks.*"[82]

"*I'm not going because Sue will be there.*"[83]

One possible interpretation could be that the negation would only extend over the main clause predicate and therefore leave the adverbial untouched. We could rewrite the sentence like this: *For two weeks he didn't go to New York.* Hence the adverbial is outside the scope of negation and the sentence is therefore unambiguous. The second possible interpretation would allow the negative scope to reach beyond the main clause predicate

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[77] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc. (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 103

[78]Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman. p. 787

[79] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 406

[80] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 407

[81] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 407

[82] Huddleston, R. D., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language.* Cambridge University Press. p. 706

[83] Huddleston, R. D., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language.* Cambridge University Press. p. 732

and affect the adverbial. The sentence could be rewritten as *He did go to New York, but not for two weeks*.[84] The same pattern applies to the second example.

An interesting case is given in Huddleston and Pullum where we can find negation with the adverb *too*. According to Huddleston and Pullum *too* is a "*negatively-oriented polarity-sensitive item*" and therefore *too* can mean "*very*" or "*excessively*".[85] This can be shown in the given example:

"*I can't recommend her too highly.*"[86]

The two possible meanings would be "*it's impossible to overstate her good qualities*" or "*I can give only a lukewarm recommendation.*"[87]

3.4 Multiple sentences

Dušková observes that sometimes, for sentences which contain two subordinate clauses, it is hard to assign "*one of the subordinate clause to two superordinate structures without any change either in the syntactic function of the clause or in its type*".[88] Hence, the ambiguity arises due to the scope of the subordinate clause which can be narrower or broader. Dušková uses these examples:

"*I'll let you know whether I'll need you here when the doctor arrives.*

I told him that I had written the essay before he gave the lecture."[89]

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[84] Smolka, V. "Why We Read What We Think We Are Reading: On Some Aspects of Resolving Ambiguity." In: Procházka. M., Malá, M., Šaldová, P. (2009). *The Prague School and Theories of Structure. Interfacing Science, Literature, and the Humanities / ACUME 2*. Goettingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. p. 212-213

[85] Huddleston, R. D., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language.* Cambridge University Press. p. 823-824

[86] Huddleston, R. D., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language.* Cambridge University Press. p. 824

[87] Huddleston, R. D., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language.* Cambridge University Press. p. 824

[88] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc. (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 103

[89] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc. (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 103

In both cases the adverbial clause causes ambiguity because it can be either subordinate to the whole complex sentence or just a constituent of the nominal clause.[90] Another example that Dušková gives is:

"*They asked me what I knew.*"[91]

The nominal clause allows ambiguity to arise because it can be "*dependent interrogative or relative*".[92] Another example of multiple sentences that can cause ambiguity is this one:

"*She remembered when she saw me.*"[93]

The word *when* causes ambiguity, but it is not only about the homonymy of *when* (it can be conjunction, relative adverb, or interrogative adverb). It is also important to mention the syntactic properties of the transitive verb *remember* which allows object deletion.[94] Therefore, the meaning of the sentence could be *She remembered the last time when she saw me*, or *She remembered (some additional information) when she saw me because I reminded her the additional information.*

The last example which is mentioned by Dušková deals with a subordinate clause which can be either a nominal content clause or an adjectival relative clause. Moreover, the ambiguity is supported by the polysemy of the word *report*. Another supporting effect is provided by the verb *steal* which can be intransitive or transitive, and lastly there is a homonymy of *that* (it can function as a demonstrative pronoun, conjunction, or relative pronoun).[95] The example goes like this:

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[90] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc. (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 103

[91] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc. (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 104

[92] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc. (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 104

[93] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc. (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 104

[94] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc. (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 105

[95] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc. (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co.

"*A report that he stole was ultimately sent to the police.*"[96]

We could paraphrase the given example to become unambiguous like this, *He stole a report and the report was ultimately sent to the police.* The second meaning could be understood as *He stole something and somebody sent a report (about him stealing something) to the police.*

3.5 Ambiguity in infinitive clauses

Infinitive clauses are more likely to be ambiguous due to their frequent use of ellipsis. These infinitive clauses can occur after adjectives, adverbs, verbs, and even nouns. Infinitive clauses manifest a diverse range of structural ambiguities, occasionally even being mistaken for prepositional phrases.[97] Although the absence of a subject in infinitive clauses (if the subject of the infinitive is identical to the subject of the superordinate clause) cannot be fully interpreted as an ellipsis because such a subject cannot be added back into the structure to form a complete structure: *He offered to help me. – *He offered he/for him to help me*. In the finite form, the subject is present in both the superordinate and subordinate clause.

It would be helpful to consider why infinitive clauses often omit an explicit subject. The subject of an infinitive clause can be omitted if it is coreferential with a subject of a superordinate clause. To illustrate this missing subject, let's look at this example. "*I want a chance to sing. I don't say "I want that I sing" or even "I want I sing"*. This is due to the valency possibilities of a particular verb: some may be complemented by an infinitive construction, others by a gerundial and other by a subordinate finite clause (that-clause), while some verbs can have more than one option: *She suggested that she would help me / helping me / *to help me*. Instead, I omit the second reference to myself and, making the subordinate clause an infinitive, get *"I want to sing.*"[98] On the other hand, if my wish is for Sarah to engage in singing, then the subject of the subordinate clause is not identical to the subject of the superordinate clause and hence needs to be explicitly mentioned. Ergo we get "*I want Sarah to sing*".[99] Quirk also

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p. 105

[96] Dušková, L. "A Contrastive View of Syntactic Ambiguities", In: Hajičová, Eva; Pražský linguistický kroužek; ebrary, Inc. (1995). *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. p. 104

[97] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 426

[98] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 426

[99] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 426

mentions that in examples like this "*Bob is hard to convince", the subject of the sentence is identified with the unexpressed object of the infinitive clause*".[100] Thus, the subject of the infinitive clause is missing. Here it is the so-called "tough movement" or "object-to-subject raising".

The first type of structural ambiguity that we will explore arises frequently when an infinitive clause doesn't contain an explicit subject and direct object, and featuring a transitive or intransitive verb, follows an adjective as subject complement in an SVC clause.[101] This could be illustrated on Quirk et al.'s example, "*The lamb is ready to eat.*"[102] The ambiguity can be shown easily when we consider what the ellipsis could have been:

"*The lamb is ready (for the lamb) to eat.*"

"*The lamb is ready (for someone) to eat (the lamb).*"[103]

It turns out the type of adjective you use matters because some of the interpretations could be confusing. We could consider these two sentences from Oaks:

"*John is easy to please.*"

"*John is eager to please.*"[104]

At first sight, these two sentences could seem to be structurally similar. If we examine these sentences closer, the first sentence would mean that *somebody would please John*. On the other hand, the second sentence would indicate that *John would try to do the pleasing*. The adjective *easy* refers to the description of an action (verb) but the adjective *eager* refers only to John. Although as we can see the sentence structure and infinitive remain the same, the meaning can shift depending on the adjective chosen. It is then just up to us to identify these adjectives that embrace both intended interpretations. Such adjectives do exist. The adjective *ready* was already shown by Quirk et al.[105] More

[100] Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman. p. 1229
[101] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 426
[102] Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman. p. 1229
[103] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 427
[104] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 427
[105] Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman. p. 1229

adjectives were provided by Huddleston and Pullum. According to this book, there are more adjectives such as "*available, bad, fit, free, good, and nice*".[106] These adjectives work with verbs that might on the surface be both transitive or intransitive, such as *eat* or *entertain*. An example of ambiguity structure for the verb *eat* was given above. The following example shows that even the verb *entertain* could indicate ambiguity.

"*Jack is nice to entertain.*"[107]

The two interpretations could be *someone entertains Jack*, or *It is nice of Jack to entertain sb.*[108]

The presence of modifiers alongside adjectives introducing infinitive structures might significantly boost the potential for ambiguity. The most common modifiers would be "*enough and too*".[109] For better understanding, Quirk et al. can help us:

"*She is friendly enough to help.*"

"*The lamb is too hot to eat.*"

"*He is too good a person to swindle.*"[110]

All these sentences can denote two meanings. The first sentence could mean *She is friendly enough (for others) to help (her)*, or *She is friendly enough (for her) to help (others)*. The second sentence could be understood as *The lamb is too hot (for us) to eat (it)*, or *The lamb is too hot (for it) to eat (anything)*. The last example is quite the same as the first one, *He is too good a person (for others) to swindle (him)*, or *He is too good a person (for him) to swindle (others)*.[111] These examples illustrate three various forms. The word *enough*, indicating sufficiency, comes after adjectives, while the word *too*, meaning

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[106] Huddleston, R. D., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language.* Cambridge University Press. p. 1248
[107] Pyles, Thomas and John Algeo. (1970). *English: An Introduction to Language.* New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. p. 180
[108] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 427
[109] Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman. p. 1141
[110] Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman. p. 1141
[111] Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman. p. 1141

excess, goes before. The last example is a construction *too adjective (of) a noun*, and it wraps around the adjective.[112]

One might find it interesting that Quirk et al. make a significant observation that the example "*It's too hot to eat*" may have a third meaning. The first two meanings are whether something is doing the eating or whether it is being eaten. The authors point out that this sentence could also mean "*It is too hot (for anyone) to eat (anything)*" but only if the subject is *it.*[113] In this case the difference is the reference of the pronoun *it*: in the previous cases it is anaphorical situational, in the last case it is *empty it*.

Ambiguity may occur in sentences containing infinitive clauses without a subject after adverbs like "*too*" or "*enough*" that modify the verb of the superordinate clause, for example:

"*It moves too quickly to see*".[114]

The interpretation could be whether someone or something is struggling to see *it*, or whether *it* is struggling to see because *it* moves too quickly. It is good to point out that the verb in the subordinate clause should be able to function transitively or intransitively.[115]

Ambiguity involving an infinitive clause may arise when it is not certain whether the infinitive phrase shows a purposive meaning or acts as an object. This is possible because an infinitive clause can contain a transitive or intransitive verb and the clause is following a superordinate clause. The embedded infinitive clause could act like a "*direct object (following a transitive verb) or an adverbial of purpose (modifying the intransitive verb)*".[116] Consider this example:

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[112] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 428
[113] Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman. p. 1142
[114] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 428
[115] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 428-429
[116] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 430

"*He swore to impress his mates.*"[117]

One interpretation could be "*He swore that he would impress his mates (in some unspecified way)*" and the other "*He swore in order to impress his mates (by swearing)*".[118] Moreover, the embedded clause might include an expressed subject and still show the ambiguity. The following example demonstrates this:

"*Susan works for John to be elected.*"[119]

It is unclear whether the subject of the subordinate clause is unspoken and coreferential with the subject of the superordinate clause, showing the purposive meaning (*Susan works for John in order for herself to be elected*) or whether the noun phrase *John* is the subject of the infinitive clause, showing a meaning that *John is to be elected*. This time the sentence explains why Susan works: *for John to be elected*. "*In this case for is a "complementizer" that forms part of the infinitive clause, even as for introduces the clause.*"[120] Infinitive clause, in a purposive vs object clause meaning, could appear without subject and come after what is by one interpretation an SVO (subject, verb, object) clause. We can look at this example:

"*Sam told the doctor to gain credibility.*"[121]

We do not know whether the subject of the infinitive clause is the same as the subject of the superordinate clause and therefore gives a purposive meaning for the infinitive clause ("*Sam told the doctor (something) in order for Sam to gain credibility*") or whether the subject of the infinitive clause is the same with the object of the superordinate clause ("*Sam told the doctor that the doctor should do something that would help the doctor to gain credibility*").[122] The infinitive clause would act as the direct object in an SVOO (subject, verb, object, object) structure. Hence for this type of structural ambiguity to function the verb in the superordinate clause must be both monotransitive or ditransitive (because it allows both an SVO or SVOO type of structure).[123] Although maybe this

[117] Huddleston, R. D., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language.* Cambridge University Press. p. 1223
[118] Huddleston, R. D., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language.* Cambridge University Press. p. 1223
[119] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 430
[120] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 430
[121] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 431
[122] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 431
[123] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 431

ambiguity arises due to the ellipsis of the direct object (the content of the message), which is known from the previous context.

Infinitive clauses can undergo ellipsis and, in order to understand, it needs to be clear what has been left out. Now consider these two examples:

"*John wants me to sing, but I don't want to.*"

"*The father had to ask her little girl to eat asparagus, but he didn't want to.*" [124]

The first example is quite clear. The missing verb here is *sing*. Therefore, there is only one interpretation. The second example is more difficult. It is not clear whether *want to* applies to *asking* or to *eating*.[125]

Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether a form in the subordinate clause functions as an infinitive clause or a prepositional phrase. This situation occurs due to the homonymy of the form *to*, which can represent the infinitive particle or the preposition *to*. In spite of their written identity, both uses are different. When we consider the prepositional role of the word *to*, it introduces a noun phrase, for example, I went *to the store*. On the other hand, as an infinitive particle, the word *to* becomes part of a verb form. For example, I want *to go to the store*.[126]

Confusion might appear when the infinitive particle *to* occurs in an infinitive that "*could be a complement to a verb of a preceding higher clause (SV or SVO)*".[127] This sentence structure involves an intransitive verb in the subordinate clause. This verb shares its exact form (as a homonym or homophone) with a noun that is either uncountable or plural. A transitive verb would be once again homonymous or homophonous with a noun functioning as a premodifier to an uncountable or plural noun. Thus, we don't know whether the *to* is suggesting an infinitive or functions as a preposition in a prepositional phrase. The overlap between homonymous or homophonous and an uncountable or plural noun is notable.[128] Consider this example,

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[124] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 431
[125] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 431
[126] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 431
[127] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 431
[128] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 431-432

"*The company gave the books to train engineers.*"[129]

This example is ambiguous because the sentence could mean that *the company gave the books in order to train engineers*, or *the company gave the books to several train engineers*. It is also interesting that we can make this sentence totally unambiguous if we add a determiner. Look at these two sentences:

"*The company gave the books to train an engineer.*"

"*The company gave the books to a train engineer.*"[130]

Confusion between an infinitive particle and preposition may occur when the structure initiated by *to* follows an SVO clause and can seem to function as a complement to the NP direct object in the superordinate clause. The noun in the *to*-structure needs to be once again an uncountable or plural noun.[131] We can use this example:

"*Henshaw Offers Rare Opportunity To Goose Hunters.*"[132]

We could rewrite this sentence with the help of a singular form – *Henshaw offers rare opportunity to goose a hunter,* or *Henshaw offers rare opportunity to a goose hunter*.

Another environment for ambiguity to occur might be when an infinitive or prepositional phrase follows an SV or SVO clause and contains a word that we don't know whether it is "*a transitive verb or adjective such as better, clear, dry, or clean*"[133] before an uncountable or plural noun. To show this we could use this example:

"*We directed students to clean bathrooms.*"[134]

For better understanding, we can rewrite this sentence as *We directed students to a clean bathroom,* or *We directed students to clean a bathroom*.

If we consider less formal environments, ambiguity may arise when it is not clear whether the infinitive marker *to* is not in fact the indefinite article *a* in constructions like *gotta* and *wanna*. Of course, this ambiguity would appear more in spoken language than

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[129] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 432
[130] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 432
[131] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 432
[132] Two-Headed Monsters' [a]: From The Columbia Journalism Review." In (1983). *Exploring Language.* Third edition, ed. Gary Goshgarian, 436–43. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co. p. 439
[133] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 433
[134] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 433

written language. "*This type of confusion relies on the fact that some verbs and singular nouns share their form and because the unstressed pronunciation of both the to and the indefinite article utilize the schwa vowel [ə].*"[135] It is possible to confuse *want to* and *got to* for *want a* and *got a*, for example:

"*I wanna bowl.*"[136]

The two possible meanings could be *I want to bowl* or *I want a bowl*. We can end this chapter with the following joke:

"*He: Wanna fly?*

She: Sure!

He: Wait here and I'll catch one for you."[137]

[135] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 434
[136] Oaks, D. D. (2010). *Structural Ambiguity in English*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 434
[137] Allen, Steve. (2000) *Steve Allen's Private Joke File.* New York: Three River Press. p. 326

III. PRACTICAL PART

In the practical part of the thesis, I will try to find ambiguities in sentences containing infinitive clauses retrieved from the British National Corpus (BNC). The British National Corpus, according to their websites, "*is a hundred million word collection of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources, designed to represent a wide cross-section of British English from the later part of the 20th century, both spoken and written*".[138] The written part takes around 90% and contains "*extracts from regional and national newspapers, specialist periodicals and journals for all ages and interests, academic books and popular fiction, published and unpublished letter and memoranda, school and university essays, among many other kinds of text*".[139] The spoken part takes only 10% and includes "*orthographic transcriptions of unscripted informal conversations (recorded by volunteers selected from different age, region and social classes in a demographically balanced way) and spoken language collected in different context, ranging from formal business or government meetings to radio shows and phone-ins*".[140]

I will try to find examples that best illustrate ambiguity in infinitive clauses. Sometimes I will also give examples that are not ambiguous but show why other examples are, while these are not. For ambiguous sentences, I will try to capture all their meanings and rewrite them so that they become unambiguous. Moreover, for the ambiguous structures, context will be provided for better understanding. This thesis attempts to list as many examples of ambiguity in infinitive clauses as possible, although it is quite clear that it would be impossible to go through the whole British National Corpus and find every single potential ambiguity.

[138] *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022. From: http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/corpus/index.xml. [cit. 2024-04-16].
[139] *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022. From: http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/corpus/index.xml. [cit. 2024-04-16].
[140] *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022. From: http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/corpus/index.xml. [cit. 2024-04-16].

4 Ambiguity triggered by verbs *want* and *wait* complemented by preposition *for*

1. "*Michael Spicer wants greater powers for the police to stop hippies gathering in large groups.*"[141]

The ambiguity arises since *for the police* can function as a recipient of *greater powers*, it also can be the subject of the infinitive *to stop*, and lastly, it can be both simultaneously. We could also think about interpretation when *Michael Spicer* is the subject of the infinitive *to stop*. It would be possible only if we consider that he is part of the police.

The obvious meaning of the sentence is that *the police need greater powers to stop hippies*, but on the other hand, we could think that maybe *the police are exhausted from stopping hippies gathering in large groups and Michael Spicer wants greater powers for himself to stop hippies and hence he will help the police*. The boundary could be in two places:

(1a) "*Michael Spicer wants greater powers | for the police to stop hippies gathering in large groups.*"

(1b) "*Michael Spicer wants greater powers for the police | to stop hippies gathering in large groups.*"

The context is not going to be helpful:

"*Meanwhile, the MP whose constituency covers Castlemorton Common is demanding that the Government take strong action against the travellers. Michael Spicer wants greater powers for the police to stop hippies gathering in large groups. He's backed by fellow MPs and the residents of Castlemorton.*"[142]

From the context, the more probable explanation is that *the police* are the recipient of *greater powers* and at the same time *the police* are the subject of the subordinate infinitive clause, but theoretically, he could want greater powers for himself to do something about the problem (for example, he could enact laws).

[141] K1S 2271 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[142] K1S 2270-2272 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

2. "*What I want most is for my mum to be well.*"[143]

On the other hand, this example is perfectly clear. The only possible meaning is:

(2a) "*What I want most is that my mum is well (because she is sick, and it makes me sad).*"

We cannot think as in the previous example that *I* could be the subject of the infinitive *to be well*. If we want to say that I want to be well for my mum, the sentence will look like this:

(2b) "*What I want most for my mum is to be well.*"

Ambiguity cannot arise in this situation since the verb *be* makes a clear boundary between the superordinate and subordinate clauses. Therefore, all the elements succeeding the verb *be* are part of the subordinate clause and we cannot think that they would belong to the superordinate clause. The preposition *for* after the verb *want* implies this too because if the nominal expression were to be the complement of the verb *want*, there would not be any preposition. However, we can use the preposition after the verb *want* only if there is a clause constituent between the verb and the subject of the infinitive part.

To illustrate this, we can use this example:

(2c) "*I want him to finish on time.*"

It is possible to say *I want him* and also, *I want to finish on time*. Therefore, the given example is ambiguous. The two possible meanings would be *I want him (for example as an assistant) so that I might finish on time / My wish is that he should finish on time.* Moreover, the syntactic difference here is that the first meaning is an SVOA (purpose) type of a sentence and the second meaning is an SVO sentence type.

3. "*Essentially, what she wants is for Berowne to discover what is serious in life, and to stop fooling all the time.*"[144]

The infinitive *to discover* is not a problem in this example. For the same reasons as in example number 2, the only subject of the infinitive *to discover* is *Berowne*. As we found out before, the verb *to be* makes a boundary between the superordinate and the subordinate clause. However, the second infinitive *to stop* could cause a problem. Once

[143] CH6 9324 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[144] A06 640 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

again we are looking for the subject of the infinitive. The more obvious subject would be Berowne, hence we could say:

(3a) "*Essentially, what she wants is for Berowne to discover what is serious in life, and for Berowne to stop fooling all the time.*"

On the other hand, it is possible to wonder that maybe the subject of the second infinitive could be the same as the subject of the whole sentence – *she*. Therefore, we could paraphrase the sentence like this:

(3b) "*Essentially, what she wants is that Berowne should discover what is serious in life, and she should stop fooling all the time.*"

Even though, this interpretation is way less probable than interpretation 3a it is structurally possible. The context should make everything clear:

"*Rosaline is very much a match for Berowne; this is her last challenge to him, at a moment in the play when death has blown all comedy away. Her challenge is, in itself, almost cruelly witty, and Rosaline must be seen to relish the situation, rather than becoming priggish. Essentially, what she wants is for Berowne to discover what is serious in life, and to stop fooling all the time.*"[145]

4. "*We are now waiting for the specialist to phone back.*"[146]

Due to the verb *wait*, this example could be ambiguous. The preposition phrase stands after the superordinate verb and before the infinitive and moreover, it is possible to use the preposition phrase without the following infinitive. We can say:

(4a) "*We are now waiting for the specialist.*"

(4b) "*We are now waiting to phone back.*"

Therefore, the two possible meanings are presented *We are now waiting for the specialist to phone back (to us) / We are now waiting for the specialist so that we can phone back (to somebody else).* In the first meaning the prepositional phrase *for the specialist* functions as a subject to the infinitive clause. On the other hand, the second meaning

[145] A06 638-640 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[146] A00 383 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

implies that the subject of the infinitive clause could be *we*. It might be possible to illustrate this with the different positions of the boundary:

(4c) "*We are now waiting | for the specialist to phone back.*"

(4d) "*We are now waiting for the specialist | to phone back.*"

The more probable meaning would be that the specialist should phone back to us, but I can imagine a situation when we are waiting for the specialist, so that we can phone back to somebody, and the specialist is going to tell us what we should say. The context goes like this:

"*10.10 am – Still no decision about Tony. We are now waiting for the specialist to phone back. Meanwhile, another cry for help. Westminster Hospital, say that Andrew, on (sic) of their patients, needs to be admitted but they are unable to find transport as no ambulance is available.*"[147]

The context indicates that the first meaning would be suitable for this situation.

5. "*He waited for me to take a chair.*"[148]

This example is very similar to example number 4. It is possible to modify the sentence like this:

(5a) "*He waited for me.*"

(5b) "*He waited to take a chair.*"

Hence, the ambiguity makes sense since we can say *He waited for me so that he could take a chair (maybe I was about to leave, and he wanted my chair) / He waited for me to take a chair so that I could sit down*.

In my opinion, without context, it is quite hard to even assume that one interpretation is more probable than the other one, although perhaps we feel somehow that probably I should take a chair not him.

The boundary could be located in two different positions:

[147] A00 382-385 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[148] A0R 497 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

(5c) "*He waited for me | to take a chair.*"

(5d) "*He waited | for me to take a chair.*"

Here is the context of the example:

"*Bit of a shock after all this time, to be summoned to my line manager's office. When I went in he was sitting at his desk with a file open in front of him. He waited for me to take a chair.*"[149]

The preceding sentence before example number 5 makes everything clear because we learn that he was already sitting at his desk, so I should take a chair.

6. "*I'll have to wait for Jeff to phone, that's all.*"[150]

Once again, the ambiguity works similarly as in examples 4 and 5. It is possible to say both:

(6a) "*I'll have to wait for Jeff, that's all.*"

(6b) "*I'll have to wait to phone, that's all.*"

Once again, the problematic part is whether I am the one who phones or Jeff. I think we could find even three different meanings in this example:

(6c) "*I'll have to wait for Jeff's call (and he phones me).*"

(6d) "*I'll have to wait for Jeff so that I can phone somebody.*"

(6e) "*I'll have to wait for Jeff so that Jeff phones somebody.*"

The third meaning is possible since the verb *phone* is not specified in terms of who we are going to phone. If we compare this to example number 4, where is the phrase *phone back,* the constituent *back* limits the number of meanings to only two. The boundary would be drawn either before or after the prepositional phrase *for Jeff*.

With the help of the context, we could make this example clear:

"*Then she has some wine. Harriet stretches out her hand and tops her up. 'I'm sorry. Oh Christ. Jen?' 'I'll have to wait for Jeff to phone, that's all.' After another pause. 'Is it*

[149] A0R 495-497 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[150] A0U 577 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

Jeff, Harriet?' 'You're getting out,' Harriet whispers, 'admit you're getting out.' Hardening again: 'Isn't Jeff a way of getting out; as well ... Why are you so hypocritical?'"[151]

The question *Is it Jeff, Harriet?* indicates that probably somebody phoned (and it is Jeff) and therefore, we can assume that Jen was waiting for Jeff's call.

7. "*She kept waiting for him to do something, but he hesitated, as if he were waiting for her.*"[152]

The sentence structure allows ambiguity, but is it there? For a start, let's consider just the first two clauses of the sentence. If the whole sentence would be just *She kept waiting for him to do something*, this type of sentence might be ambiguous. The two possible meanings are *She kept waiting for him until he did something / She kept waiting for him so that she could do something (she probably cannot do it without his present).* The problematic part would be that we do not know who the subject of the infinitive clause is. However, the following clause *but he hesitated* makes the whole example unambiguous since the logical explanation would be that *he hesitated to do something*, hence *he* is the subject of the infinitive clause. The last clause *as if he were waiting for her* is apparently ellipsis which mean *as if he were waiting for her (to do something).*

8. "*One night as he waited for a young man to find him a cab, I saw my chance.*"[153]

It would seem that ambiguity could be possible in this example since we do not know who is finding whom a cab. However, in this situation, the pronoun *him* is the part that prevents the ambiguity to arise. It is possible to say both:

(8a) "*One night as he waited for a young man, I saw my chance.*"

(8b) "*One night as he waited to find himself a cab, I saw my chance.*"

As we can see in 8b, if we rewrite the sentence that it is clear that *he* is the subject of the infinitive clause we need to modify the pronoun *him* to its form *himself*. This modification is required since *he* and the person that he is finding a cab (presented by *himself*) is the

[151] A0U 572-582 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[152] A0U 2332 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[153] A0U 2542 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

same person. Therefore, it is not possible that example 8 would indicate ambiguity because the pronoun *him* refers to *he* and, moreover, the subject of the infinitive clause is *a young man*. We can look at the context:

"*I was neither aspiring poet nor actor and had never been further east than Brooklyn. I wanted to offer him something no one else would. One night as he waited for a young man to find him a cab, I saw my chance. He was alone for just a few minutes and I made my offer.*"[154]

With the help of the context, we can see that all these pronouns *him, he, him*, and *he* refers to one person.

9. "*So don't wait for the scratching to start.*"[155]

There is an environment for the ambiguity to arise. It is possible to say:

(9a) "*So don't wait for the scratching.*"

(9b) "*So don't wait to start.*"

The first meaning arises if we consider that the *scratching* is the subject of the infinitive clause. Hence, we could paraphrase example 9 as *You should not wait until the point when the scratching starts (you should probably do something before that)*. On the other hand, we could assume that the subject of the *wait* would also be the subject of the infinitive clause *to start*. Therefore, we can use you as the subject of the verb *wait* and rewrite the given example as *You don't wait for the scratching, you just start (doing something) right away.* Probably a more illustrative example of this ambiguity would be a simple modification of example 9:

(9c) "*So don't wait for me to start celebrating.*"

Example 9c could be understood in two meanings *So don't wait for me to start celebrating because I am not going to celebrate (I am not in the mood for celebrating) / So don't wait for me to start celebrating because I am going to be late (so you should start celebrating without me).*

[154] A0U 2540-2543 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[155] A0J 1189 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

The context of example number 9 is:

"*How do I know if my child has head lice? The way head lice feed causes itching irritation. So scratching the scalp is usually the first sign that a child has head lice. By this time, though, the lice have probably been in the hair for several weeks. So don't wait for the scratching to start. Check your child's hair regularly.*"[156]

From the given context, the meaning becomes unambiguous because the subject of the infinitive *to start* is *the scratching*.

10. "*I want them to lose.*"[157]

Ambiguity arises in this example because the infinitive *to lose* could have two different subjects. It is possible to paraphrase the whole sentence like this:

(10a) "*My wish is that they will lose.*"

This meaning is clear and probably the correct one, however it is structurally possible that the subject of the infinitive *to lose* would be *I*. Therefore, we could rewrite the sentence so that the meaning is clear:

(10b) "*I want them (to my team), so that I can lose.*"

Example 10b is unambiguous and structurally correct, but semantically we could argue that nobody would want to their team someone who would make them lose. Hence, this example is semantically highly improbable. Perhaps, the most ambiguous example could be a simple paraphrase of example 10. Let's consider this paraphrase:

(10c) "*I want them to win.*"

In my opinion, this example would be even more ambiguous than the original one. Both interpretations make sense – *My wish is that they will win / I want to win with them (in my team)*. Compared to example 10b, it is more probable that I would want somebody who will help me to win than to lose.

The context of example 10 could be presented to help us with the correct meaning:

[156] A0J 1185-1190 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[157] A0U 1099 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

"*'I'm glad. I want them to lose. C'mon Morocco!' she cheered but it was half-hearted. She smuggled closer into Steve's body searching assurance. 'I thought you wanted them to lose too.' 'Well at least Morocco are trying to score,' was all he replied.*"[158]

As we can see, the person doesn't even play the game, therefore the correct meaning would be indicated in example 10a. They are probably watching a game between Morocco and somebody else.

[158] A0U 1098-1103 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

5 Ambiguity triggered by verb *rely on*

Another verb that can possibly cause an ambiguity to arise is *rely*. The verb *rely* has to be complemented by the preposition *on* unlike for example the verb *want*. The prepositional phrase which follows the verb *rely* is the part of the sentence which is important to us because it could just complement the verb or it could be the subject of the following infinitive clause. This ambiguity functions similarly in the sentences with the verb *wait*. The difference between the verb *want* and verbs such as *rely* or *wait* is that while the verb *want* does not indicate the following nominal element with a preposition, unless it is separated from the verb by another clause constituent (as in example number 1), in the verb *wait*, as in *rely*, the preposition is a necessary part of the verb recitation.

Let's show how this ambiguity works with examples.

11. "*So the point I'm trying to make is that you can't rely on one product to do the whole job.*"[159]

The prepositional phrase *on one product* is the important part of the sentence because it can function as just a complement of the verb *rely* or it could also be the subject of the infinitive clause *to do the whole job*. Therefore, the two possible meanings would be:

(11a) "*So the point I'm trying to make is that you can't rely on one product and with the help of this product you will do the whole job (you will probably need more than one product).*"

(11b) "*So the point I'm trying to make is that you can't rely on it that one product will do the whole job*"

Although we can argue that the semantic meaning is probably very similar because both sentences mean that we want to do the whole job with one product, in terms of syntactic structure there could be ambiguity since we cannot be sure which part of the sentence is the subject of the infinitive clause. In example 11a the subject of the verb *do* is *you*, but in example 11b the subject is *the product*. Furthermore, we are not sure where the boundary is:

[159] G4H 159 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

(11c) "*So the point I'm trying to make is that you can't rely on one product | to do the whole job.*"

(11d) "*So the point I'm trying to make is that you can't rely on | one product to do the whole job.*"

We could look at the context which may help us to be sure what the correct subject of the infinitive clause is.

"*But of course profit's one thing, and income's another thing, and I think the problem with most er forms of income type investment is that we spent it, it's not a problem it's just, it just happens. But when you spend it when you're spending your income you're not accumulating your capital, so this person in five (sic) years time, although they've had their income which may vary between seven and thirteen percent, their ten thousand is still ten thousand pounds, and obviously that would have devalued in real terms against inflation, which is the other problem. So the point I'm trying to make is that you can't rely on one product to do the whole job.*"[160]

From the given context, in my opinion, the more probable subject of the infinitive clause would be *one product* because it could refer to *profit* or *income* and that should do the whole job.

12. "*Saturday's goal was the product of some poor defending by Celtic and the alertness of Mason in picking out the ginger nut of Alex McLeish, but, again, they relied on a defender to score.*"[161]

Once again we want to find the right subject of the infinitive clause *to score*. The two possible subjects of the infinitive clause are *they* or *a defender*, therefore we can rewrite the sentence like this:

(12a) "*... but, again, they relied on a defender and because he was doing a great job they scored.*"

(12b) "*... but, again, they relied on a defender's scoring (their striker is so useless, so the defender must score all goals).*"

[160] G4H 157-159 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[161] A1N 454 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

Semantically speaking, someone might argue that the core meaning is more or less the same in both sentences because the defender somehow helped the team with the score, but syntactically speaking, we cannot be sure who scored. Let's look at the context which may help us to decide which subject would be more probable:

"*Nicholas's lack of success in front of goal, though, underlines Aberdeen's Achilles' heel – the inability to make pressure tell. In Jim Bett, Paul Mason, Brian Grant and Craig Robertson, they have an effective and, at times, elegant midfield, which can impose its will on opponents, but too often the opportunities created come to nought. Saturday's goal was the product of some poor defending by Celtic and the alertness of Mason in picking out the ginger nut of Alex Mc Leish, but, again, they relied on a defender to score. Although two points clear of the pack, the writing is on the wall for Aberdeen unless someone starts banging goals away.*"[162]

I think that the subject of the infinitive clause would probably be *a defender*. The reason for this is that they struggle in front of goal and therefore, they probably need to rely on a defender's scoring.

13. "*An international company is likely to rely on agents to sell its products to the country's markets.*"[163]

This example once again functions as examples 11 and 12. We are unable to identify the correct and more probable subject of the infinitive clause. Both *agents* and *an international company* can be the subject to the verb *sell*:

(13a) "*An international company is likely to rely on agents and these agents sell its products to the country's markets.*"

(13b) "*An international company is likely to rely on agents so that the company sells its products to the country's markets (the agents themselves do not sell the products).*"

What is more interesting about this example is that the pronoun *its* does not help us at all because it remains the same in both meanings. This is something that we should remember

[162] A1N 452-455 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[163] A60 979 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

because I am going to show in the next examples that sometimes a specific pronoun can make the sentence unambiguous.

The context goes like this:

"*in hot countries, the markets are dynamic, and a multinational company ought to seek greater control over the activities of the 'middleman' – ie over selling. Companies are likely to seek ownership of operations within the country; in cold countries, markets are not dynamic and investment would be more risky and difficult. An international company is likely to rely on agents to sell its products to the country's markets.*"[164]

We can see that the more probable solution would be that the word *agents* is the subject of the infinitive clause.

14. "*You can't rely on popularity to make you happy.*"[165]
15. "*You have to rely on your instincts to pull you through.*"[166]

At first sight, these two examples might seem to be potentially ambiguous. The structure of the sentence is the same as in the previous examples. However, there is one component of the sentence which makes the sentence unambiguous. In example 13, I have commented on the pronoun *its* which can be used in both meanings of the sentence and therefore, ambiguity would be possible, but here the pronoun *you* in the infinitive clause makes both examples clear. Let me explain.

In examples 11, 12 and 13, I have shown that both the subject of the superordinate clause and the noun following the preposition *on* could be the subject of the infinitive clause. On the other hand, in examples 14 and 15 it is not possible for the subject of the superordinate clause to be simultaneously the subject of the infinitive clause. This is all due to the pronoun *you* which is located in the subordinate clause. This pronoun indicates that we refer to some other person, and therefore, if we wanted to get the meaning where the subject of the superordinate and the subordinate clause is the same, we would have to use a different pronoun. Maybe the best way to show how this works is to do a little modification.

[164] A60 974-979 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[165] ADR 991 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[166] ASV 673 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

The obvious meaning of example 14 is:

(14a) "*You can't rely on it that popularity will make you happy.*"

However, we can do this modification to get a slightly different meaning:

(14b) "*You can't rely on popularity to make <u>yourself</u> happy.*"

As we can see, if we want to indicate that the subject of the superordinate clause *you* will be the subject of the infinitive clause, we need to use a reflexive pronoun – *yourself*. The reason for this is quite obvious, we refer to the same person (*you – yourself*).

Identically, example number 15 works the same. Hence, both examples are clearly unambiguous, and we know that in both examples the subject of the infinitive clause is the noun phrase following the preposition *on* (*popularity, your instincts*).

16. "*With so much team research these days it is inevitable that directors of projects must rely on their assistants to produce satisfactory data.*"[167]

The question is who is producing satisfactory data. It is impossible to be sure whether *directors of projects need their assistants so that they can produce satisfactory data*, or *their assistants produce satisfactory data*. Therefore, we could rewrite the sentence like this:

(16a) "*... that directors of projects must rely on their assistants so that directors of projects produce satisfactory data (probably with the help of assistants).*"

(16b) "*... that directors of projects must rely on their assistants' production of satisfactory data.*"

This could also be shown by the different positions of the boundary between the superordinate and the subordinate clause:

(16c) "*... that directors of projects must rely on assistants | to produce satisfactory data.*"

(16d) "*... that directors of projects must rely on | assistants to produce satisfactory data.*"

With the help of the context, we can identify the correct meaning:

[167] B25 381 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

"*But in some instances research assistants may have been primarily concerned with digging out tables from published sources and presenting them to the writer to work on; in this case the data are certainly secondary and practically tertiary. With so much team research these days it is inevitable that directors of projects must rely on assistants to produce satisfactory data.*"[168]

As we can see *assistants* should produce satisfactory data so that *directors of projects* could work with the data.

17. "*Are you relying on your partner to meet needs that can only realistically be met by God?*"[169]
18. "*Do you feel your partner is relying on you to meet needs that can only realistically be met by God?*"[170]

Both examples are ambiguous since we do not know who meets needs that can only realistically be met by God. The two meanings should be obvious from these two modifications:

(17a) "*Are you relying on your partner and with the help of your partner you will meet needs that can only realistically be met by God?*"

(17b) "*Are you relying on the fact that your partner will meet needs that can only realistically be met by God?*"

Example 18 would function the same as example 17. It is interesting that we probably do not have any hint that could possibly help us to know what the correct subject of the infinitive clause is. When the sentence stands on its own without any context, both meanings are possible. We could argue that maybe one meaning is more probable, but these examples are ambiguous. Example 18 could be presented by the different positions of boundary:

(18a) "*Do you feel your partner is relying on you | to meet needs that can only realistically be met by God?*"

[168] B25 380-381 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[169] BND 1291 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[170] BND 1293 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

(18b) "*Do you feel your partner is relying on | you to meet needs that can only realistically be met by God?*"

Hence, in example 18 the subject of the infinitive clause could be either the noun phrase *your partner* or the pronoun *you* which follows the preposition *on*.

Let's look at the context around these examples which might help us:

"*1 I feel rejected when you 2 I feel a sense of acceptance and worth when you 3 Are you relying on your partner to meet needs that can only realistically be met by God? 4 Do you feel your partner is relying on you to meet needs that can only realistically be met by God? Are there any further statements that you can add to your objectives on page 41? MATURITY IS: Applying the same standards to myself as I do to other.*"[171]

Although the context is provided on the BNC site, I am not sure whether this helps us at all. We could maybe assume from the unfinished first and second sentences that the speaker always refers to *you* so thus the subject of the infinitive clause in both examples would be also *you*.

19. "*It especially hit pensioners and those on fixed incomes who rely on the interest to meet their bills.*"[172]

Ambiguity arises in this example for the same reason as in the previous examples. Moreover, the verb *meet* in the infinitive clause is important too since it is possible for *pensioner and those on fixed incomes* to meet their bills and also for *the interest* to meet their bills. We can show this with the different positions of the boundary:

(19a) "*It especially hit pensioners and those on fixed incomes who rely on the interest | to meet their bills.*"

(19b) "*It especially hit pensioner and those on fixed incomes who rely on | the interest to meet their bills.*"

I wanted to include this example because I think that sometimes even the choice of the verb in the infinitive clause is important. As it is mentioned above, syntactically and

[171] BND 1286-1295 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[172] CH5 1687 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

semantically, the subject of the verb *meet* could be either people (*pensioners and those on fixed incomes*) or *the interest*.

The context for example 19 goes like this:

"*(sic) THE latest round of interest rate cuts by building societies and National Savings is bad news for savers. It especially hits pensioner and those on fixed incomes who rely on the interest to meet their bills. But the news isn't as bad as it looks.*"[173]

In the first sentence, the news informs us about *the interest rate*. Therefore, it would be more probable that the subject of the infinitive clause is *the interest*.

20. "*They sound a little like natural filtration systems – lacking mouth, gut, and anus, they rely on bacteria to process the nutrients in minerals dissolved in sea water.*"[174]

This example is once again ambiguous since we do not know what the subject of the infinitive clause is. It could be either *they* or *bacteria*. However, I would like to show with this example that even though this sentence is syntactically speaking unclear, in the case of semantics, we could argue that it does not matter which subject *processes the nutrients in minerals dissolved in sea water* because the sentence would mean the same thing in both variants. Semantically, both interpretations mean that the organism can live because of the bacteria. Look at the two possible variants of example 20:

(20a) "*... they rely on bacteria and with the help of bacteria they process the nutrients in minerals dissolved in sea water.*"

(20b) *"... they rely on bacteria's procession of the nutrients in minerals dissolved in sea water.*"

Hence, we could maybe argue that we understand the sentence, but the syntax is causing the problem. There is always a chance that the context will make everything clear:

"*Strange life-forms have been found off the coast of Spain inhabiting a 15 year old wreck. The six foot long tube worms are more normally found in the Pacific and the Gulf of Mexico. They sound a little like natural filtration systems – lacking mouth, gut, and anus,*

[173] CH5 1686-1688 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[174] CLT 2335 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

they rely on bacteria to process the nutrients in minerals dissolved in sea water. Apparently they were thriving on hydrogen sulphide from the rotting beams of the ship. In their more usual homes they like to live in huge colonies around cracks in the ocean floor where hot mineral rich (sic) larva or oil and gas leak from the sea bed."[175]

In my opinion, the context makes the situation clear because the whole statement is about the worms and therefore the subject of the infinitive clause would be *they* (*the tube worms*).

21. "*Today most people rely on travel agents to make their travel arrangements and book their accommodation.*"[176]

The subject of the infinitive clause is questionable. *People rely on travel agents and the travel agents will make their travel arrangements* or *people rely on travel agents so that people can make their travel arrangements*. It would also be arguable whether there is a difference between the two interpretations in terms of semantics. With the help of the boundary, we could show the two different interpretations:

(21a) "*Today most people rely on | travel agents to make their travel arrangements and book their accommodation.*"

(21b) "*Today most people rely on travel agents | to make their travel arrangements and book their accommodation.*"

Nevertheless, when we look at the context the example becomes crystally clear:

"*Today most people rely on travel agents to make their travel arrangements and book their accommodation. Tour operators organise and plan package holidays and tours and specialist organisations plan conferences and group travel for other organisations. These agents work on a commission basis and special rates and discounts are negotiated with the hotel groups and will depend on several factors:*"[177]

[175] CLT 2333-2337 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[176] EA9 682 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[177] EA9 682-684 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

6 Ambiguity triggered by verb *look for*

Another set of examples will contain the verb *look* complemented by the preposition *for*. The ambiguity arises for the same reason as in verbs *rely on* or *wait*. The nominal element following the preposition can complement the preceding verb or it can be the subject of the infinitive clause.

Let's start with this example:

22. "*They are looking for partners to develop the idea throughout Europe.*"[178]

The ambiguity in this example is possible since we can rewrite this sentence like this:

(22a) "*They are looking for partners who might develop the idea throughout Europe.*"

(22b) "*They are looking for partners so that they (probably a firm or company) might develop the idea throughout Europe (with the help of partners).*"

Once again, we cannot be sure whether *partners* just complement the verb *look for* or the nominal element is the subject of the infinitive clause. Unlike example 20, where we could argue that semantically it does not matter what the subject of the infinitive clause is, in this example, a different subject of the infinitive clause makes a difference. The whole sentence will have a different meaning depending to our interpretation of the subject. However, the nominal element *partners* is still semantically part of the infinitive clause even in example 22b (*with the help of partners*), hence in many examples the semantic difference between both interpretations is blurred. We can look at the context:

"*At a recent trade exhibition staged in Paris, a Spanish firm was featuring a new idea in coffin materials made from moulding reconstituted wood pulp from agricultural waste. They are looking for partners to develop the idea throughout Europe. One hopes they come forward in sufficient numbers to make such an item available to all ecologically minded funeral-arrangers before too long.*"[179]

We can probably think that the more suitable subject of the infinitive clause in our example would be *they*. Logically, it is more probable that *they* want to develop the idea

[178] CES 1209 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[179] CES 1208-1210 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

throughout Europe and *partners* will provide money or help. On the other hand, it is possible to think that the intended subject of the infinitive clause might be *partners*.

23. "*'As we come out of the recession, retailers will be looking for new merchandise to attract people into their store,' says Gledhill.*"[180]

Who or what should attract people to their store? There are two possible subjects of the infinitive clause – *retailers* and *new merchandise*. The nominal phrase following the preposition *for* triggers the ambiguity. The possible meanings are:

(23a) "*'As we come out of the recession, retailers will be looking for new merchandise which will attract people into their store,' says Gledhill.*"

(23b) "*'As we come out of the recession, retailers will be looking for new merchandise so that they will attract people into their store,' says Gledhill.*"

Semantically, we could once again argue whether there is a difference between examples 23a and 23b, nonetheless, syntactically the ambiguity persists, and we cannot be sure what the intended subject of the infinitive clause is. Perhaps with the help of the context, we will know the right answer:

"*Marketing director Tony Gledhill says the company will not be using an ad agency to launch the range but will stay below the line with recently appointed PR agency Smart Communications. 'We have an international brand name established in Europe and beyond. Extending our name to accessories is a natural and logical progression. As we come out of the recession, retailers will be looking for new merchandise to attract people into their stores,' says Gledhill.*"[181]

In my opinion, *new merchandise* is the more suitable subject of the infinitive clause since we see that they have extended their name to accessories.

[180] BNH 143 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[181] BNH 140-143 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

24. "*We are therefore looking for sponsors to help the project.*"[182]

This example functions identically as example number 23. We can demonstrate the different meanings by two possible positions of boundary:

(24a) "*We are therefore looking for | sponsors to help the project.*"

(24b) "*We are therefore looking for sponsors | to help the project.*"

Naturally, we would assume that the nominal element *sponsors* is the subject of the infinitive clause because *sponsors* are usually the ones that help the project. It is also evident from the context:

"*I am writing on behalf of the Princes Trust Community Venture in Cornwall. For part of our course we have to organise a community project, which entails fundraising and planning. We considered several ideas but the one we felt to be most beneficial to the local community was a skateboard ramp/halfpipe. We are therefore looking for sponsors to help the project. Hopefully this may lead to publicity for these benefactors.*"[183]

25. "*The chairman, Martin Jay, told me they were always looking for new ideas to raise money, but they want to keep it an event for the family, a rural event based on the race.*"[184]

Ambiguity occurs due to the fact that we are not sure whether *they* raised money or *new ideas* raised money. Again, the nominal phrase following the preposition for can have two functions:

(25a) "*The chairman, Martin Jay, told me they were always looking for new ideas which would raise money, but …*"

(25b) "*The chairman, Martin Jay, told me they were always looking for new ideas and with the help of new ideas, they would raise money, but …*"

In common conversation, a native speaker would probably not even notice that there could be two possible subjects of the infinitive clause because people usually do not think about every single clause, and they do not search for ambiguities. However, for this work,

[182] ARM 754 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[183] ARM 751-755 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[184] BPK 1189 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

it is possible to analyse these sentences and identify potential ambiguities. We can also look at the context:

"*The population of Oxenhope doubles during the weekend of the race, with shops doing more trade than at Christmas. The race is held on a Sunday, but people travel to the village on the Saturday or even the Friday. The pubs had begun hiring marquees to contain their overflow and they put them to good use by putting on entertainment – a disco, a barn dance or jazz music – on the Friday and Saturday evenings. The chairman, Martin Jay, told me they were always looking for new ideas to raise money, but they want to keep it an event for the family, a rural event based on the race.*"[185]

It is quite clear that the city wants to raise money and they are open to new ideas about how to do it.

26. "*You are looking for a woman to produce healthy children.*"[186]

It is possible for both *you* and *a woman* to be the subject of the infinitive clause. Naturally, in common speech, this sentence would not even seem strange simply because we know that somebody is looking for a woman and they would probably produce healthy children together – this is the core meaning of the whole statement. On the other hand, in terms of syntax, we cannot be sure what clause constituent is *to produce healthy children* since it could be either the modification of the object *a woman* or it could be the adverbial. We can rewrite the sentence like this:

(26a) "*You are looking for a woman so that you can produce healthy children.*"

(26b) "*You are looking for a woman who can produce healthy children.*"

From a semantic point of view, somebody might argue that only women produce children, but biologically, it takes both the genetic information from a man and a woman to produce a child, therefore, we can think about example 26a.

Let's look at the context which might help us to decide:

"*The line of a jaw, the curve of a breast, the way the hair falls just so: as well as this potent mix of stored physical ideals – what Simonde de Beauvoir called 'incandescence'*

[185] BPK 1186-1189 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[186] FBL 1478 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

– you are, like it or not, influenced by fundamental programming which dictates that, while the 'higher' processes of your mind dicker around in a gadfly twentieth-century way, the areas of the brain that control instinctive behaviour are looking for a mate, a woman of energy and physical alertness: a good breeder. You are looking for a woman to produce healthy children."[187]

The more probable subject of the infinitive clause would be *a woman*.

27. "*Students can then get very involved in looking for clues to support their own hypotheses.*"[188]

Ambiguity arises once again owing to the prepositional phrase *for clues*. It is interesting how, without any context, it is nearly impossible to guess whether the more likely subject of the infinitive clause is *clues* or *students*, at least from a syntactic point of view. Perhaps our sense of language could help us and indicate that clues usually support hypotheses, but on the other hand, students (or basically anybody) can support hypotheses too. Thus, we can present ambiguity with the help of different positions of the boundary:

(27a) "*Students can then get very involved in looking for clues | to support their own hypotheses.*"

(27b) "*Students can then get very involved in looking for | clues to support their own hypotheses.*"

The context around the sentence goes like this:

"*When viewing video, students at all levels attempt to make sense of what they see by hypothesising an event that suits a setting, or a setting that suits an event – it is not possible to say which comes first. Students can then get very involved in looking for clues to support their own hypotheses. As others may have different theories a genuine desire to prove a point of view leads to some lively debate.*"[189]

In my opinion, the more likely subject of the infinitive clause would be *clues*, but I am still not one hundred per cent sure whether anything would help us in this situation and indicate the correct subject.

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[187] FBL 1477-1478 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[188] FUA 1162 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[189] FUA 1161-1163 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

7 Ambiguity triggered by verb *send for*

The verb *send* with a preposition *for* could cause ambiguity to arise. If we look at the two following examples, which are both unambiguous, we can see that the nominal element following the prepositional *for* can have different functions. Let's look at the first example which indicates that the subject of the infinitive clause would be the same as the subject of the superordinate clause:

28. "*On the day Sir Hubert arrived in Rangoon he sent for me to thank me for the way in which this delicate matter had been handled.*"[190]

It is quite clear that *Sir Hubert* (represented by *he*) *wants to thank me*. On the other hand, in the following example, the subject of the infinitive clause would be the nominal element following the preposition *for*:

29. "*He ran about the library shouting and shaking his fists at the shelves and the Headmaster had to send for Matron to calm him down.*"[191]

The one who should calm him down is *Matron*. Therefore, it should be possible to find structures where the subject of the infinitive clause was hard to identify. With the help of BNC, I have found just one example, and it goes like this:

30. "*Officials had to send for special chemicals to break down the tar and free the vehicles.*"[192]

In this case, it would be possible to think about two meanings and two possible subjects of the infinitive clause – *officials* or *special chemicals*. We can potentially rewrite the sentence like this:

(30a) "*Officials had to send for special chemicals and with the help of these chemicals, they will be able to break down the tar and free the vehicles.*"

[190] CDC 1417 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[191] AMB 1251 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[192] K1W 2138 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

(30b) "*Officials had to send for special chemicals which will break down the tar and free the vehicles.*"

In terms of semantics, the difference is pretty minimal since we need to use special chemicals to be able to break down the tar and it does not matter whether we think about this situation as officials using chemicals and breaking down the tar or special chemicals breaking down the tar (anyway, special chemicals have to be used by a human being). However, from a syntactic point of view, we would still be interested in which subject is the right one. We can also provide context which might help us:

"*More than a dozen vehicles became stranded on the hard shoulder – unable to move because their underside became clogged with tar and chippings. A police patrol car also became a casualty after officers attempted to help stranded motorists. Officials had to send for special chemicals to break down the tar and free the vehicles.*"[193]

I think it is still difficult to decide which subject is more probable even if we know further information. I would choose *officials* as a suitable subject of the infinitive clause.

[193] K1W 2136-2138 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

8 Ambiguity triggered by verb *think of*

Another verb that works similarly as the verb *send for* is the verb *think of*. As we can see in following example 31 which is unambiguous, the subject of the infinitive clause is the same as in the superordinate clause, on the contrary, in example 32 (also unambiguous), we can see that the subject of the infinitive clause is the nominal phrase following the preposition *of*.

31. "*I couldn't think of anything else to say.*"[194]
32. "*He probably thought of my wrath to follow.*"[195]

Therefore, it should be possible to find an ambiguous sentence with the help of BNC.

33. "*She could think of no words to break the agonising tension.*"[196]

Who or what should break the agonising tension? As always, we are looking for a possible subject of the subordinate clause. The two possible meanings could be:

(33a) "*She could think of no words which she could use so that she breaks the agonising tension.*"

(33b) "*She could think of no words which would break the agonising tension.*"

Maybe it would be possible to argue that the nominal phrase *no words* is not capable of breaking anything and therefore only a human being is able to break something by saying words, but syntactically speaking, it is possible to think about both meanings. Of course, semantically, both meanings are nearly identical. Only a slight difference could be seen in whether there are no words to break the agonising tension, or she doesn't break the agonising tension (because the right words don't occur).

The context of this sentence might help us to decide:

"*The silence in the room stretched out, unbroken except by the heavy, deliberate ticking of the long-case clock in the corner. Annie felt that if no one spoke before long, she must*

[194] A0F 1938 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[195] BN3 2549 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[196] C98 2345 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

get up and go out. She could think of no words to break the agonising tension. Before she actually rose to her feet, Jonadab spoke again."[197]

In my opinion, the more suitable subject of the infinitive clause would be *she*.

34. "*You don't think of your children to do something like that do you?*"[198]

The nominal phrase *your children* could only complement the verb *think of* or it could also function as the subject of the infinitive clause, therefore this sentence is syntactically ambiguous. It is possible to rewrite this sentence to get two different meanings:

(34a) "*You don't think of your children that you do something like that do you?*"

(34b) "*You don't think of your children that your children do something like that do you?*"

The difference could be shown by a various position of the boundary:

(34c) "*You don't think of your children | to do something like that do you?*"

(34d) "*You don't think of | your children to do something like that do you?*"

This example comes from a spoken conversation between two people which has been transcribed by BNC, which is manifested by the missing comma before the tag-question, so we can look at the context if it can help us in deciding:

"*Ruth: You don't think of your children to do something like that do you? Kevin: How can you, could you do that if you've got <pause> I mean he's about twelve or thirteen <-|-> comes home from school <-|-> Ruth: <-|-> <unclear> on tranquillisers <-|-> because the balance of your mind is disturbed.*"[199]

They are probably talking about a child; therefore, I think that the nominal phrase *your children* would be the more likely subject of the infinitive clause.

[197] C98 2343-2346 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[198] KD0 12316 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[199] KD0 12316-12318 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

9 Ambiguity triggered by verb *ask for*

The next verb that could make the sentence ambiguous is *ask* followed by the preposition *for*. If we look at the two following examples, we can see that the nominal element after the preposition *for* could be either a complement of the verb or it can be the subject of the subordinate clause. Here are the examples:

35. "*Secondly, he asked for authority to begin negotiations with Tolbukhin for the hand-over of the Cossacks.*"[200] (the subject of the infinitive clause is *he*)
36. "*There have been people writing in asking for her fans to stop making excuses for her.*"[201] (the subject of the infinitive clause is *her fans*)

Hence, it should be possible to find a sentence where the nominal element could have two different functions – the complement of the superordinate verb or the subject of the subordinate clause.

37. "*In its evidence to the Ashby Committee, the WEA had asked for more grant-aid to finance 'a considerable increase' in the number of full-time staff.*"[202]

In this example, it is possible to think that the nominal phrase *more grant-aid* could complement the verb and therefore, the subject of the infinitive clause would be *the WEA* or *more grant-aid* could be the subject of the subordinate clause. Hence, we could rewrite the sentence like this:

(37a) "*... the WEA had asked for more grant-aid so that the WEA can finance 'a considerable increase' in the number of full-time staff.*"

(37b) "*... the WEA had asked for more grant-aid which would finance 'a considerable increase' in the number of full-time staff.*"

The syntactic difference is notable because of the different subjects of the subordinate clause, but in terms of semantics, the difference is minimal almost none since *more grant-aid* is needed so that *a considerable increase* is covered. With the help of the context, we can identify that the WEA would be the correct subject of the infinitive clause:

[200] FE5 384 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[201] A0V 421 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.
[202] AL8 1014 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

"*However, the operation of these regulations during the rest of the decade kept the WEA on a tight rein. In its evidence to the Ashby Committee, the WEA had asked for more grant-aid to finance 'a considerable increase' in the number of full-time staff.*"[203]

[203] AL8 1013-1014 *British National Corpus*. Online. 2022.

10 Results of the practical part

10.1 Frequency of ambiguity

From the examples presented in the practical part of the thesis, it is possible to identify typical patterns in which ambiguity potentially arises. It was shown that a sentence with a verb which is not complemented by a preposition (such as *want*) might contain ambiguity within the sentence. We can simply illustrate this with this example: *I want him to win the race. = I want him (he is the strongest player) so that I might win the race. / My wish is that he might win the race.* The nominal element could be either just a complement of the verb, here the subject, or the subject of the infinitive clause. Although the structure *want + pronoun + infinitive clause* is pretty widespread across the English language since in BNC it was possible to find 5212 hits (sentences which contain the structure in question) in 1428 different texts, not many sentences could be interpreted as ambiguous which can be seen even in the thesis because not many examples were provided. It should also be noted that the verb *want* can be complemented by the preposition *for* but only if another clause constituent intervenes between the verb and the subject of the infinitive clause e.g. *I want very much for him to win the race*. Moreover, the verb *do* can be complemented by the preposition *for*, fulfilling the same conditions as the verb *want*. Therefore, it can be shown in a simple example: *I did it for him to be happy*. Although this structure is ambiguous, I was not able to find any such examples in BNC.

The next category of verbs that the thesis dealt with was prepositional verbs obligatorily complemented by the preposition *for*. Many examples of the verb *wait for* could be seen in the practical part of the thesis. The preposition *for* introduces a nominal element which can be either just a complement of the superordinate verb or it could be the subject of the following infinitive clause. The BNC yields 2103 hits in 1033 different text of the structure *wait + for + nominal phrase + infinitive clause* (note: the query was constructed in a way allowing any other words occurring between *wait* and *for*, and the nominal phrase could contain three words at most). In contrast to the verb *want*, this structure causes more sentences to become potentially ambiguous, which could be seen in examples. Within the first twenty sentences, at least four sentences would be ambiguous without context. The other verb complemented by the preposition *for* was *look*. As many as 496 hits in 409 different texts were obtained for the structure *look + for + nominal phrase + infinitive clause*. If we compare this structure to the one with the verb

wait, we can see that it is not so widespread and not as readily ambiguous, but sentences with *look* are still more ambiguous than sentences with the last two verbs that can be complemented by the preposition *for* – *ask* and *send*. The same type of structure as before with *look* is nearly as frequent as the structure with the verb *ask*; BNC provided 404 hits in 320 different texts. I was able to find around four or five sentences which could be ambiguous. The last verb *send* would be both the least frequent (at least in this combination *send* + *for* + *nominal phrase* + *infinitive clause*) and the least ambiguous. I was able to find only one ambiguous sentence (example 30) within 28 hits in 26 different texts.

Many examples including the verb *rely* complemented by the preposition *on* were provided in the practical part of the thesis. The BNC contains 307 hits in 261 different texts for the structure *rely* + *on* + *nominal phrase* + *infinitive clause*. If we look at sentences which might be ambiguous, their number amounts to around forty to forty-five sentences. This structure would probably be the most ambiguous one alongside the verb *wait for*. The last verb complemented by a preposition that the practical part has dealt with is *think of*. Of the typical structure *think* + *of* + *nominal phrase* + *infinitive clause* 354 hits occurred in 272 different texts. Among them, I found only seven sentences that could potentially be ambiguous.

10.2 Syntactic vs semantic features

In many examples in the practical part of the thesis, the syntactic and semantic features of the sentence were discussed. It needs to be said that many of the examples that were provided would not be seen as ambiguous in standard communication in English. It is of course due to many facts such as: in authentic communication, the context is provided, resolving most of the potential ambiguities; people usually do not think of every single sentence separately and do not try to find ambiguity, opting for the most plausible interpretation in a given context. Lastly, in many examples, there is hardly any or even no semantic difference between the two interpretations; the difference is only in the syntactic features of the sentence, which native speakers usually do not interpret explicitly. We can see that in example 30, as well as a number of others, the semantic difference is basically zero, as was commented on in the practical part.

On the other hand, it also needs to be pointed out that in some cases, the difference even in semantics would be present. This could be seen in the examples with the verb *wait for* (examples 5 and 6). In these sentences, we can see that the difference between the two possible interpretations (example 6 allows three possible interpretations) is notable even from the semantic perspective.

For the verbs *rely on, look for, think of, ask for, send for*, we could see that in terms of semantics, the difference was minimal. This could be illustrated with the idea: if someone uses words that offend somebody else, what is the difference between whether the offence is caused by the person who used the words as a means or by the words themselves? This could be illustrated in example 37 where we can paraphrase this idea: if someone uses grant-aid to finance somebody else, what is the difference between whether the financing is caused by the person or by the grant-aid? From the syntactic point of view, the examples with the given verbs were ambiguous since the syntactic relations would change in different interpretations. We can also show this in the following example: *They are looking for new products to attract customers*. If the animate subject of the main clause *they* uses the complement of the preposition *new products* as a tool or means to achieve the goal, the two elements largely merge – only the animate agent is capable of intentional action but without the means, it cannot realize its intention. Generally speaking, the structure of language forces us to distinguish two elements (*they* and *new products*) as distinct from a formal point of view, even though from a semantic point of view such a distinction is unnecessary.

The verbs *want* and *wait for* differ not only in the case of syntax but also in the case of semantics. If I want somebody so that I might do something, the meaning is completely different from situations in which I want somebody so that they might do something.

IV. CONCLUSION

The theoretical part of the thesis provided background information about ambiguity from several different sources. The origin and the meaning of the term ambiguity were described in the first chapter. Moreover, the author briefly tried to comment on the difference between ambiguity and vagueness. The thesis then dealt with lexical ambiguity, the first field familiar to native users of English without a special linguistic background. The meaning and usage of the lexical ambiguity were shown with the help of literature, using examples, jokes or riddles. Even though this thesis is not primarily interested in lexical ambiguity, this topic was included to provide a broader understanding of the area under study. To cover the entire topic of ambiguity in English, it was necessary to comment on other types of ambiguity rather than only introduce the syntactic ambiguity of the infinitive clauses, which constitute just a portion of the phenomenon. Hence, the thesis provided information about structural ambiguity focusing on verbs which often cause ambiguity to arise. Another important chapter was also the one that dealt with ambiguity arising from the preposition *for* because this preposition usually played a significant role in sentences that were analysed in the practical part of the thesis, for example those including the verb *wait for*, where the preposition is an integral part of the verb. Brief comments and examples were used to show how the preposition *for* can sometimes cause ambiguity. This could be compared to examples with verbs optionally complemented with the preposition *for* – here ambiguity does not arise only because of the preposition *for*, but because of the other factors. Short chapters were dedicated to scope ambiguity and sentences illustrating structural ambiguity. The core of this thesis, and therefore the most extensive, is the chapter dealing with ambiguity in infinitive clauses. With the help the literature, many examples were given to show how ambiguity works in these structures. The emphasis was on presenting the multiple meanings of one sentence and explaining them. The whole theoretical part of the thesis provided a solid basis for the practical part.

The practical part of the thesis presented a set of examples in which ambiguity may arise, along with examples which were unambiguous, showing important differences between ambiguous and unambiguous structures. The sentences retrieved from the British National Corpus website. The verbs which were selected by the author as potentially showing signs of ambiguity were *want*, *wait for*, *rely on*, *send for*, *think of*, *look for*, and

ask for. The assumption was that the more frequent the verb is in the structure under study, the greater the potential for ambiguity. This was commented on at the end of the practical part, and this assumption was proved to be correct. The author tried to choose suitable examples illustrating how ambiguity works with these verbs. The sentences were commented on from the point of view of syntax, as well as semantics. The possible meanings of the sentences were described through paraphrases which clarified the meaning. The author also included the context of the examples obtained from BNC, and with the help of the context the author identified the meaning that was more likely. In some cases, the possible difference in meanings was presented by a different position of the boundary between the superordinate and subordinate clauses, illustrating the initial assumption that the position of the boundary is often unclear, changing the meaning of the sentence.

At the end of the practical part of the thesis, additional information was given about the researched topic. The author tried to comment on the frequency of the verbs explored. It was shown that the most frequent verb that could potentially cause ambiguity would be *wait for*, followed by the verb *rely on*. On the contrary, the verbs such as *send for*, *ask for*, *think of*, or *look for* were much less productive of ambiguity. Sometimes, it was hard to find just a single example in which the ambiguity would be indisputably present. Moreover, comments on the semantic difference were given in the results section as well as throughout the practical part of the thesis. In many examples, a syntactic difference was identified, but semantically, the difference was not notable. While the meaning of the verb *wait for* were sufficiently distinguished semantically, the two potential meanings in the sentences containing verbs such as *ask for*, *look for*, or sometimes even *rely on* were not so semantically different, although the syntactic differences were still identifiable. As was suggested in the results section of the practical part, in common communication, many of the examples would not even be considered ambiguous by native speakers, therefore presenting no challenge to successful communication.

V. SOURCES

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