

SYNTACTIC AMBIGUITY FOUND IN BUSINESS HEADLINES OF THE NEW YORK TIMES

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Abstract

This study is conducted to analyze the syntactic ambiguity in business headlines on the news of The New York Times. This study aimed at explaining: (1) the ambiguity in the tree diagram. (2) The suitability of the headlines with the content of the news in The New York Times. The data source is the online news in The New York Times. The data are collected by (1) Opening the Google Chrome app, (2) Accessing the official website <https://nytimes.com>, (3) Choosing the column "business", (4) Collecting headlines via copy and paste and screenshotting news content in a word document, (5) Writing the ten data of headlines into the table, (6) Coding the data, while the procedure of data analysis are: (1) Reading the headlines, (2) Drawing the tree diagrams, (3) Describing the meaning, (3) Interpreting the data, (4) Drawing conclusion. In this research, the writer concluded that ambiguous headlines are represented in tree diagrams based on syntax categories, namely parts of speech and phrases. Also, there are nine news headlines that are in accordance with the news content and one headline that is not in accordance with the news content.

Keywords: Ambiguity, Headline, Syntactic Ambiguity, The New York Times

1. INTRODUCTION

Business is one topic that is of great interest to the public. This can be proven by the large number of people who are involved in the business world both in the fields of services and goods. As a result of enthusiasm of the people, there is a lot of information about business, both in writing and speaking. This information can come from various platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Google by simply searching for the title of the information you want. However, sometimes the title you are looking for does not contain information and content of the news that you want.

Ambiguity cannot be avoided in the field of language and communication, both written and spoken. Ambiguity can cause confusion and unclear communication. Ambiguity can be detrimental to both the speaker and writer and the listener or reader in grasping the meaning given. Besides, ambiguity can be used by speakers and writers to make listeners and readers interested in the subject they are discussing.

According to Crystal (2008: 22), ambiguity is a term used for referring to words, phrases, or sentences which express more than one meaning depending on the context in which they occur. It means ambiguity can be interpreted in more than one way. In this case, the readers or speakers get two interpretations that make them confused.

This study focuses on the syntactic ambiguity that occurs in a news headline. According to Cruse (1986:58), syntactic ambiguity means ambiguity in which variant

readings of a sentence involve identical lexical units, the ambiguity is thus necessarily a matter merely of the way the elements are grouped together. Based on MacDonald Et al (1994:677), syntactic ambiguity occurs when a sequence of words has more than one syntactic interpretation.

The writer took this topic because of public interest and the large number of business headlines that contained ambiguity. This raises the stigma called "click baits" where the headline does not match the content of the news being told.

The previous study comes from Intan Nur Charina (2017), with her journal entitled "Lexical and Syntactic Ambiguity in Humor". The lexical and syntactic ambiguity in newspaper headlines, riddles, and short stories or anecdotes is studied in this journal. In the next study comes from Nuzulul Rohmaniah (2017), a student of English Language and Letters Department State Islamic University Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang with her thesis entitled "Syntactic Ambiguity on Students Writing in State Senior High School 9 Malang". This thesis applies Gorrell's theory and parsing strategies to resolve the ambiguity in students' writing.

Some previous researches related to theory of ambiguity are outlined as follows. The previous study comes from Intan Nur Charina (2017) with her journal entitled "*Lexical and Syntactic Ambiguity in Humor*". This research focused in classification of ambiguity and analysis of meaning interpretations.

In the next study comes from Nuzulul Rohmaniah (2017), a student of English Language and Letters Department State Islamic University Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang with her thesis entitled "*Syntactic Ambiguity on Students Writing in State Senior High School 9 Malang*". This thesis applies Gorrell's theory and parsing strategies to resolves the ambiguity.

Further research comes from Fasya Febriandini Pramadwityas (2017), a student of English Language and Literature Department State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta with her thesis entitled "*A Syntactic Analysis of Structural Ambiguity on Headlines of the Jakarta Post by Using Stanford Dependency*". The writer applies Stanford typed dependency for theory in this research.

Based on the previous study above, the writer is interested in analyzing the syntactic ambiguity in business headlines of headline news in the New York Times. Tree diagrams are used to analyze to be more easily understood and detail both in structure and class of words. It becomes a differentiator from previous research.

This study used syntactic theory in a tree diagram, this study will be focused in syntactically ambiguity in the term, phrase, and sentence in the object of research. The subject of this study is the business headlines on news of The New York Times. The writer would like to explain the syntactic ambiguity in the simple explanation which use tree diagrams that makes more effective to analyze clearly.

Based on the above background, the writer contains the following questions, there are;

1. How are the ambiguous headlines described within the tree diagrams?
2. Does the meaning of the headlines, match the content of the news in The New York Times?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Ambiguity

People communicate with others as social beings to share thoughts, feelings, and emotions through the use of a language that is used in both informal and formal situations.

In an informal situation, one example of language used is in headlines on online news. Some headlines do not correspond to the content that makes the readers confused and misunderstood. This leads to uncertainty, which is a type of ambiguity.

According to Hurford and Heasley (2007:128), a word or sentence is ambiguous when it has more than one sense. A sentence is ambiguous if it has two (or more) paraphrases which are not themselves paraphrases of each other.

For example:

We saw her duck

This sentence have the two possible meaning and two sentences in the below are not paraphrases of each other that are:

- a. We saw her lower her head
- b. We saw the duck belonging to her

The possibility that a sentence can be interpreted in more than one way is called ambiguity (O’Grady, 1997: 686). The term used to describe a word, phrase, or sentence with multiple meanings is called ambiguity (Fromkin, 2014: 556).

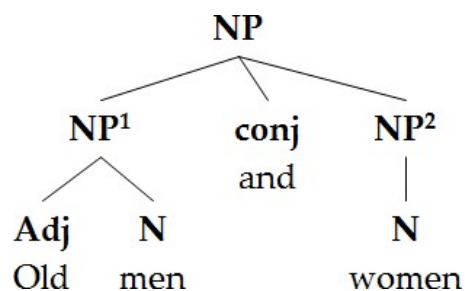
There are some ways to classify ambiguity. According to Katz (Parera, 2004:54), ambiguities are divided into two types that are:

- a. Syntactic ambiguity is an ambiguity that is related to the grammar or structural form of sentence. It happens when the sentence can be interpreted its meaning into two ways. For instance: “She ate the cake on the sofa”. This sentence has two different interpretations. First, she has eaten the cake which was on the sofa or she had sat on the sofa while she ate the cake.
- b. Semantic ambiguity is an ambiguity that connected with lexical element of sentences, it is related to the semantics study. It happens when a word is used in the place where is not usually placed and it will make considerable meanings. For instance: idiomatic expressions.

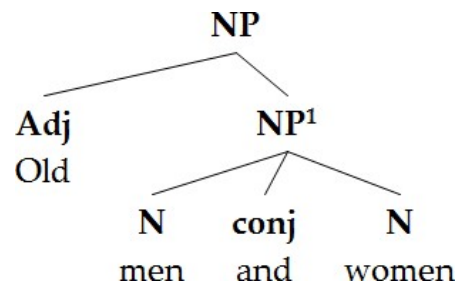
According to Fromkin (1999:143), there are two types of ambiguities that are structural and lexical ambiguity. In addition, Hurford and Heasley (2007:135) mentioned that there are two types of ambiguity. Those are lexical ambiguity and structural ambiguity. Lexical ambiguity is any ambiguity resulting from the ambiguity of a word. The one such diagramming technique is tree diagrams. For example, the phrase old men and women. It phrases represent two meanings that are:

In the phrase old men and women

(1)



(2)



However, the writer only focused on syntactic ambiguity in business headlines on the New York Times in this study.

2.2. Syntactic Ambiguity

Syntactic ambiguity is ambiguity that occurs when a sentence has more than one meaning. Syntactic ambiguity is called structural ambiguity. According to Hurford and Heasley (2007:135), structural ambiguity is a sentence which is ambiguous because its words relate to each other in different ways, even though none of the individual words are ambiguous. Structural ambiguity is ambiguous sentences that have more than one phrase structure tree, each corresponding to a different meaning (Fromkin, 1999:143).

Meanwhile, O'Grady (1997:271) suggested analyzing structural ambiguity using a conventional term structure tree, as depicted in simple ambiguous sentences. Tree diagram is a visual representation that used to represent the syntactic structure of a phrase or sentence (Radford, 2009: 398). The example is the sentence Nicole saw people with binoculars is syntactic or structural ambiguity. It has two meaning, both of which are connected to the two phrase structure trees in the below.

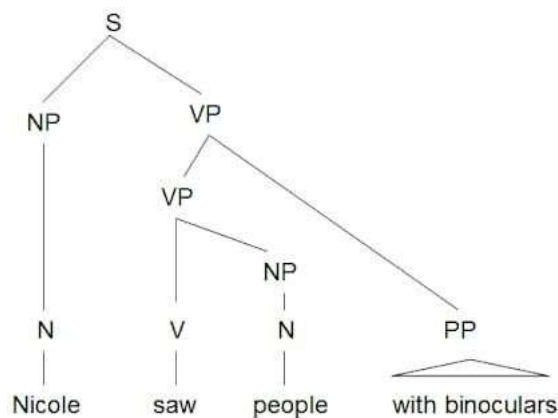


Figure 2.1 First interpretation of the example

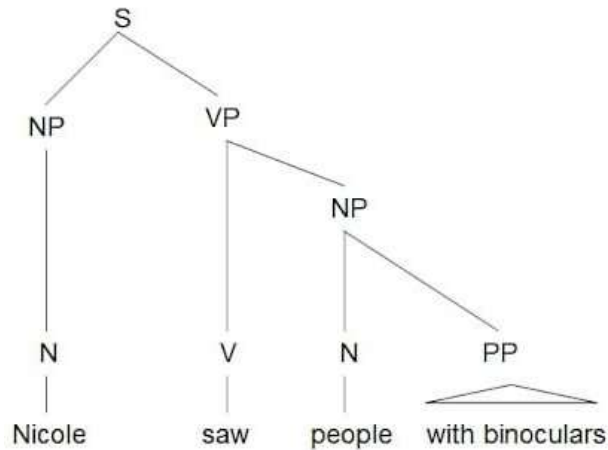


Figure 2.2 Second interpretation of the example

The first interpretation the sentence is ‘Nicole used a binoculars to see people’. The first structure tree is shows it. The key element is the position of PP directly under the VP. In this interpretation, the PP has an adverbial function and modifies the verb “saw”.

In second interpretation, the sentence is “Nicole saw people who had binoculars”. The key element is the PP “with binoculars” under NP where it modifies the noun “people”. Thus, “people with binoculars” becomes the complement of the verb “saw”

2.3. Parts of Speech

Part of speech is a traditional term for a grammatical class of words (Crystal, 2008:352). It is also called word class or syntactic category. According to Maria (2018:3), parts of speech divided into eight parts that are nouns, verbs, adjectives, determiners, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions. It explains in this research.

a. Noun

Noun is a term that used in the grammatical classification of words, traditionally defined as the ‘name or person, place or thing’ (Crystal, 2008:333). For instance are house, Tom, math, family, water, and etc.

b. Verb

Verb is a term that used in grammatical classification of words, referring to a class traditionally defined as doing or action words (Crystal, 2008:510). The examples are talk, swim, write, sleep, and etc.

c. Adjective

Adjective is a term that used in grammatical classification of words, referring to the main set of items which specify the attributes of nouns (Crystal, 2008:11). The examples are serious, intelligent, heavy, and etc.

d. Determiner

Determiner contains a number of subcategories including articles, quantifiers, numerals, deictic, and possessive pronouns (Crystal, 2008:140). The examples are a/an, the, this, those, my, and etc.

e. Adverb

Adverb is a term that used in grammatical classification of words, referring to a heterogeneous group of items whose most frequent function is to specify the mode of action of the verb (Crystal, 2008:13). The examples are slowly, yesterday, quickly, and etc.

f. Pronoun

Pronoun is term that used in the grammatical classification of words, referring to the closed set of items which can be used to substitute for a noun phrase (or single

noun) (Crystal, 2008:391). The examples are I, you, she, he, it, they, and etc.

g. Preposition

Preposition (P) is a term used in grammatical classification of words, referring to the closed set of items which appears before noun phrases to form a single constituent of structure (Crystal, 2008:383). The examples are about, after, from, into, towards, around, with, to, at, and etc.

h. Conjunction

Conjunction is a word that connects two or more phrases together on an equal level (Crystal, 2008:101). The examples are and, but, or, because, and etc.

i. Phrase

Phrase is a group of words to refer to a single element of structure (Crystal, 2008:367). The kinds of phrase in this research explains in the below.

a. Noun Phrase

Noun Phrase is the construction into which nouns most commonly enter and of which they are the head word (Crystal, 2008:367). The examples are:

- 1) The car
- 2) A handsome boy
- 3) A new book

b. Verb Phrase

Verb Phrase consists of a main verb and one or more auxiliaries (Crystal, 2008:367). The examples are:

- 1) She is writing
- 2) I will go to Madura
- 3) They studied Math

c. Adjective Phrase

Adjective Phrase is a phrase with an adjective as its head (Crystal, 2008:367). The examples are:

- 1) The exam was very difficult
- 2) Dila will wear a beautiful white dress
- 3) She ate a very delicious cheese cake

d. Adverbial Phrase

Adverbial Phrase is a phrase with an adverb as its head (Crystal, 2008:367). The examples are:

- 1) Dion walks extremely slowly
- 2) I went to school last week
- 3) Its quite soon

e. Prepositional Phrase

Prepositional Phrase is a group of words consisting of a preposition, its object, and any words that modify the object (Crystal, 2008:367). The examples are:

- 1) At harbor
- 2) Because of you
- 3) Since three years ago

In addition, the writer employs some abbreviations that used in this syntactic ambiguity study.

Table 2.1. The list of abbreviation class of words

S	Sentence	Det	Determiner
NP	Noun Phrase	Prep	Preposition
VP	Verb Phrase	Comp	Complement

PP	Preposition Phrase	Adj	Adjective
Adj.P	Adjective Phrase	Pron	Pronoun
Adv.P	Adverb Phrase	Conj	Conjunction
N	Noun	Adv	Adverb

2.4. Meaning

Meaning is the thing or message that conveyed by language (word, phrase, sentence). Meaning is idea or concept which can be transferred from the mind of the speaker to the mind of the hearer to embodying them as it was in the forms of one language or another (Lyons, 1981:136).

2.5. Headlines News

According to Ogunsiji (1989: 97), headlines are arranged in a way that can reveal fast the social, cultural, economic and political issues unfolding in a society at any given time. Headlines or newspaper headlines have different characteristics from ordinary or colloquial sentences. It is structured in such a way as to make the readers interested in reading all the news articles. In this study, the writer chooses the headlines news in the New York Times news. It's because there are some meanings or interpretations in the headline that make the readers confused.

The New York Times is a New York City-based American daily newspaper with a global readership. Since its founding in 1851, the New York Times has earned 130 Pulitzer Prizes (the most of any newspaper) and has long been known as a national "newspaper of record" within the industry. It is the 18th most widely circulated newspaper in the world, and the third most widely circulated in the United States. This newspaper can be seen by online with URL: <https://www.nytimes.com>.

3. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method, This qualitative research tries to explain the data using words and sentence which is separated into some categorizes to get the conclusion (Arikunto 1998:193). Here in, qualitative method was used because the data in this research are not in the form of numbers but in sentences that must be analyzed. The reason for using qualitative methods for writer is that can help writers analyze sentences from headlines in depth so that the structural meaning of headlines can be found. The writer analyzes the sentences in the headlines news which were syntactically ambiguity using the Hurford and Heasley's theory.

The data from this study is the headlines in business. The writer chooses business headlines because the sentences were quite difficult to understand, which made the readers confused. Thus, these headlines contain different interpretations or possible meanings that are called ambiguity.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Headlines of the New York Time

These headlines contain different interpretations or possible meanings that are called ambiguity.

Table 4.1. The headlines of the New York Times

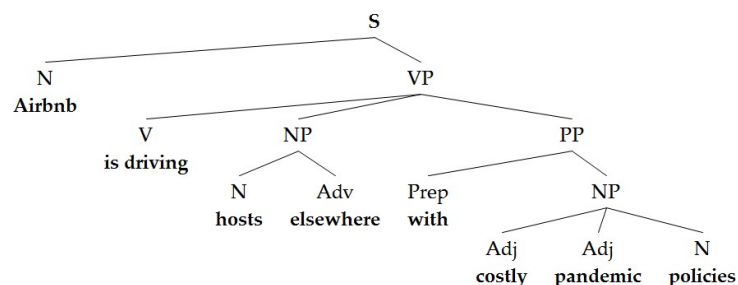
Datum	The Headlines	Remark
A	Airbnb is Driving Hosts Elsewhere with Costly Pandemic Policies	Released on February 21, 2021
B	The Robots Are Coming for Phil in Accounting	Released on March 6, 2021
C	China's Jaded Techies Find a Hero in Elon Musk	Released on March 11, 2021
D	The Market Seems Crazy Stars-up Wrestle with Flood of Offers	Released on March 19, 2021
E	Canadian Rivals in Bidding War for U.S. Railroad	Released on March 28, 2021
F	An Accidental Disclosure Exposes a \$1 Billion Tax Fight With Bristol Myers	Released on April 1, 2021
G	Restaurants Fought for Covid Survival With Some Tech Helpers	Released on April 20, 2021
H	HBO Max Gains Traction in a Crowded Field	Released on April 22, 2021
I	Help Wanted Someone with Money and Connection	Released on May 7, 2021
J	Existing-Home Sales Declined in April with a Tight Supply and Record Prices	Release on May 21, 2021

4.2. Datum

Datum A

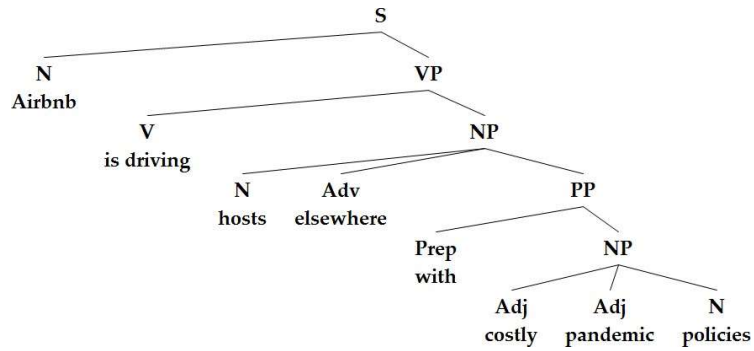
The title of headlines is “Airbnb is Driving Hosts Elsewhere with Costly Pandemic Policies”

a. First Interpretation



In diagram a, the word costly pandemic policies modifies the verb is driving to explain something used by the subject in driving the object (hosts elsewhere). It means that Airbnb with costly pandemic policies is driving hosts elsewhere.

b. Second interpretation

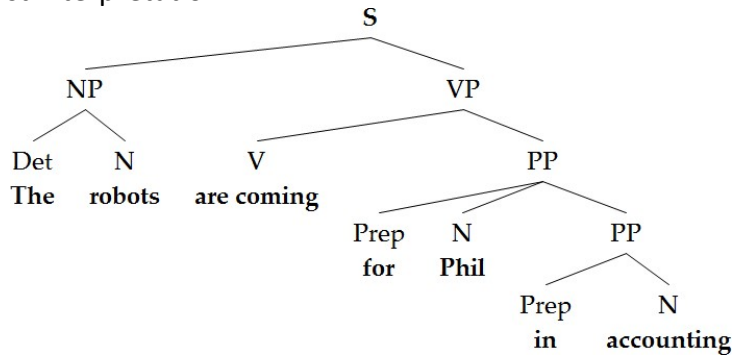


In the diagram b, the word costly pandemic policies modifies the noun phrase hosts elsewhere. That means Airbnb is driving hosts that have costly pandemic policies elsewhere.

Datum B

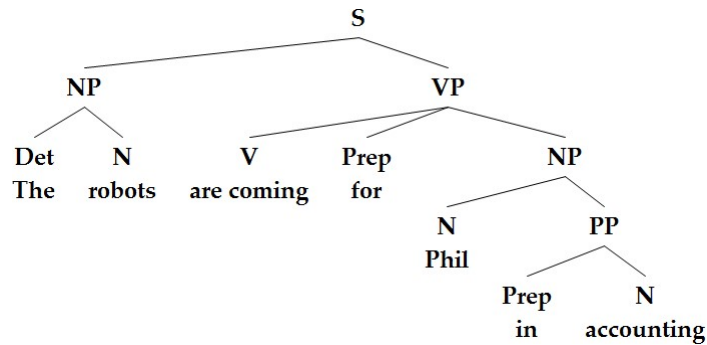
The title of headlines is “The Robots Are Coming for Phil in Accounting”

a. First interpretation



In diagram a, the word in accounting modifies the verb are coming to explain the subject in the object (for Phil). It means that the robots that used in accounting are coming for Phil.

b. Second interpretation

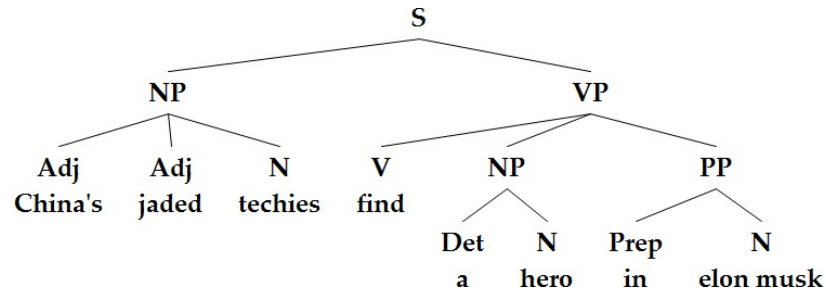


In the diagram b, the word in accounting modifies the noun phrase for Phil that means for Phil where in accounting.

Datum C

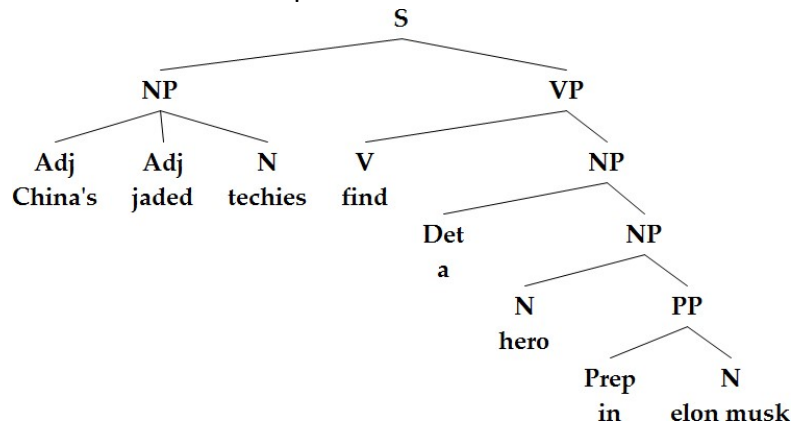
The title of headlines is “China’s Jaded Techies Find a Hero in Elon Musk”

a. First interpretation



In diagram a, the word in elon musk modifies the verb find to explain the subject in the object (a hero). It means that China's jade techies where in elon musk find a hero.

b. Second interpretation

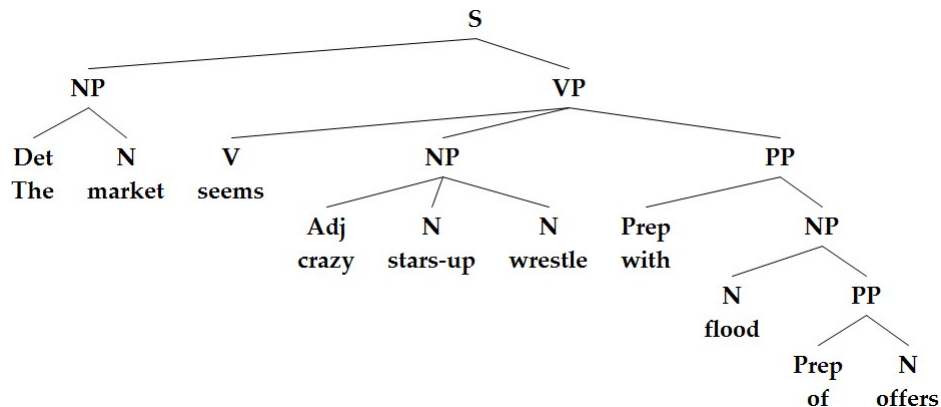


In the diagram b, the word in elon musk modifies the noun phrase a hero that means a hero which in elon musk.

Datum D

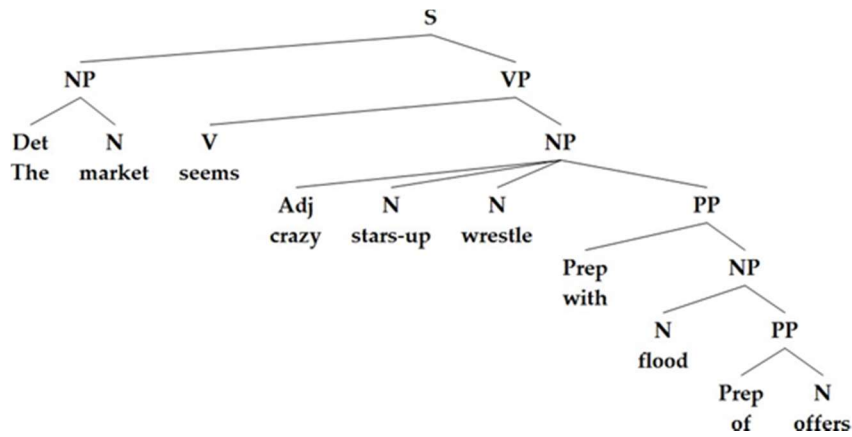
The title of headlines is "The Market Seems Crazy Stars-up Wrestle with Flood of Offers"

a. First interpretation



In diagram a, the word flood of offers modifies the verb seems to explain something used by the subject in seeing the object (crazy stars-up wrestle). It means that the market with flood of offers seems crazy stars-up wrestle.

b. Second interpretation

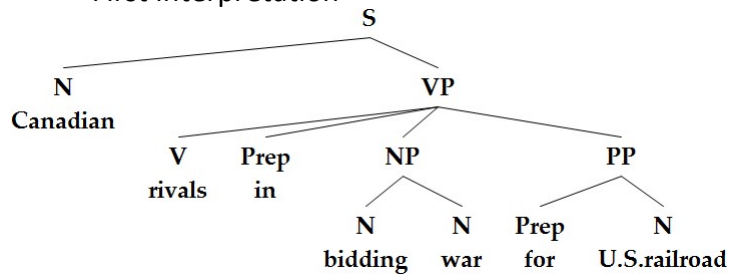


In the diagram b, the word flood of offers modifies the noun phrase crazy stars-up wrestle. That means the market seems crazy stars-up wrestle that used flood of offers.

Datum E

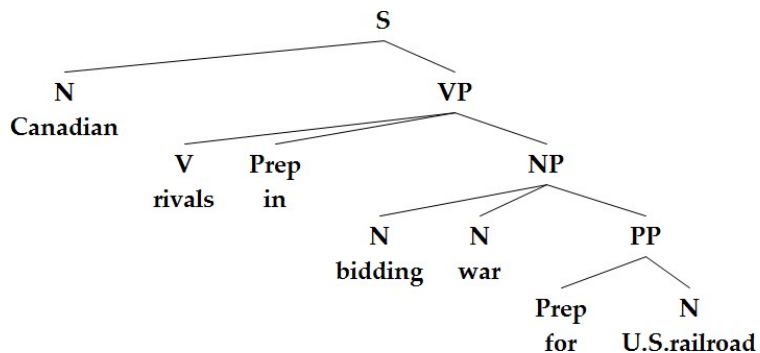
The title of headlines is “Canadian Rivals in Bidding War for U.S. Railroad”

a. First interpretation



In diagram a, the word in bidding war modifies the verb rivals to explain the subject that means, like the origin of headlines.

b. Second interpretation



In the diagram b, the word in bidding war modifies the noun phrase for U.S. railroad. It means that Canadian rivals for U.S. railroad in bidding war.

5. DISCUSSION

All the data in business headlines of *The New York times* use literal meanings. The writer also adjusts the meaning of the headlines based on the content of the news. There are nine headlines that match the content of the news, namely datum A, datum B, datum C, datum D, datum E, datum F, datum G, datum H, and datum J. While datum I does not correspond to the news content because it is not correlated with the tree diagram.

Table 4.1. The correct meaning of datum

Datum	The Correct Meaning	Match or Not
A	Tree diagram a	Match
B	Tree diagram b	Match
C	Tree diagram b	Match
D	Tree diagram a	Match
E	Tree diagram a	Match

In datum A, the correct meaning is in diagram a, which means that *Airbnb with costly pandemic policies is driving hosts elsewhere*. This ambiguous sentence can be resolved by changing the disposition structure of a word which is previously located after the object becomes after the subject. In datum B, the correct meaning is in diagram b that means *the robots that are used in accounting are coming for Phil*. This ambiguous sentence can be resolved by changing the disposition structure of a word which is previously located after the object becomes after the subject. In the datum C, the correct meaning is in diagram b, which means *China's jaded techies find a hero which in elon musk*. This ambiguous sentence can be resolved by adding the word that explains the object clearly. In the datum D, the correct meaning is in diagram a, which means *the market with flood of offers seems crazy stars-up wrestle*. This ambiguous sentence can be resolved by changing the disposition structure of a word which is previously located after the object becomes after the subject. In datum E, the correct meaning is in diagram a, which means *Canadian rivals in bidding war for U.S. railroad*, where *in bidding war* modifies the verb (rivals).

In this study, the writer uses the Hurford and Heasley's theory (2007) and Griffiths's theory (2006) to analyze the interpretation of meaning from this headlines. The headlines can be ambiguous by the placement or use of the word structure that is not right. This gives rise to the term click baits, where the title is considered interesting but does not match what is presented by the news title. The effect of ambiguity in headlines on readers is that they waste their time reading things they don't want to read. It can be an insight or an increase in interaction for writers or the news media as a result of interesting and ambiguous headlines.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that the data from this research presents how the ambiguous headlines are represented in tree diagrams and does the meaning of the headlines match the content of the news in *The New York Times*. Ambiguous headlines are represented in tree diagrams based on the syntax categories that are parts of speech and phrases. Each diagram is simplified into two parts of speech or phrase and is simplified again into smaller parts.

Yes, there are nine of the ten headlines match the content of the news, but at the same time there are one headlines does not match the content of the news. The nine headlines

are able to be said to match because one of the interpretations of tree diagrams from each headline represents or is consistent with the subject matter of the news content, whereas the one headline does not match because the two interpretations of tree diagrams do not represent the news content.

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