

UNDERSTANDING LEXICAL AMBIGUITY IN SENTENCE PROCESSING AMONG 12 AND 15 YEARS OLD LEARNER

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Abstract:

Psycholinguistics serves as a crucial bridge between cognitive psychology and linguistic theory in understanding the mental processes involved in language acquisition and production. Rather than viewing language as a static set of rules, this field examines how linguistic components map onto the brain's cognitive architecture as a dynamic, predictive system. This study analyzes language processing challenges, such as lexical ambiguity and syntactic complexity, in adolescents aged 12 and 15 who are experiencing a crucial phase of cognitive maturation in their working memory capacity. The findings indicate that obstacles in academic comprehension are often not caused by low intelligence, but rather by limitations in working memory capacity and cognitive overload. As a solution, this study proposes the implementation of metacognitive literacy strategies, such as strategic pausing and self-monitoring, to enhance students' cognitive flexibility in managing their mental resources autonomously.

Keywords: Psycholinguistics, Ambiguity, Working Memory, Adolescents, Metacognitive Strategies.

Abstrak:

Psikolinguistik berfungsi sebagai jembatan krusial antara psikologi kognitif dan teori linguistik dalam memahami proses mental manusia dalam memperoleh serta menghasilkan bahasa. Alih-alih memandang bahasa sebagai aturan statis, bidang ini meninjau bagaimana komponen linguistik memetakan arsitektur kognitif otak sebagai sistem prediktif yang dinamis. Penelitian ini menganalisis tantangan pemrosesan bahasa, seperti ambiguitas leksikal dan kompleksitas sintaksis, pada remaja usia 12 and 15 tahun yang kapasitas memori kerjanya sedang mengalami fase krusial maturasi kognitif. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa hambatan dalam pemahaman akademik sering kali bukan disebabkan oleh rendahnya kecerdasan, melainkan oleh keterbatasan kapasitas memori kerja dan beban kognitif berlebih (cognitive overload). Sebagai solusi, penelitian ini mengusulkan penerapan strategi literasi metakognitif, seperti strategic pausing dan pemantauan diri (selfmonitoring), untuk meningkatkan fleksibilitas kognitif siswa dalam mengelola sumber daya mental mereka secara mandiri.

Kata Kunci: Psikolinguistik, Ambiguitas, Memori Kerja, Remaja, Strategi Metakognitif.

INTRODUCTION

At its core, psycholinguistics serves as the viewing language as a static set of rules, this crucial bridge between cognitive psychology field examines how various linguistic and linguistic theory, investigating the mental components such as phonology, syntax, and semantics are mapped onto the brain's cognitive architecture during real-world communication. Modern research increasingly reveals that language processing is far from a simple, linear task; instead, it operates as a highly dynamic, predictive computational system (Brown & Miller, 2021). By exploring how the brain translates raw sensory input into coherent meaning, psycholinguistics offers a window into the limits and capabilities of human cognition, especially when language users are confronted with incomplete, uncertain, or ambiguous information.

Furthermore, psycholinguistics views language not as a fixed ability, but as a process that evolves in tandem with an individual's cognitive maturation. Studies in this domain have demonstrated that the efficiency of language processing is deeply rooted in the interplay between a learner's memory systems, executive functioning, and their broader social experiences (Roid & Koch, 2017). In educational settings, this perspective allows researchers to unpack the ways young learners whose neural pathways are still undergoing significant development navigate linguistic complexity through adaptive strategies. By grounding our analysis in these psychological principles, we gain a clearer understanding of how communication challenges, such as resolving ambiguity, are not merely "errors" but reflections of the delicate balance between biological constraints and the need to construct meaning in an ever-changing environment. Consequently, this psychological framework is indispensable for mapping how language is processed in real-time and how true linguistic proficiency is forged across the human lifespan.

If we view language as a dynamic and predictive system as discussed in the previous section we inevitably encounter one of its most persistent hurdles: lexical ambiguity. This occurs when a single word carries several distinct, unrelated meanings, forcing the brain into a complex balancing act. Rather than just acknowledging a word, language users momentarily ignite a spread of potential meanings, narrowing them down only after weighing the surrounding discourse (Kaltsa & Papadopoulou, 2024). This isn't a passive process; it is a resource-intensive task that leans heavily on what researchers call "predictive efficiency." When a word is inherently fuzzy, the brain instinctively triggers a rapid, parallel activation of various candidates. This forces the working memory to work overtime, simultaneously evaluating these competing interpretations against the context in real-time to find the best fit (Davis, 2018).

Once these candidate meanings are active, the real challenge begins: the brain must exert a high level of executive control to discard whatever doesn't fit the current context. This is what many scholars call "active comprehension," where the listener or reader is constantly negotiating between the literal structure of a sentence and the reality of the situation (White, 2020). When a learner gets stuck, it is rarely just a lack of vocabulary; more often, it is a snag in semantic integration an inability to look past a highly common, yet irrelevant, association in favor of the correct contextual meaning (Miller et al., 2023). Ultimately, how a person navigates this uncertainty reveals a great deal about their cognitive flexibility. By studying this, we are not just analyzing words; we are peering into the delicate synergy between a learner's evolving brain and their capacity to turn messy, uncertain input into coherent, meaningful communication.

Although lexical ambiguity is a common feature of human language, effective communication depends largely on a person's ability to interpret meaning through contextual information. Many words can

express more than one meaning, requiring readers or listeners to consider several possible interpretations before deciding which one best matches the context. Rodd (2020) explains that language comprehension is an active cognitive process in which the brain continuously combines lexical knowledge with contextual and linguistic information to identify the intended meaning. Likewise, Rodd (2018) argues that understanding ambiguous words involves suppressing inappropriate meanings while selecting the interpretation that is most consistent with the surrounding context. This process can be particularly demanding for adolescents because their cognitive and linguistic abilities are still developing. As a result, they must coordinate vocabulary knowledge, sentence structure, and contextual cues at the same time, making them more vulnerable to misunderstanding when contextual information is limited.

While resolving individual lexical ambiguities requires quick mental adjustments, the process becomes significantly more complex once we move to the level of full sentence processing. Language is not simply a string of words but a hierarchical structure where syntax guides our understanding of how these words interact. As we process a sentence, our cognitive system is constantly making split-second predictions about its structure a process often referred to as "syntactic parsing" (Ferreira & Lowder, 2016). When a sentence contains both lexical ambiguity and complex grammatical architecture, the brain faces a dual challenge: it must settle on the right meaning for each word while simultaneously mapping those meanings onto the correct structural roles. This is where the cognitive load peaks, as the reader or listener must juggle multiple potential sentence trees before the incoming information clarifies the intended path.

This real-time navigation relies heavily on the brain's ability to remain flexible yet focused. Whenever we encounter a "gardenpath sentence" where the initial

structure leads us toward a temporary misinterpretation we see the executive control system in action. The brain must quickly detect the mismatch between the expected structure and the reality of the sentence, suppress the initial, flawed interpretation, and re-analyze the syntax to arrive at the intended meaning (Christianson et al., 2017). This rapid-fire cycle of predicting, checking, and re-analyzing highlights that sentence processing is essentially a high-stakes negotiation with uncertainty. For adolescents aged 12 and 15 years old, this process is particularly revealing; as their executive functions are still undergoing refinement, their struggle with complex sentence structures is a direct reflection of their developing cognitive maturity as they learn to handle increasingly sophisticated academic discourse.

Building upon our earlier exploration of lexical ambiguity and syntactic parsing, it becomes clear that these mental operations do not happen in isolation. Instead, they rely heavily on the brain's working memory the cognitive workspace where linguistic information is temporarily held and manipulated in real-time. According to Cowan (2017), this capacity serves as the primary "bottleneck" in language processing, as it limits the amount of information a learner can actively hold while performing complex tasks like comprehension. For adolescents aged 12 and 15 years old, this is particularly vital; as their executive functions are still undergoing significant maturation, their ability to store raw input while simultaneously calculating meaning is often under intense strain. When the complexity of a text exceeds a student's available capacity, the system experiences what Sweller (2020) defines as "cognitive overload," forcing the brain to sacrifice grammatical precision just to grasp the most basic, surface-level content.

This limitation is crucial to understanding why many students struggle with academic discourse. It is rarely a reflection of their underlying intelligence, but rather a temporary constraint of their

developing cognitive architecture. Research by Baddeley et al. (2021) suggests that individuals with higher working memory efficiency are more adept at keeping multiple linguistic interpretations "live" in their minds, which allows them to compare and evaluate meanings more effectively before settling on a contextually appropriate choice. By recognizing these constraints, we move toward a more accurate pedagogical perspective: language comprehension is a high-stakes balancing act between a learner's evolving cognitive resources and the intricate demands of the texts they encounter. Ultimately, acknowledging these limits allows educators to design better support systems, ensuring that cognitive load remains manageable as students refine their linguistic proficiency (Cowan, 2017).

Given the clear constraints that working memory capacity imposes on students aged 12 and 15 years old, the focus of pedagogical intervention must shift from simply simplifying content to teaching learners how to effectively manage their "cognitive workspace." The most sustainable solution to this bottleneck lies in fostering cognitive flexibility through explicit metacognitive literacy strategies. Research in modern education underscores that metacognitive monitoring the ability to intentionally recognize when one's mental bandwidth is being stretched is a game-changer for student comprehension (Efklides, 2017). When adolescents are taught to practice "strategic pausing" upon encountering ambiguous lexical items or complex syntactic structures, they grant their working memory the vital time needed to reorganize and integrate incoming data. This approach moves beyond passive reading; it empowers students to perform deliberate re-analysis of the text, ensuring that their interpretation is accurate rather than a hurried, surface-level guess.

Furthermore, implementing these selfmonitoring techniques is particularly timely for students in the 12 and 15 age bracket, as they are undergoing a profound

biological transition in their executive functioning.

According to findings by Schraw and Robinson (2019), early adolescence represents a critical window where the capacity for metacognitive awareness the ability to reflect on one's own thought processes begins to mature rapidly. By providing students with these self-regulatory tools, educators are not merely asking them to memorize more linguistic rules, but are instead building the cognitive resilience necessary to navigate academic discourse autonomously (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2021). Ultimately, this psycholinguistic approach offers a practical path forward: it bridges the gap between the natural developmental limits of a teenager's working memory and the growing demands of their academic environment, effectively turning the struggle of language processing into an opportunity to refine their cognitive maturity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate how adolescents aged 12 and 15 years old navigate the complexities of lexical ambiguity and challenging syntactic structures. A qualitative approach is deemed highly suitable for this inquiry, as it allows for a profound exploration of the participants' personal experiences, perceptions, and cognitive processes within a naturalistic, real-world academic setting. By prioritizing rich descriptive data, this research aims to uncover the nuances of how students utilize their executive functions and working memory to decode and internalize difficult linguistic elements during authentic academic discourse.

The participants consist of adolescents within the 12 and 15 age range, selected because this period represents a critical developmental stage marked by rapid maturation in executive functioning and metacognitive awareness. The researcher employs purposeful sampling to identify individuals who demonstrate active engagement in literacy tasks and possess the

capacity to reflect upon their mental experiences. This selection strategy ensures that the gathered data is grounded in meaningful personal experience and remains directly relevant to the study's core focus on predictive efficiency and working memory constraints in language processing.

The primary instrument for data collection is the semi-structured interview. This technique was specifically chosen for its flexibility, enabling the researcher to facilitate a reflective dialogue while retaining the freedom to probe deeper into emerging themes throughout the conversation. The interviews are designed to elicit detailed accounts of the participants' mental experiences during reading, specifically focusing on three key areas: how they manage lexical ambiguity when encountering multiple word meanings; how they perceive cognitive load when grappling with complex sentences; and the self-regulatory strategies such as strategic pausing they employ to maintain focus and comprehension.

All data obtained from these interviews will be processed through thematic analysis. This process involves a series of iterative steps, starting with the transcription of interview recordings, followed by coding the data to identify recurring patterns related to cognitive processing, and finally interpreting these findings within the context of relevant psycholinguistic theories. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the researcher will engage in member checking, where participants are asked to verify the accuracy of their transcribed statements. This systematic analysis is intended to bridge the gap between individual linguistic experiences and broader pedagogical implications, thereby evaluating the effectiveness of metacognitive literacy strategies in meeting the demands of academic discourse.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study indicate that all three participants were able to recognize that the given sentence was ambiguous. However, instead of selecting one possible

interpretation, they consistently acknowledged that the sentence did not provide sufficient information to determine its intended meaning. Rather than relying on personal assumptions, the participants preferred to ask for clarification before making an interpretation. This finding suggests that adolescents aged 12 and 15 have developed an awareness that successful language comprehension depends not only on understanding individual words but also on recognizing when contextual information is insufficient to support accurate interpretation.

The participants' responses demonstrate that they were able to identify ambiguity even though they could not determine the intended meaning of the sentence. Haurah stated that she was confused because it was unclear who was using the telescope. Fahmavihi explained that the sentence could be understood in several different ways because it lacked complete information. Likewise, Imacahaya expressed uncertainty and preferred to ask for clarification rather than making assumptions. These responses indicate that the participants recognized ambiguity as a problem of insufficient contextual information rather than a lack of vocabulary knowledge. In other words, they understood that language comprehension sometimes requires additional information beyond the literal words contained in a sentence.

This finding supports the psycholinguistic perspective proposed by Jennifer M. Rodd (2020), who argues that language comprehension is a dynamic process in which listeners evaluate several possible meanings before selecting the interpretation that best fits the available context. According to Rodd, lexical ambiguity is a natural characteristic of language because many words and sentence structures allow multiple interpretations. When contextual information is limited, individuals may delay interpretation until they obtain additional evidence. The responses of the participants in the present study reflect this process. Instead of immediately assigning meaning to the

ambiguous sentence, they recognized that more contextual information was necessary before an accurate interpretation could be made.

Another important finding concerns the participants' preference for clarification rather than assumption. All participants demonstrated a willingness to obtain additional information before deciding on the meaning of an ambiguous sentence. Although their approaches differed, each participant viewed clarification as the most reliable strategy for avoiding misunderstanding. This suggests that they already possess an awareness of effective communication strategies, despite their relatively young age.

The importance of clarification is closely related to the concept of cooperative communication proposed by Herbert H. Clark (1996). Clark explains that communication is a collaborative process in which speakers and listeners work together to establish shared meaning. When listeners recognize that the available information is insufficient, they naturally request clarification to ensure that both parties share the same understanding. The participants in this study demonstrated exactly this behavior. Rather than attempting to infer the intended meaning independently, they relied on interaction with the speaker to obtain the necessary contextual information.

The findings also highlight the important role of context in language comprehension. During the interviews, all participants stated that additional explanation was necessary because the original sentence did not clearly indicate its intended meaning. Their responses suggest that they understood that context is essential for resolving ambiguity. This awareness is particularly important because many ambiguous expressions cannot be interpreted correctly without considering the surrounding linguistic or situational context.

This finding is consistent with the explanation provided by George Yule (2020), who states that ambiguity occurs when an expression allows more than one possible interpretation and that contextual information

serves as the primary mechanism for selecting the intended meaning. Without adequate context, listeners may generate multiple interpretations, making successful communication more difficult. Since the sentence used in this study intentionally omitted contextual information, it is understandable that the participants preferred to request clarification before interpreting its meaning.

Although all participants chose clarification, they employed different strategies to achieve comprehension. Haurah preferred to ask the speaker to explain the sentence again and, if necessary, to provide a simpler explanation. Fahmavihi adopted a more analytical approach by identifying the exact part of the sentence that caused ambiguity and asking a specific question about it. Meanwhile, Imacahaya preferred to reread or listen to the sentence again before requesting clarification from the speaker. These differences indicate that adolescents may employ different cognitive and communicative strategies even when attempting to solve the same language problem.

These findings are supported by Anastasia Efklides (2017), who argues that metacognitive awareness enables learners to monitor their own understanding, recognize comprehension difficulties, and select appropriate strategies to overcome them. The participants in this study demonstrated this metacognitive ability by recognizing that they did not fully understand the sentence and by choosing strategies that could improve their comprehension. Rather than ignoring their uncertainty, they actively attempted to resolve it through questioning, rereading, or requesting additional explanation.

The use of different clarification strategies also reflects the development of self-regulated learning during early adolescence. At this stage of development, children begin to evaluate their own understanding more consciously and become increasingly capable of selecting strategies that help them solve learning problems

independently. The participants' responses suggest that they have begun to develop these abilities, particularly in situations involving language comprehension.

Another important finding is that all participants agreed that ambiguous words or sentences may lead to misunderstanding. They explained that different people may interpret the same sentence differently when sufficient explanation is not provided. This indicates that the participants already understand that communication involves more than simply recognizing vocabulary. Instead, successful communication requires speakers and listeners to share the same contextual understanding of the message.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, these findings also illustrate the role of working memory during language comprehension. According to Nelson Cowan (2017), working memory temporarily stores linguistic information while individuals evaluate possible interpretations and integrate contextual information. In the present study, the participants did not immediately select one interpretation because they recognized that the available information was insufficient. Instead, they maintained uncertainty until additional contextual information could be obtained. This behavior suggests that working memory supports not only language processing but also the monitoring of comprehension during communication.

Similarly, Alan Baddeley et al. (2021) argue that executive control processes enable individuals to evaluate competing interpretations before selecting the most appropriate meaning. The participants' tendency to delay interpretation and request clarification reflects the operation of these executive processes. Rather than accepting the first possible interpretation that came to mind, they evaluated the limitations of the available information and recognized the need for further evidence.

An interesting aspect of the present findings is that none of the participants attempted to force a specific interpretation of the ambiguous sentence. Instead, they openly

acknowledged their uncertainty. This behavior may indicate the emergence of critical thinking skills during early adolescence. Rather than believing that every question must have an immediate answer, the participants demonstrated an awareness that uncertainty is sometimes a natural consequence of incomplete information. Such awareness is important because it encourages learners to seek evidence before making conclusions.

From an educational perspective, these findings have several implications for language teaching. Teachers should provide students with opportunities to identify ambiguous sentences, discuss why ambiguity occurs, and practice asking clarification questions during communication. Classroom activities involving ambiguous sentences, contextual analysis, and collaborative discussion may help students develop stronger comprehension skills while also improving their critical thinking and communication abilities.

Furthermore, language instruction should emphasize that misunderstanding is not always caused by limited vocabulary or grammatical knowledge. Instead, misunderstanding often results from insufficient contextual information. Therefore, encouraging students to seek clarification should be viewed as an effective communication strategy rather than as evidence of poor language ability. Developing this habit may help learners become more confident and accurate communicators in both academic and everyday situations.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that adolescents aged 12 and 15 have already developed an awareness of lexical ambiguity and understand the importance of contextual information in language comprehension. Rather than relying on assumptions, they naturally employ clarification strategies to avoid misunderstanding and achieve accurate interpretation. These findings reinforce the psycholinguistic view that successful language comprehension involves not only processing linguistic information but also

monitoring one's own understanding, evaluating contextual cues, and actively seeking additional information when necessary. Consequently, integrating activities that promote ambiguity awareness and clarification strategies into language learning may contribute to the development of more effective communication skills among adolescent learners.

Struggle Analysis

The interview findings revealed that adolescents aged 12 and 15 experienced several challenges when processing ambiguous sentences. The main difficulty was not understanding the vocabulary itself but determining the speaker's intended meaning because the sentences did not provide enough contextual information. All participants recognized that the sentences were unclear and could not be interpreted with certainty. Instead of making assumptions, they preferred to ask for clarification before deciding what the speaker actually meant. This finding suggests that insufficient context became the primary obstacle in understanding ambiguous language.

The first challenge identified in this study was recognizing that the information provided in the sentence was not sufficient to determine its intended meaning. When participants were presented with the sentence, "I saw the man carrying a dog with a telescope," none of them attempted to choose one possible interpretation. Instead, they explained that the sentence was unclear because it did not specify who was using the telescope. Haurah stated that she felt confused because the sentence did not clearly explain the relationship between the telescope and the people mentioned.

Fahmavihi believed that the sentence could be understood in several different ways because it was incomplete. Likewise, Imacahaya explained that she preferred to ask for further explanation rather than guessing the meaning. These responses indicate that the participants were able to recognize ambiguity, but they found it difficult to determine the

intended meaning without additional contextual information.

Another challenge was dealing with uncertainty during the comprehension process. All participants admitted that they were not confident enough to interpret the sentence when the available information was limited. Instead of making immediate conclusions, they preferred to delay their interpretation until they received further explanation from the speaker. This behavior shows that the participants were aware that making assumptions could easily lead to misunderstanding. As a result, they considered clarification to be the safest way to achieve an accurate understanding of the message.

The findings also showed that each participant used a different strategy to resolve ambiguity. Haurah preferred to ask the speaker to explain the sentence again and, if necessary, to use simpler words. Fahmavihi chose to ask a more specific question about the unclear part of the sentence so that she could identify the source of the ambiguity. In contrast, Imacahaya first tried to understand the sentence by reading or listening to it again before asking for clarification. Although their approaches were different, all participants shared the same goal of obtaining enough information before interpreting the sentence. These responses suggest that adolescents may use different comprehension strategies, but they all recognize the importance of clarification when context is insufficient.

Another difficulty observed in this study was integrating linguistic information with contextual information. The participants understood the meaning of the individual words used in the sentence, yet they were unable to determine the overall meaning because the relationship between those words was unclear. This finding indicates that vocabulary knowledge alone is not enough for successful language comprehension. Listeners also need contextual information to identify the speaker's intended meaning. Without that support, even simple sentences may become difficult to understand.

A similar pattern appeared in the

second interview question, which included the sentence, “Rina took a picture of her younger sibling with a new camera.” None of the participants immediately decided who owned the new camera. Instead, they chose to ask questions or seek further explanation before drawing a conclusion. This consistency suggests that the participants naturally relied on contextual information whenever they encountered ambiguous language. Rather than making unsupported assumptions, they preferred to verify the meaning through clarification.

The participants also demonstrated an awareness of the possible consequences of ambiguity in everyday communication. All of them agreed that words or sentences with more than one meaning could easily cause misunderstanding because different people might interpret the same message differently. They believed that additional explanation was necessary to ensure that both the speaker and the listener shared the same understanding. This awareness reflects an emerging understanding of how context contributes to effective communication.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, these findings suggest that adolescents aged 12 and 15 are still developing the cognitive abilities needed to process ambiguous language efficiently. When contextual information was missing, the participants had difficulty deciding on the intended meaning and preferred to postpone interpretation until more information became available. This process required them to monitor their own understanding while considering the possibility that more than one interpretation could exist. As a result, processing ambiguous sentences demanded greater cognitive effort than processing sentences with a single, clear meaning.

The interview findings also indicate that the participants had begun to develop metacognitive awareness. All three participants recognized when they did not fully understand the sentence and consciously selected strategies to improve their comprehension. Rather than ignoring their

confusion, they actively asked questions, requested simpler explanations, reread the sentence, or listened to it again. These behaviors suggest that they were able to monitor their own understanding, although they still depended on external support to achieve accurate comprehension.

Overall, the struggle analysis identified three major challenges experienced by adolescents aged 12 and 15 when processing ambiguous language. First, they experienced difficulty determining the intended meaning because the sentences lacked sufficient contextual information. Second, they felt uncertain about making interpretations and therefore preferred to delay their responses until clarification was provided. Third, although they were able to recognize ambiguity and apply different clarification strategies, they still relied heavily on contextual support to understand the speaker's intended message. These findings suggest that language comprehension during early adolescence is still developing and is closely influenced by the ability to use contextual information, monitor comprehension, and apply appropriate communication strategies. Therefore, providing students with more opportunities to analyze ambiguous sentences and practice clarification strategies may help improve both their language comprehension and their critical thinking skills.

Implications for Language Learning (Pedagogical Implications)

The findings of this study suggest that adolescents aged 12 and 15 have begun to develop an awareness of lexical ambiguity. During the interviews, all participants recognized that the sentences did not provide enough contextual information to determine one definite meaning. Instead of making assumptions, they preferred to ask for clarification before deciding what the speaker intended. This indicates that successful language comprehension involves more than understanding vocabulary and grammar. Learners also need to recognize when

information is incomplete and know how to use appropriate strategies to resolve uncertainty. Therefore, language teaching should pay greater attention to helping students develop contextual awareness and effective comprehension strategies, rather than focusing only on linguistic knowledge.

One important implication of these findings is the need to emphasize context in language learning. The participants consistently relied on contextual information before interpreting ambiguous sentences, showing that context plays an essential role in understanding meaning. For this reason, teachers should encourage students to interpret words and sentences within the situations in which they are used rather than depending only on dictionary definitions or literal meanings. When students learn to connect language with context, they become more capable of identifying the speaker's intended message and are less likely to misunderstand ambiguous expressions.

The study also highlights the value of teaching clarification strategies as part of classroom instruction. Whenever participants encountered unclear sentences, they chose to ask questions, request additional explanations, reread the sentence, or listen to it again. These responses demonstrate that asking for clarification is a practical strategy for dealing with ambiguity. Teachers can support this skill by giving students regular opportunities to practice requesting repetition, asking followup questions, or confirming information during classroom interactions. Encouraging these habits can help students become more confident, independent, and effective communicators.

Another implication is the use of ambiguous sentences as learning materials. Rather than avoiding ambiguity, teachers can use it as a tool to develop students' thinking skills. Students can be asked to identify why a sentence is unclear, explain what information is missing, and discuss what additional context would help them understand the intended meaning. Activities like these encourage learners to think critically instead of searching

for immediate answers. They also help students understand that meaning is often influenced by context rather than by individual words alone.

Collaborative learning activities can further strengthen students' awareness of language ambiguity. Through pair work or group discussions, students can compare their ideas, explain the reasons behind their interpretations, and listen to different perspectives from their classmates. Such discussions help students realize that people may understand the same sentence differently when contextual information is limited. At the same time, these activities improve communication skills, reasoning ability, and cooperation among learners.

The teacher's role is equally important in supporting students' language development. Instead of simply providing the correct interpretation, teachers should guide students to think about why they find a sentence confusing and encourage them to identify the information they need to understand it more accurately. By asking guiding questions and facilitating discussion, teachers can help students become more aware of their own thinking processes and develop stronger comprehension strategies. This learnercentered approach encourages students to take an active role in constructing meaning rather than depending entirely on teacher explanations.

Using authentic materials is another useful strategy suggested by the findings of this study. Teachers may include newspaper articles, short stories, advertisements, conversations, or social media content that naturally contain ambiguous words or expressions. Analyzing authentic examples allows students to experience how ambiguity appears in everyday communication and teaches them to rely on contextual clues when interpreting meaning. This approach makes classroom learning more meaningful because it connects academic learning with real-life language use.

In addition, communicative learning activities should become a regular part of

language instruction. Activities such as role plays, discussions, simulations, and problemsolving tasks encourage students to negotiate meaning with others. During these interactions, students naturally practice asking for clarification, confirming information, and expressing their ideas more clearly. As a result, they improve not only their language proficiency but also their ability to communicate effectively in different situations.

Constructive feedback should also be an essential part of the learning process. When students struggle to interpret ambiguous language, teachers should avoid focusing only on whether an answer is correct or incorrect. Instead, they should encourage students to explain the reasoning behind their interpretations and guide them to reconsider the contextual clues that may lead to a more accurate understanding. This type of feedback helps students develop critical thinking, increases their confidence, and encourages them to become more reflective learners.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that language teaching should adopt a more communicative, contextual, and learnercentered approach. Since adolescents aged 12 and 15 naturally seek clarification when faced with ambiguous language, classroom instruction should provide opportunities for students to ask questions, analyze contextual information, discuss different viewpoints, and solve communication problems collaboratively. By incorporating these practices into language learning, teachers can help students improve not only their language comprehension but also their critical thinking, cognitive flexibility, metacognitive awareness, and communication skills, all of which are important for both academic achievement and everyday communication.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how adolescents aged 12 and 15 deal with lexical ambiguity and the strategies they use when they encounter sentences with unclear meanings. The findings

showed that all three participants were aware that the interview sentences were ambiguous because they lacked sufficient contextual information to support one clear interpretation. Rather than guessing or choosing one possible meaning, the participants preferred to ask for clarification before deciding what the speaker actually meant. This suggests that adolescents at this age understand that successful language comprehension depends not only on recognizing the meanings of individual words but also on using contextual information to interpret a message accurately.

The interviews also revealed that the participants were aware of their own understanding while processing the sentences. They recognized that the information provided was incomplete and avoided making conclusions based only on personal assumptions. Instead, they used different strategies to overcome their uncertainty. One participant preferred to ask the speaker to explain the sentence again in simpler language, another asked specific questions about the unclear part of the sentence, while the third reread or listened to the sentence once more before asking for further explanation. Although their approaches were different, they all aimed to gain enough information before deciding on the intended meaning. These findings indicate that adolescents have started to develop metacognitive awareness, allowing them to recognize comprehension difficulties and choose appropriate strategies to improve their understanding.

Another important finding is that all participants believed that ambiguous words or sentences could easily create misunderstandings when contextual information was limited. They understood that different people might interpret the same message in different ways because every individual brings different knowledge, experiences, and assumptions to the process of language comprehension. As a result, they considered asking for clarification to be an important part of effective communication rather than a sign of poor language ability.

This finding emphasizes that understanding language involves more than vocabulary knowledge and grammatical competence; it also requires the ability to interpret meaning through context and interaction with others.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, the findings suggest that language comprehension involves several cognitive processes working together. When people encounter ambiguous language, they need to recognize uncertainty, evaluate the information available, monitor their own understanding, and decide whether additional information is necessary before reaching a conclusion. The participants' decision to delay interpretation until they received further explanation demonstrates that they actively monitored their comprehension instead of responding automatically. This behavior reflects the continuing development of cognitive skills that support language processing during early adolescence.

The study also highlights the important role of contextual information in reducing ambiguity. Although the participants understood the vocabulary used in the interview questions, they could not determine the intended meaning because the sentences did not provide enough contextual clues. Consequently, they relied on interaction with the speaker to obtain the information needed before making an interpretation. This finding indicates that context is a fundamental element of language comprehension because it helps listeners select the meaning that best matches the communicative situation.

In addition, the findings show that asking for clarification should be viewed as a positive communication strategy rather than a weakness. Throughout the interviews, the participants were willing to admit when they did not fully understand a sentence instead of pretending that they understood it. They chose to ask questions, request further explanation, or confirm information before responding. Such behavior reflects effective communication habits that can reduce misunderstanding and improve both classroom learning and everyday interaction.

The findings also provide insight into language development during early adolescence. By the age of 12 and 15, learners appear to have developed an awareness that language can be ambiguous and that contextual information is necessary to determine meaning accurately. However, they still rely heavily on contextual support and clarification when dealing with ambiguous expressions. This suggests that the ability to resolve ambiguity continues to develop alongside broader cognitive skills, including reasoning, selfmonitoring, and critical thinking.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of incorporating psycholinguistic principles into language teaching and learning. Language comprehension should be understood as an active process in which learners evaluate information, recognize uncertainty, and use contextual clues to construct meaning. Providing students with opportunities to analyze ambiguous language, identify missing contextual information, discuss possible interpretations, and practice clarification strategies may strengthen not only their language comprehension but also their critical thinking, metacognitive awareness, cognitive flexibility, and communication skills. These abilities are essential for successful communication in both academic settings and everyday life.

SUGGESTION

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for both language teaching and future research. First, language instruction should place greater emphasis on helping students understand the importance of context when interpreting meaning. The interview results showed that all participants recognized that the sentences did not provide enough contextual information to support a single interpretation. Instead of making assumptions, they preferred to seek clarification before deciding what the sentences meant. This suggests that teachers should encourage

students to interpret words and sentences within their communicative context rather than relying only on vocabulary knowledge or grammatical rules. Developing this ability can help learners understand messages more accurately and reduce misunderstandings in communication.

Another recommendation is that clarification strategies should become a regular part of classroom practice. The participants used different approaches when they encountered unclear language, including asking for additional explanations, requesting simpler wording, rereading the sentence, or listening to it again before making a decision. These responses indicate that clarification is an effective strategy for resolving uncertainty. Therefore, teachers should provide opportunities for students to practice asking questions, confirming information, and requesting repetition whenever they are unsure about the meaning of a message. Regular practice with these strategies can strengthen students' confidence while improving both their comprehension and communication skills.

Teachers are also encouraged to include ambiguous language in classroom activities. Sentences containing more than one possible meaning can be used to help students understand how context influences interpretation. Rather than asking students to identify the correct answer immediately, teachers can invite them to discuss why a sentence is unclear, identify the information that is missing, and explain what contextual clues are needed to determine the speaker's intended meaning. Activities of this kind encourage learners to think more critically, analyze language carefully, and support their ideas with logical reasons.

Collaborative learning can also play an important role in developing students' understanding of ambiguous language. Activities such as pair work, group discussions, role plays, and problem-solving tasks allow students to exchange ideas and compare different viewpoints. Through these interactions, learners become aware that

people may interpret the same sentence differently when contextual information is limited. At the same time, they learn that discussing ideas and asking for clarification are effective ways to avoid misunderstanding.

Such activities not only improve communication skills but also encourage cooperation, confidence, and respect for different perspectives. The use of authentic learning materials is another recommendation arising from this study. Newspapers, short stories, conversations, advertisements, and social media content often contain naturally occurring ambiguous expressions that reflect real language use. By working with authentic materials, students can observe how ambiguity appears in everyday communication and practice using contextual clues to identify the intended meaning. This approach makes language learning more relevant because it connects classroom instruction with real-life situations.

Constructive feedback should also receive greater attention during the learning process. When students have difficulty interpreting ambiguous sentences, teachers should avoid focusing only on whether the answers are correct or incorrect. Instead, they should encourage learners to explain the reasons behind their interpretations and guide them to reconsider the contextual information that may lead to a more appropriate understanding. This type of feedback helps students improve their analytical thinking, strengthens their metacognitive awareness, and builds confidence in solving language-related problems independently.

In addition, teachers should create a classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing uncertainty. The interview findings suggest that asking for clarification is a positive communication strategy rather than a sign of weak language ability. Therefore, students should be encouraged to ask questions, request further explanations, and discuss ideas openly without worrying about making mistakes. A supportive learning environment can promote active participation, independent learning, and

stronger awareness of their own comprehension processes.

This study involved only three participants aged 12 and 15, so the findings cannot be generalized to all adolescents in this age group. Future studies are therefore encouraged to include a larger number of participants with different educational backgrounds and levels of language proficiency to gain a broader understanding of how lexical ambiguity is processed during language development. Future research may also explore other forms of ambiguity, such as syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic ambiguity, and examine how these relate to psycholinguistic factors such as working memory, attention, executive functioning, and metacognitive awareness.

Finally, future researchers may benefit from using a wider range of research methods, including experimental designs, think-aloud protocols, reaction-time tasks, or eye-tracking techniques, to obtain a deeper understanding of the cognitive processes involved in resolving ambiguity. Such investigations could make valuable contributions to psycholinguistic research while also providing practical insights for improving language teaching. Ultimately, a better understanding of how learners process ambiguous language may help educators design learning experiences that strengthen language comprehension, critical thinking, and effective communication skills.

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