

Alena Štulajterová

Linguistic Ambiguity in English Humorous Discourse

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CONTENTS

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Introduction | 7 |
|--------------|---|

Part I Theoretical approaches to ambiguity

| | | |
|----------|---|----|
| 1 | General remarks on ambiguity | 14 |
| 1.1 | Definition of ambiguity in English | 22 |
| 2 | Ambiguity and its typological categorization | 25 |
| 2.1 | Phonological ambiguity | 28 |
| 2.2 | Morphological ambiguity | 31 |
| 2.3 | Categorical ambiguity | 33 |
| 2.4 | Lexical ambiguity | 34 |
| 2.5 | Semantic ambiguity | 40 |
| 2.6 | Syntactical ambiguity | 42 |
| 2.7 | Discourse ambiguity | 46 |
| 2.8 | Scope ambiguity | 50 |
| 2.9 | Gender ambiguity | 50 |
| 2.10 | Pragmatic ambiguity | 51 |
| 3 | Ambiguity versus vagueness | 59 |

Part II Ambiguity based humour in English

| | | |
|----------|--|----|
| 4 | Introduction to humour and humour theories | 62 |
| | Introduction | 62 |
| 4.1 | Linguistic approach to humour | 67 |
| 4.2 | Ambiguity related theories to humour | 70 |
| 5 | Structure and typology of jokes | 76 |
| 6 | Typological characterization of ambiguity based jokes | 81 |
| 6.1 | Jokes based on phonological ambiguity | 83 |
| 6.2 | Jokes based on lexical ambiguity | 86 |

| | | |
|----------|--------------------------------------|------------|
| 6.3 | Jokes based on semantic ambiguity | 90 |
| 6.4 | Jokes based on syntactical ambiguity | 96 |
| 7 | Conclusions | 102 |
| | Resumé | 108 |
| | Index | 112 |
| | Bibliography | 117 |
| | Excerpted literature | 127 |

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INTRODUCTION

*“Man walks into a bar, orders a Corona
and 2 Hurricanes. Bartender says,
that’ll be \$20.20...” [2]*

The main theme of this monograph is ambiguity as a linguistic phenomenon in English verbal humour. Ambiguity is an attractive phenomenon for linguistic research and has been theoretically analysed from the point of view of particular language levels or for special types of discourses (literary, journalistic, etc.). Our interest in ambiguity in general or ambiguity in verbal humour in particular stems from the fact that although there exist a few thorough studies presented by respected English or American theoreticians¹, as well as some scientific articles scattered in

¹Oaks, 1994; Tabossi, 2001; Ruby, 2001; Attardo, 1991; Raskin, 1985, 2014; Böhmerová, 2010;

various papers,² ambiguity in verbal humour still provides some interesting insights into the topic.

In this monograph, we shall examine the specific relationship between ambiguity and verbal humour and analyse various types of ambiguity and its use in jokes. Our research is based upon a linguistic corpus consisting of 1966 English jokes found in literary sources or on the Internet.

We take into consideration only those types of ambiguities that are linguistic in nature, which means that their indeterminacy arises entirely from linguistic properties. The main research question of the monograph will be: what types of ambiguity are most productive in producing humorous effect in jokes in contemporary English.

In the first chapter of Part I we present underlying general cognitive and linguistic principles which enable us perceive ambiguity as a specific linguistic phenomenon. We define the essence of ambiguity and discuss its various types – phonological ambiguity,

Štulajterová, 2008, 2013; Záborská, 2018; etc.