

**INVESTIGATING STRUCTURAL AMBIGUITY IN NEWSPAPER HEADLINES: A
CASE STUDY OF SELECTED HEADLINES IN THE NAMIBIAN NEWSPAPER
BETWEEN 1ST FEBRUARY AND 31ST DECEMBER 2020**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH STUDIES**

OF

THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

BY

ELISABETH MASSAMBA

201134187

SEPTEMBER 2022

SUPERVISOR: DR S. MUNGUNGU-SHIPALE

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate possible meanings of the structurally ambiguous headlines found in *The Namibian* newspaper and to illustrate the ambiguity by tree diagram. The study focused on structural ambiguity in the news headlines published between 1st February 2020 and 31st December 2020 covering political, social, and sports beats. The study also described the causes of structural ambiguity in these headlines. No fieldwork was carried out in this research as it was limited to desktop design due to the qualitative nature of the research. In addition, the data were analysed using Clare's (2013) theory of ambiguity to demonstrate that the headlines are structurally ambiguous, Carnie's (2013) syntactic theory to find possible explanations for each ambiguous phrase or sentence and Bornstain's (1997) tree diagram theory to reveal the structural ambiguity. The study revealed that structural ambiguity occurs in the headlines of *The Namibian* newspaper because of modification scope, negation scope, active or passive meaning, present participle and mostly due to prepositional phrases. In addition, the study also revealed that not all structural ambiguous headlines can be exposed using the tree diagram, therefore making it a limiting tool to illustrate structural ambiguity. In the final analysis, the study recommended that the newspaper editors should include deck heads to further give meaning to the headlines and to clear any confusion that might be caused by ambiguity in the headline.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements are extended to every individual that made the completion of this work possible. Firstly, I would like to thank God for providing me with a diligent supervisor who is always available for me, Dr. Shipale. Secondly, I would like to thank my son for sacrificing ‘our time’ to allow mommy to finish this thesis after a demanding day. Thirdly, I would like to thank my company, MTC, for giving me the opportunity to do my masters. Lastly, I owe my close friends for proofreading, encouraging and motivating me when I could not seem to carry on.

DEDICATION

Firstly, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my son, Hamwandi Epaphras Shilombuelua who continues to grow his knowledge. Also, to all the English language lovers who want to pursue their studies in the English language studies field in order to make a difference in English education.

DECLARATION

I, Elisabeth B. Massamba, hereby declare that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any institution of higher education.

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29/09/2022

Elisabeth B. Massamba

Date

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

1.1 Background

To avoid misunderstanding, language is an important aspect required. Human social life requires interaction and communication and is thus made successful by language. Fromkin, Blair and Collins (1991) agree that “when you know a language, you can speak and be understood by others who know that language” (p. 3). One’s understanding of a language aids them to understand how to interrelate a word, phrase or sentence with its meaning. Also, ones understanding of a language directs them to establish whether a sentence makes sense or not.

Furthermore, human language comprises of written and spoken modes. Spoken language can be defined as language produced using sound or symbols, while written language is the depiction of spoken language by means of writing systems (Kristian, 2018). Written language is more complex than spoken language because of the meaning interpretation. When someone speaks the listener usually understands the meaning much better because of the speaker’s tone or body language unlike the case with a reader (Nurradiatumardiah, 2020). Charina (2017) explains that a written text can have different interpretations from different people and these different interpretations among readers are created by ambiguity. Ambiguity is defined by Empson (2014) as words, phrases or sentences with different meanings and could fit in several settings and situations.

Additionally, ambiguity is divided into two types; lexical and structural. Lexical ambiguity occurs when a word has more than one meaning. However, this research is exclusively concerned with structural ambiguity which is concerned with more than one structural interpretation. In the field of language and communication, ambiguity is an inevitable occurrence in both speech and written

communication in most, if not all languages. It therefore causes confusion and unclearness in communication that leads to a problem for both the writer and reader. However, it can also be used to attract the reader's attention and draw interest especially in newspaper headlines (Samaila, 2015). The importance of headlines cannot be overstressed as headlines and often photos are what attract the readers' interest into a newspaper, thus, due care, concise and correct language is key to effectively communicate and sell the stories to the readers (Tereszkiewicz, 2012). Hameed and Ammar (2011) proffer that ambiguous headlines hinder readers from grasping the true meaning of the article and it sometimes causes them to skip or read half the content.

Therefore, the study researched on the structural ambiguity that occurs in the headlines of *The Namibian* newspaper and explained the several meanings in each ambiguous headline. Emphasis is placed on *The Namibian* newspaper since out of 11 newspapers in Namibia (New Era, *The Namibian*, Allgemeine Zeitung, Namibian Sun, Republikein, Namibia Economist, Informanté, Namibia Today, Windhoek Observer and The Southern Times), it has the highest reach with 313000 readers on Mondays to Thursdays and 624000 readers on Fridays (Remmet, 2019). In analysing structural ambiguity, the researcher draws tree diagrams to expose the ambiguity of a phrase or sentence. Also, the application of tree diagrams has been chosen as they are mostly used by researchers to explain all of the possible phrases or sentences created from a language (Kristian, 2018).

1.2 Statement of the problem

It is suggested by Nwala (2017), Alozi and Akpevweoghene (2017) that editors should always use secondary headlines called sub-heads or deck heads for readers to obtain reasonable interpretations of intentional or unintentional ambiguous headlines and to maintain the interest of the reader to read the content of the headline. Language of media has ambiguity and failure (Nwala, 2017).

Ritan (2018) also adds that even if the media intentionally creates an ambiguous headline, it should not cause communication misunderstanding as news headlines are meant to inform and not to confuse the audience. The core problem which this study intended to investigate is two-fold. Firstly, to find out the several possible meanings and interpretations of the ambiguous headlines and secondly, how these ambiguous headlines can be described within the framework of the tree diagrams.

1.3 Objectives of the study

This study was directed by the following objectives which were to:

- Explain the several meanings and interpretations in each ambiguous headline;
- Illustrate the structural ambiguity in the headlines by tree diagram; and
- Outline the causes of structural ambiguity in the headlines.

1.4 Significance of the study

The findings of this study may assist people translate or interpret ambiguous phrases or sentences and document them to achieve the right meanings in accordance with the context. It may also assist editors to be cautious with words, phrases and sentences so that readers are able to easily interpret the headlines. Additionally, the study contributes as a reference for the study of semantics and syntax in teaching and learning activity. Also, the study can be used by those who have interest in structural ambiguity.

1.5 Limitations of the study

The study is limited to ambiguous headlines from *The Namibian* newspaper, so the findings will not be generalized to other ambiguous newspaper headlines. Lastly, the researcher only got access

to a limited number of headlines online due to the fact that in order to search in the archive of *The Namibian*, an individual is required to type in a word that might link them to a specific article.

1.6 Delimitations

The study focused on linguistic ambiguity in the newspaper headlines released between 1st February 2020 and 31st December 2020 covering political, social, and sports beats in *The Namibian* Newspaper. *The Namibian* was chosen for of its popularity in the area in which this research is focused. The data of this research were only taken from the main headlines and sub-headlines of the newspaper, excluding other elements of the newspaper like advertisements, columns, content and leads.

1.7 Outline of chapters

The study consists of five chapters which are further subdivided into subtitles. A broad overview of the study is outlined in the introduction section of Chapter One. Additionally, it also defines the background of the study, the statement of the problem, significance of the study, limitations of the study and delimitations of the study. Moreover, Chapter Two presents a literature review that aids in understanding structural ambiguity and its causes. Besides, this chapter also provides the theories that inform the study. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology used for the study. Chapter Four explains the several possible meanings and interpretations of the ambiguous headlines and describes them using a tree diagram. Lastly, Chapter Five completes the study by highlighting the results of the study and points out the recommendations.

1.8 Chapter summary

Chapter One provided an introduction of structural ambiguity in newspaper headlines. The chapter contains the introduction, background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions,

significance of the study, limitations and delimitations of the study. The next chapter (Chapter Two) reviews the literature related to investigating structural ambiguity in newspaper headlines in other studies already conducted.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review that has been created on the topic under research. However, it seems that much work has been done on the subject under study, but the gaps that may have been missed by previous studies can be identified by consulting the literature.

Creswell (2003) proffers that a literature review provides a framework to determine the importance of research and a benchmark for comparing research results with other findings. The chapter begins with previous studies done on this research topic to discuss how similar studies have been done in the past and to indicate the strengths and weaknesses of existing research. Thereafter, the chapter then elaborates on syntax it is the means to answer the research question. This is followed by the definition of ambiguity and narrowed down to structural ambiguity and how it can be identified as it is the core of the research. The chapter also outlines the functions of newspaper headlines to provide an overview of their structure. Lastly, the chapter concludes by outlining the theoretical framework that guided the study.

2.2 Previous studies on ambiguity

As much as headlines are precise and concise, some readers can still find it challenging to grasp the true meaning of the headline because of ambiguity. There are several studies which were done to analyse ambiguity in headlines. To begin with, Tohirov and Khamahani (2013) investigated structural and lexical ambiguity written by native and non-native journalists. The study sought to know the differences between ambiguity written by native and non-native by dispensing questionnaires to university students. Tohirov and Khamahani (2013) presented two sets of data

which are lexical and structural ambiguities and the respondents had to answer to them. The study revealed that the headlines that were written by native journalists were more ambiguous than the headlines that are written by the non-native.

However, contrary to Tohirov and Khamahani's (2013) study, Triangga's (2014) study proves quite the opposite when it comes to natives. Triangga (2014) used the qualitative method to obtain data regarding the types of ambiguity and the several meanings that occur in the headline news of Jakarta Post and New York Times. The study focused on lexical and grammatical ambiguities in the headline news of Jakarta post and New York Times. Ullmann's (1977) theory of ambiguity was employed in the study and it states that ambiguity has three structural levels: phonological, lexical, and grammatical. The results of the study showed that the Jakarta Post produced more ambiguous headlines than the New York Times, particularly when it comes to grammatical ambiguity. Perhaps it is because the journalist or editor is not a native speaker, so they may have trouble putting together the messages in English. Also, the journalist and editor may be creating ambiguous headlines on purpose, as an interesting headline will attract more readers' attention to be able to read the entire article. However, the use of some technical terms in the headlines of the New York Times can create confusion for readers.

Moreover, readers sometimes get unclear descriptions of news just by reading the headline. Sevida (2015) explains structural ambiguity in Yahoo news headlines using the X-bar theory and describes the causes of structural ambiguity in the news headlines. The study concluded that structural ambiguity occurs in Yahoo headlines because of the placement of modifiers such as the prepositional phrases, relative clauses, adjectival phrases, and noun phrases. The location of the modifier becomes ambiguous as it can be added to the next or previous phrase or lexical category in the heading that has more than one interpretive meaning to the reader. The results of structural

ambiguity in headings explained by the X-bar theory clearly shows that the modifier placement can be made as an addition to the next or preceding lexical category or phrasal category or in a headline sentence. If the headline is a phrase, the headline is the lexical category. If the headline is a sentence, then the headline is the time marker of the verb in the headline. Sevida (2015) indicates that the cause of structural ambiguity is mostly because of the prepositional phrase. Also, phrasal categories that cause structural ambiguity are noun phrases, adjective phrases and the relative clause.

Furthermore, Taufiqoh (2017) centred the research on ambiguity in the headlines of BBC News. The study examined the ambiguous meaning of the headlines about the 2017 French elections on the BBC's online news. The study focused on semantic analysis, which emphasizes on words, phrases and sentences with ambiguous meanings. Methodologically, Taufiqoh (2017) used a descriptive qualitative design as the research design, since the purpose of the study is to analyse the data in depth. In addition, the study provides a complete description and interpretation of the meaning of ambiguity. For data collection, data were collected online from the official BBC website, also, the researcher uses Kreidler's (1998) theory to analyse data, which divides ambiguity into three types, namely; lexical ambiguity, referential ambiguity, and syntactic ambiguity. Based on the selected theory, the researcher tries to describe how ambiguity is found in newspapers through their headlines. From the analysis, the result of Taufiqoh's (2017) study showed that lexical ambiguity is more common in the headlines of the 2017 French elections than referential and syntactic ambiguity. The researcher found that there are 22 headlines out of 127 headlines classified as ambiguous. In particular, 12 dates of lexical ambiguity are caused by polysemy and figurative meanings, while another 8 dates of referential ambiguity are caused by an indefinite referential expression, the common or specifically used pronoun "tu" and anaphora, which are due

to the lack of clarity of the staff pronoun. Furthermore, two dates of syntactic ambiguity are caused by two words coordinated by the conjunction "and" and a head with an internal modifier and an external modifier. Based on the result of the analysis, the researcher suggests for the next researcher interested in learning and analysing the similar topic about the meaning of ambiguity. Future researchers can do more analysis by examining the ambiguity of headlines in business or sports news. In addition, the next researcher can also analyse the meaning.

Yastanti and Setiwati (2018) researched on ambiguity but focused on the song lyrics of the movie 'Moana'. The study defines the ambiguity found in the lyrics and the data are analysed using a descriptive method. After completing the research, the results showed that there are 26 ambiguities 8 structural and 18 lexical.

After analysing these past researches comparatively and contrastively, the difference between these previous researches and the current study is that this study solely focuses on structural ambiguity and the object of this research is the headlines from *The Namibian* newspaper. Whilst, the research employed by Khamahani and Tohivor (2013) focused on both structural and lexical ambiguities in English newspaper headlines written by native and non-native journalists. Also, Sevida (2015) researched on structural ambiguity, but the study used the X-bar theory to analyse ambiguity. Meanwhile, the current study employed tree diagrams to analyse the structural ambiguity in the headlines of *The Namibian* newspaper. Lastly, Triangga (2015) employed Kreidler (1998) theory in analysing data which separates ambiguity into three types: lexical, structural, and referential. This study used Clare's (1993) theory that states that ambiguity happens when it is understood in two or more possible ways of senses and further defining structural ambiguity to when a sentence or phrase is deemed ambiguous which is the focus of the research.

Although, there are other studies done on ambiguity, those studies (Arizona, 2016; Hussein, 2017; Yastanti & Setiwati, 2018) predominantly focus on the classification and description of ambiguity. Only a few studies (Charina, 2017; Tahirov & Khamahari 2013) focus on ambiguity in daily language use or teaching. Additionally, despite the contribution brought upon by other studies, it has been suggested that more work should be done in the investigation of ambiguity in newspaper headlines (Tirannga, 2014). However, the missing gap that the proposed study tries to address is to determine the structural ambiguities in *The Namibian* headlines and their interpretations.

2.3 Syntax

Headlines are usually made up of phrases and sentences and therefore syntax may be used to better understand the arrangement of words. There are different definitions of syntax, Radford (2004) defines syntax as a way of studying how sentences and phrases are made up of words. Also, it is the study of how languages structure their syntax. Another definition by Tallerman (2011) is that syntax is the study of language syntax patterns. According to Radford (1997), syntax focuses on how words can be laced together to make up phrases and sentences.

Furthermore, Smith (2015) proffers that in linguistics, syntax can be challenging because one needs to know how to combine words together to construct a phrase or sentence and avoid ambiguity at the same time. Despite understanding the full meaning of the words, one still finds it difficult to place words in a sentence and at the same time making grammatical and logical sense. The function of a sentence in a text or dialogue is to convey certain information to readers or listeners. The arrangement of words in a sentence can produce specific meanings and the rearrangement of the same words can give readers or listeners different meanings.

Syntax regulates the correct component parts of a sentence and explains the type of its parts of a sentence, sometimes called grammatical category and its grammatical function. According to Haegeman and Wekker (1985) “Constituents are like building blocks which pattern in certain ways to form larger and larger units, the largest units being called a sentence” (p. 5). In other words, constituents are all subparts of sentences. The hierarchy of sentences constituents can be illustrated below:

Sentence ↔ Clause ↔ Phrase ↔ Word ↔ Morpheme

Syntax is an integral part of linguistics which provides meaning to a sentence (Nurradiatumardiah, 2020). Yule (2010) admits that sentences become ambiguous when they lack syntax properties. There are many rules involved in learning grammar. The easiest way to understand grammar is to learn through the formed tree diagram and use grammatical rules. If people want to draw a tree diagram of a sentence or phrase, they must understand the grammatical rules, as they will have a hard time understanding them without knowing these rules.

From the previous definitions of syntax, it can be concluded that syntax is the form or rule of how to recognise the structure of words, phrases, and sentences to avoid ambiguity. However, the study employed Carnie’s (2013) theory of syntax that studies the way the language works and the structure of sentences, the level of language between words and the meaning of sentences. Learning grammar is one of the important things people should consider if they want to be proficient in a language (Nurradiatumardiah, 2020). In the case of understanding whether or not a headline is ambiguous, it is imperative to understand syntax for further interpretation of a headline.

2.3.1 Part of speech

The role of a word in a sentence actually helps to understand the sentence. However, if the role of a word changes, the meaning can become completely different. Ambiguous headlines are made up of different parts of speech and understanding what they are and how they can relate can better help identify ambiguity in a headline. Therefore, the parts of speech are important because they show how words relate to each other. Part of speech is the traditional term for the grammatical category of words (Crystal, 2008). It is also called a syntactic category or part of speech. The part of speech explains the role of words in sentences (Carnie, 2013). Carnie (2013) divides parts of speech into ten types: noun (N), verb (V), adjective (Adj), adverb (Adv), determiner (Det), preposition (P), complementizer (C), tense (T), negation (Neg) and conjunction (Conj) but only eight are used in this study. The negation and the tense part of speech are semantically defined unlike the rest that depend on where they are in the sentence and the research focused only on the syntactical view point.

2.3.1.1 Noun (N)

A noun can be defined as a name of a place, person or thing and a noun phrase includes an article or other modifiers and a noun (Crystal, 2008). The examples are: cellphone, school, perfume etc.

2.3.1.2 Determiner (Det)

According to Crystal (2008), there are a few classifications that are referred to as determiners, that come before the NP or utilised to identify the reference of a noun, like; both, all, double, one, a, an, these, that, his, same, other, cardinal numerals etc.

2.3.1.3 Verb (V)

A verb is made up of an intransitive verb and transitive verb. An intransitive verb is one that is not accompanied by a NP (Crystal, 2008), for instance: The match ended. While, transitive verb is one that is accompanied by NP, for instance: A rampage ended the game.

Nonetheless, verbs are not always action words. Some are ‘express being’ which consist as a form of the linking verb or verb ‘to be’: am, are, were, is and was. Furthermore, there are few verbs that act as linking verbs, like appear, feel, remain, become, look, smell, taste, sound and seem.

2.3.1.4 Adverb (Adv)

Stageberg and Goodman (1977) state that an adverb is a word that modifies a verb. Briefly, adverb is created by including the inflection –ly, -wise or words such as slowly, rapidly, happily, onwards, afterwards, soon, left, often, now, tomorrow, yesterday, today, early, fast and the list goes on. Moreover, the head of an adverb phrase is an adverb.

2.3.1.5 Adjective (Adj)

Adjectives are words that can be optionally attached besides the article in the noun phrase (Stageberg & Goodman, 1977). To establish if a word is an adjective, it can usually be visible by derivational endings of its word, like –ic, ible or able, -ful, -less, -ous and so forth. Moreover, an adjective can also be comparable by grammatical endings –er comparative; larger than and –est for superlative; largest and other comparisons, such as more and most, namely more beautiful than and most beautiful.

2.3.1.6 Preposition (P)

Words such as; in, over, past, with, for, to, from, by, above, among, on account of and so forth, are called prepositions (Crystal, 2008).

2.3.1.7 Conjunction (Conj)

Sentences and phrases are connected by conjunctions (Stageberg & Goodman, 1977). They are made up of coordinators namely: for, and, or, but and so forth. Also, they include subordinates such as: if, although, that, as soon as, so that etc. Examples of coordinating conjunctions that link to the noun phrase by words such as ‘or’ ‘and’:

- a) The daughter and mother greeted Hamwandi
- b) They struggled to get a taxi or a bus to go home in Katutura.

Moreover, other conjoined words may also occur in both a verb phrase and prepositional phrase. For example; Akamwele dated Peter and married Natangwe.

2.3.1.8 Complementiser (C)

Complementiser is a term used to refer to subordinate conjunctions in embedded sentences that mark the complement type (Crystal, 2008). Complementisers link structures together, but integrate one clause into another instead of keeping them at the same level. These examples are because, unless, since and so on.

2.3.2 Phrase

Headlines are usually made up of phrases which do not convey a complete thought and ambiguity can also be caused by these phrases. Phrases usually modify expressions and may sometimes be unclear. According to Crystal (2008), a phrase is a group of words expressed as a single unit. It can be divided into seven categories: Noun Phrase (NP), Verb Phrase (VP), Adverbial Phrase (AP), Adjective Phrase (AP), Prepositional Phrase (PP), Complement Phrase (CP) and Infinitive Phrase

(IP), but only six were used in this study. The infinitive phrase was not used because it can act as a noun phrase, adverbial phrase or adjective phrase thus acting as a duplication to the other phrases.

2.3.2.1 Noun Phrase (NP)

Stageberg and Goodman (1977) state that a noun phrase consists of a noun and all the words and word groups that belong with a noun and cluster around it. The noun itself is called the ‘headword’ or ‘head’ and the other words and word groups are modifiers of the noun. Some examples of a noun phrase are: a vice chancellor, a Range Rover, the exercise book, the pink rose, some houses, her silver watch and so on.

Nonetheless, there are many different nouns; pronoun that may be described as a noun in noun phrases, such as:

1. Personal pronoun: You, I, she, he, we, it, they, you, me, him, us, her, them
2. Possessive pronoun: Yours, mine, hers, his, yours, ours, theirs, and by including- ‘s (or apostrophe) for example: Akamwele’s book, the famous dancer’s new video.
3. Reflexive pronoun: Yourself, myself, herself, itself, himself, ourselves, themselves, yourselves
4. Possessive determiner: Your, my, her, his, our, its, their, your
5. Demonstrative pronoun: that, his, those, these
6. Indefinite pronoun: Everyone, everybody, everything, somebody, somewhere, anybody, something, anyone, nobody, anything, no one, nothing.
7. Interrogative relative pronoun: who, whom, what, that, which.

2.3.2.2 Verb Phrase (VP)

According to Stageberg and Goodman (1977), a verb phrase is made up of a verb and all the words and word groups that connect with the verb and group around it. The ‘headword’ is usually the verb itself or the ‘head’, while the other words and word groups are the auxiliaries, modifiers, and verb complements.

2.3.2.3 Adverbial Phrase (AdvP)

Adverb phrase happens in a VP or in an AdjP. Adverbs and adjectives are referred to as modifiers since an adverb modifies verbs and adjective modifies nouns. Also, adverbs and adjectives can both be expressed in degree of comparison, comparative, and superlative degree. For instance: slow, slower, slowest and soft, softer, softest.

2.3.2.4 Adjective Phrase (AdjP)

Additionally, when an adjective comes before a degree modifier, it is called an adjective phrase (AdjP). Veit (1986) states that “the two words constitute a phrase and so can be called an adjective phrase or AdjP” (p. 28). For instance: Paul’s extremely emotional letter won their sympathy almost entirely.

2.3.2.5 Prepositional Phrase (PP)

According to Stageberg and Goodman (1977), “Prepositions are usually followed by a noun, noun phrase, personal pronoun, or noun-substitute (object of prepositions) called prepositional phrase” (pp. 242-254).

2.3.2.6 Complement Phrase (CP)

According to Crystal (2008) “Complementizer Phrase is a phrase that serves to complete the meaning of a noun or a verb in a sentence” (p. 93). Sometimes, it can be referred to as a

complement clause. For instance, ‘that’ and wh- clauses. “She never expected that you would go, Elisabeth never knows how to say yes, and Elisabeth has hope that he will love her”.

2.3.3 Sentence

Sentences are the biggest primary units as far as which the grammar of a language is coordinated (Crystal, 2008). A sentence is a syntactic unit made up of a set of clauses or phrases that are used to express statements, questions, orders or interjections. It is usually written in capital letters and ends with a punctuation mark. An example of the sentence is ‘What a fantastic morning!’, ‘You can come closer and take a muffin.’, ‘Will you close the door?’.

2.3.4 Tree Diagram

According to Baker (1998), tree diagrams are widely used in textbooks and academic papers. The author argues that they provide a quick and effective representation of the basic organisational characteristics of sentences. Bornstain (1997) also adds that the tree diagram can present the hierarchical structure of a sentence. Also, Kristian (2018) states that utilising tree diagrams is one of the mostly used ways to describe a visual representation of the syntactic structure. The tree diagram shows that in every sentence, words are grouped into phrases and these phrases can be grouped to other phrases, and it is through this those sentences are formed. It is through these tree diagrams that this organisation is described.

Furthermore, Ritan (2018) notes that when parsing a sentence, there are sentence structure rules in the transformational grammar which are illustrated by a tree diagram also called ‘sentence mark’ as it shows the hierarchical structure of the sentence.

The study employed tree diagrams due to the fact that each phrasal category has a head of its alike syntactic structure. Commonly, ambiguity is analysed by semantic interpretation nevertheless in

this research, the ambiguity will be analysed by syntax view and the tree diagrams will illustrate the different interpretations through word order in the headlines.

Bornstain (1997) also pointed out that there are some commonly used symbols in sentence structure rules:

S= Sentence

V= Verb

N= Noun

VP= Verb phrase

NP= Noun phrase

Pron= Pronoun

Prep= Preposition

Adv= Adverb

Adj= Adjective

Aux=To establish the tense used

Pred= Predicate (noun, adverb, adjective)

M= Modal auxiliary (Can, must, shall, will, may)

Det= Determiner (definite article 'the', indefinite article 'a' and 'an',

demonstrative 'that', 'this', 'these', 'those',

quantifier 'several', 'some', 'many', 'much', etc.)

Vi= Intransitive verb (A verb without an object)

VT= Transitive verb (a Verb with a direct object)

VI= Linking verb (become, seem)

Comp= Complement (adjective or noun)

PP= Prepositional Phrase

Adv.P= Adverb phrase

Adj.P= Adjective phrase

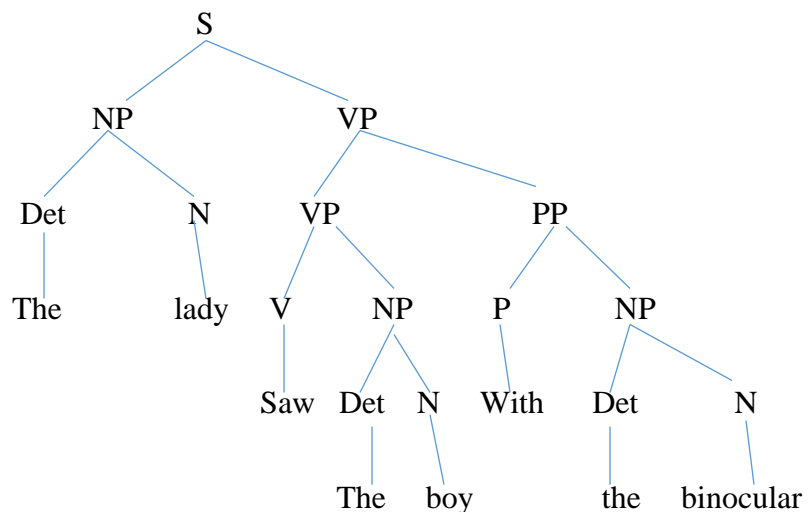
Prop N= Proper name

Pres=Present tense

Past=Past tense

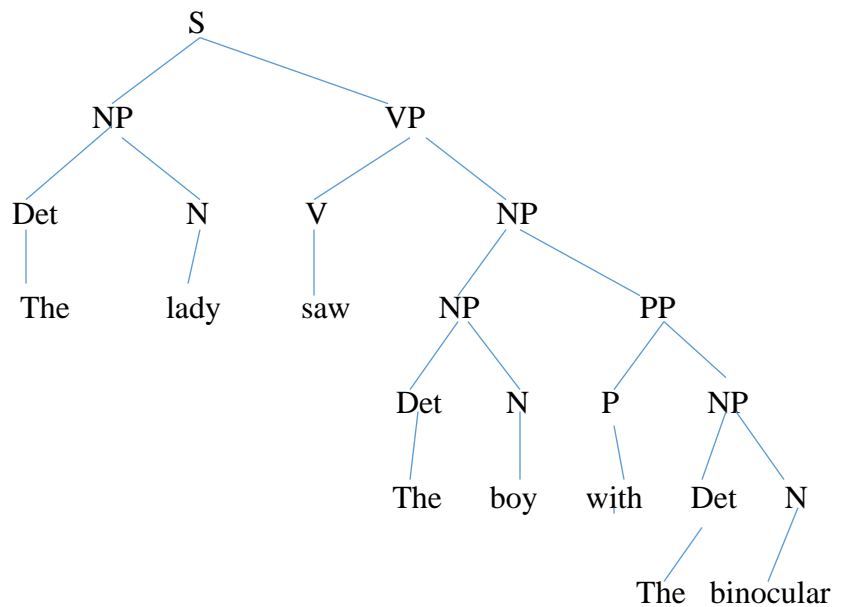
Below are examples of utilising tree diagrams to analyse structural ambiguity in a sentence “The lady saw the boy with the binocular”.

i) Structural ambiguity



The tree diagram above shows that the word ‘saw’ is directly linked to the noun phrase (NP) ‘The lady’ and it forms as the verb phrase (VP). After that, the verb phrase (VP) ‘saw the boy’ linked with the prepositional phrase (PP) ‘with the binocular’ which becomes the modifier of the VP. This indicates that the sentence means that “using the binocular, the lady saw the boy”.

ii) Structural ambiguity



The tree diagram shows that the prepositional phrase “with the binocular” becomes a modifier of the noun phrase (NP) ‘the lady’ and it forms the noun phrase (NP). After, the noun phrase (NP) ‘the boy with the binocular’ linked with the verb ‘saw’. This indicates that the meaning of the sentence is “The lady saw the boy and the boy had a binocular”.

2.4 Defining Ambiguity

Grammar, semantics, syntax or a small punctuation may all contribute to the meaning of a sentence and can sometimes lead to ambiguity. Empson (2014) states that in language terms, ambiguity is briefly defined as double or multiple understandings. This may be due to the presence of a

polysemous word in a sentence or merely due to the organisation of the words in a sentence (Salih, 2015). Different scholars have perceived ambiguity in diverse ways. Clare (1993) for instance defined ambiguity as a word, phrase or sentence that can be interpreted in two or more ways. Whilst Rusche (1980) suggests that ambiguity needs to be extended to any verbal nuance which provides room to substitute reactions to the same linguistic component. Hoefler (2003) on the other hand argued that ambiguity is more than one meaning given to the same single communication.

Despite these various definitions of ambiguity, the scholars all have one common opinion and that is ambiguity happens when there are two or more meanings to an expression. Ambiguity may weaken the intended importance of the data of a discourse. Also, it may confuse a reader who tries to establish the intended meaning provided in a text and therefore losing the communication conveyed. It is during such a time that Nwala (2017) believes that meaning then becomes personal. Therefore, Crystal and Davy (1969) were not wrong to emphasize that writers should by all means try and understand their text from all angles, especially due to the fact that people are diverse and might interpret a text differently. The disadvantage of reading an ambiguous text is merely on the fact that one does not receive immediate feedback.

From the foregoing, there are two types of ambiguity and Belleri (2014) outlines them as lexical and structural ambiguity. According to Fromkin et al (2010), lexical ambiguity occurs when a lexical item in a phrase has more than one sense and structural ambiguity is ambiguity caused by a group of words together. Ndimele (1997) indicates to the foregoing by declaring that “structural ambiguity results from the way an entire sentence is organised to produce several interpretations” (p. 75). However, the interpretation of phrases with two or more possible meanings may not be due to the way the entire sentence is organised as Ndimele’s (1997) opinion would like one to

accept as true, especially when taken literally, but due to the word or the syntactic structure of the phrase in the sentence. This is exactly what one can see in the headlines of the newspaper.

2.5 Surface and deep structure

According to Sevida (2015) every sentence has a surface and deep structure. The deep structure is the abstract grammatical structure related to its meaning. At the same time, the surface structure is related to the pronunciation of the sentence. For instance, ‘The shooting of Monica was awful’, this sentence can have two different interpretations. Firstly, the sentence has various deep structures but has the same surface structure.

(The shooting of Monica was awful)-Surface Structure

Possible meanings:

1st sense: Someone (not indicated) shot Monica. - Deep Structure

2nd sense: Monica shot someone (not indicated)- Deep Structure

2.6 Structural ambiguity

Structural ambiguity is sometimes referred to as syntactic ambiguity or grammatical ambiguity in syntax. According to Nordquist (2019) in English grammar, structural ambiguity is the existence of two or more possible meanings in a single phrase or sequence of words. For instance, the phrase “the new boys and girls”, has ambiguous meaning and is therefore structurally ambiguous. It is equivalent with new boys and new girls, also with new boys and just girls. These two meanings can be shown with square brackets:

1. New [boys and girls]

2. [New boys] and girls.

Referencing from the above example, the first bracket shows that the adjective ‘new’ modifies the entire phrase ‘boys and girl’ and the second bracket shows that the adjective ‘new’ modifies only the word ‘boys’.

Furthermore, Nurradiatumardiah (2020) states that there are two types of structural ambiguity, namely deep-structure and surface-structure ambiguity. Deep structural ambiguity relates to different interpretations that depend on the grammatical relationships in each sentence as subject and direct object. So, the ambiguity of the surface structure is usually related to the grouping range of various words.

2.7 Causes of structural ambiguity

The most identified cause of structural ambiguity is attachment ambiguity (Hirst, 1987). Ullmann (1997) further adds that structural ambiguity usually happens because of grammatical forms or amphibology. Amphibology is defined by Ullmann (1977) as a phrase that is made deliberately ambiguous. Besides the causes established by the two authors, Fromkin et al (2010) also have a theory on the causes of structural ambiguity and they are divided into six.

2.7.1 Modification scope

Modification scope occurs when a phrase or sentence has two constituents of the same category as NPs linked together with a conjunction like ‘and’ ‘or’. For instance, “Vilho had two cups of hot chocolate and coffee”. This sentence may lead one to ambiguity since it can be understood as ‘Vilho had two cups of hot chocolate and two cups of coffee’. Also, it can be interpreted as Vilho had two cups of hot chocolate and a cup of coffee.

2.7.2 Negation scope

Negation is a grammatical operation in which a proposition is replaced by a proposition that says otherwise. For instance, “All of you won’t fail”, this sentence can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly ‘all of you will fail’ or it can be negated to mean ‘some will fail and some will pass’.

2.7.3 Active or passive meaning

An active sentence can be described as the subject that is doing the action and the receiver is the object as they received the action. Whilst in a passive sentence, the subject of the sentence received the action. A sentence with active and passive meanings may puzzle readers. For instance, “He has a student to help” which can be understood as ‘there is a student who needs his help’ and ‘he has a student who will help others’. In such a situation, the readers cannot establish whether the sentence is active or passive.

2.7.4 Present participle (-ing form)

The present participle is a word composed of verbs and can be used as an adjective or verb tense. For instance, “Vilho likes teasing girls”. It can be understood in two ways, either ‘Vilho likes to tease girls’ or ‘Vilho likes girls who tease’.

2.7.5 Prepositional phrase as modifier or sentence adjunct

Prepositional phrase (pp) can be linked to more than one phrase. For instance, “Vilho ate the doughnut on the kitchen counter”. This sentence could mean that Vilho ate the doughnut while on the kitchen counter and therefore ‘Vilho’ is attached to the ‘kitchen counter’. Also, it could mean that Vilho ate the doughnut that was found on the kitchen counter and therefore ‘the doughnut’ becomes attached to the ‘kitchen counter’.

2.7.6 Possessive or objective pronoun

The present participle is a word composed of verbs and can be used as an adjective or verb tense. For instance, “she has his work”. ‘his’ here can be utilised as a possessive pronoun to ‘work’, which then means ‘she has the work owned by him, or as an object ‘she has’ which means ‘she has work that she needs to give to him’. In this sentence, the readers cannot establish if the sentence is possessive or an objective pronoun.

2.8 News headlines

A daily paper article or a news story comprises of a few basic elements such as a headline, fundamental body and visual components. In online articles, there can be extra links, a space for comments and suggestions (Tereszkiewicz, 2012). So, headlines are a necessary part of any journalistic article. A news headline may be a basic and brief expression that sums up the content of a news article (Bonyadi & Samuel, 2013).

2.8.1 Functions of news headlines

News headlines have multiple functions. Firstly, news headlines can provide information functions as they provide summaries or summaries of news content (Brone & Coulson, 2010). Secondly, news headlines are used to persuade readers to keep reading news content. Therefore, the news headlines are used to maximise the value of the news and the entire newspaper. Thirdly, news headlines are used to reshape readers’ minds by directing readers’ attention to specific angles of the news (Bednarek & Caple, 2012).

2.8.2 Characteristics of news headlines

News headlines use visual and linguistic characteristics to make them attractive to readers (Borne and Coulson, 2010). By using the right font type and size, type face and layout, news headlines should be visually appealing (Bednarek & Caple, 2012). This study has identified headlines using

the description by Prateepchaikul (2010) which states that news headlines must be accurate, concise, simple, clear and up to date. News headlines must avoid duplication and redundancy. Therefore, the ellipsis can reasonably be used to fit the limited space of news headlines and attract the attention of readers (Prateepchaikul, 2010). Ambiguity can be used to motivate readers to continue reading to eliminate the ambiguity (Brone & Coulson, 2010). However, ambiguity can frustrate readers and cause them to give up reading (Al-Janaby & Abed, 2011). Ambiguous headlines are not necessarily ineffective but understanding the possible interpretations may assist a reader in weighing the option on whether to read the entire article or not.

2.9 Theoretical framework

The goal of this research is to provide understanding about the phenomena of structural ambiguity found in *The Namibian* newspaper headlines. The core-problem which the study intended to investigate is two-fold. Firstly, to find out the several possible meanings of the structurally ambiguous headlines and secondly to describe the structurally ambiguous headlines within the framework of the tree diagrams.

To begin with, to establish the kind of ambiguity the study employed the theory of Clare (1993). The theory states that structural ambiguity occurs when sentences or phrases can be interpreted in two or more senses. Also, the study employed the theory of syntax by Carnie (2013) to identify structurally ambiguous headlines. The theory of tree diagram by Bornstain's (1997) was used to explain structural ambiguity. It assisted the researcher to show all the possible phrases or sentences that contained ambiguity. To encode the tree diagrams, Carnie's (2013) theory of part of speech and Crystals (2008) phrase theory were utilised. In solving structural ambiguity, the researcher used the causes of structural ambiguity by Fromkin et al (2010).

Finally, the study employed the theory from Fromkin et al (1991) about syntactic rules. The rules are stipulated below:

Rule 1

S- NP VP: This is the basic rule that a sentence should acquire. A sentence should include a noun phrase and verb phrase.

Rule 2

S- NP (Aux) VP: This is the extension of rule 1. This rule entails that should a sentence contain an auxiliary verb, the auxiliary verb must be drawn into a different node. Auxiliary verbs should not be included into the VP node.

Rule 3

NP- (Det) (Adj) N: This rule entails that a noun phrase can consist of a determiner-adjective-noun, determiner-noun, adjective-noun or sometimes only a noun.

Rule 4

NP-That S: This rule entails that all sentences that are following the words that are included into the NP node.

Rule 5

NP- Pronoun: This rule entails that a pronoun is included into NP node.

Rule 6

VP-V-V (NP) (PP) (Adj): This rule entails that a verb phrase may be a mixture of verb-noun phrase-prepositional phrase-adverb, verb-noun phrase, or verb only.

Rule 7

PP-P (NP): This rule entails that a prepositional phrase can be a mixture of a prepositional word and noun phrase, or a prepositional only.

Ritan's (2018) study on ambiguity and tree structure of sentences in home movie used Fromkin et al (1991) syntactic rules and indicated that sentences may be grammatically correct and still be senseless. The study added that a properly constructed sentence may still be ambiguous or have no meaning at all. However, despite this observation from Ritan (2018), the current study employed this theory because the headlines chosen all had to have more than one meaning and be syntactically correct.

2.10 Chapter summary

In this chapter, some of the related studies that were conducted by other researchers on ambiguity found in newspaper headlines were discussed. This chapter also provides an understanding of grammar as it is the core of the research. Structural ambiguity is the principal reason why this research is conducted thus understanding the theory about ambiguity is also necessary. Syntactic rules, parts of speech, phrases and tree structure theories are reviewed in this chapter as they are the means to answer the research problems. The next chapter outlines the methods that have been employed in carrying out this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter Three of this study outlines the methodology of research. The research methodology identifies and justifies the methods utilised to investigate structural ambiguity in headlines of *The Namibian*. It covers the research approach and design, the research population and sample, research instruments, procedure, data analysis and research ethics of the investigation.

3.2 Research design

Research design is a framework for generating evidence, which is chosen to answer the research objectives of the research (Bryman, 2016). Yin (2011) supports this idea by defining research design as a logical model; the design serving as a plan which covers the management of one's research. This research was carried out from the qualitative research methods perspective and it also used desktop comparative research methods to analyse structurally ambiguous headlines. The qualitative method is a method in which the researcher does not focus primarily on quantitative or statistical and numerical views of the phenomenon under investigation, but rather focuses on an in-depth analysis of the problem under investigation.

According to Crossman (2017), qualitative research is a type of social science research that collects and processes non-numerical data and attempts to interpret the meaning of these data through the investigation of target groups of places. The qualitative method is considered the most suitable method for this study as it will identify the ambiguous headlines and their possible meanings stated. The advantage of using the qualitative method is that it is explanatory, aimed at providing extensive understanding of the subject and its contextual setting (Wahyuni, 2012).

Furthermore, no fieldwork was carried out in this research since it was limited to desktop design due to the qualitative nature of the research. In a desktop study, researchers do not need to do fieldwork but instead use available resources such as: books, the internet and other publications. Also, a case study is considered an appropriate research design for the current study. Creswell (2009) establishes that research design describes how research questions relate to research. The study uses selected headlines in *The Namibian* newspaper, to explain and describe the specific circumstances that led the researcher to adopt the case study. A case study is a phenomenon that allows critical inquiries about data related to a particular study (Somekh & Lewin, 2005).

3.3 Population

According to Creswell (2014), population can be defined as a group of individuals with the same characteristics. Whilst, Bhattacharjee (2012) defines population as individuals, units, objects, or events that can be considered in a research survey. This means that the population is the largest board or group of people or other units being consulted. Qualitative researchers extract their data from many sources, not only from a variety of people but possibly also from objects, textual materials, audio visuals and electronic records (Leedy & Omrod, 2010). The research population in question does not come from a single source; it contains all headlines from *The Namibian* newspaper. However, only the structurally ambiguous headlines were analysed.

3.4 Sample

According to Creswell (2014), “a sample is a subgroup of the target population that the researcher plans to study for generalizing about the target population” (p. 160). It is most impossible for a researcher to study the entire population of interest; instead, the researcher selects a subset or sample from that population. There are different sampling methods which can be divided into two

categories: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Leedy and Omrod (2010) believe that probability sampling includes simple random sampling, proportional stratified sampling, cluster sampling and systematic sampling. Whereas, non-probability sampling includes convenience sampling, quota sampling and intentional purposive sampling.

The study employed a non-probability sampling approach to analyse structurally ambiguous headlines. This type of sampling approach is beneficial in choosing elements that are used to give useful information in solving the research problem. The study used the purposive sampling technique which falls under the non-probability sampling approach in coming up with the much needed information which addressed the research objectives.

Additionally, in purposive sampling data is selected or searched according to the pre-selection criteria of the research question. The researcher chose all ambiguous headlines as the pre-selected criteria, then the researcher intentionally selected structurally ambiguous headlines from 1st February 2020 to 31 December 2020. By using purposive sampling, the researcher developed a better understanding of ambiguity.

3.5 Procedure

The study used a desktop study where data were collected through an intense reading and critical analysis of the chosen headlines. In collecting the data, the researcher went through some steps. Firstly, from *The Namibian* official page, Facebook and Instagram pages, the researcher typed news articles in the search column and then limited the search from 1st February to 31 December 2020. Secondly, the researcher read and checked all the headlines to find any ambiguous phrases or sentences in these headlines. However, the headlines that were not ambiguous were not considered and the researcher did not use the research data.

Thirdly, the researcher identified the possible interpretations of those ambiguous headlines and used tree diagrams to explain structural ambiguity. Finally, the data were interpreted and the causes of ambiguity were established. Creswell (2009) notes that “research methods involve the forms of data collection, analysis and interpretation that the researcher employs in their study’ (p. 233).

3.6 Data analysis

Bhattacharjee (2012) described qualitative analysis as the analysis of data which is heavily dependent on the researchers analytic and integrative skills and personal knowledge of the social context where the data is collected. Also, Bhattacharjee (2012) further believes that in qualitative analysis, researchers must emphasize meaning rather than making explanations or predictions in order to fully understand the experience explained in the content being analysed, explained or predicted. Creswell (2003) also adds that the data analysis process involves understanding text and image data. It involves preparing data for analysis, performing different analyses, deepening the understanding of the data, representing the data and interpreting the broader meaning of the data. When analysing the data, the researcher used all the relevant theories mentioned above and took all relevant studies as references.

To analyse the data, the researcher also performed several steps. After collecting the data, the researchers used the word, phrase and sentence theory of Crystal (2008) to determine whether the ambiguity was caused by a word, phrase or sentence. However, this research only focused on phrases and sentences. Then the researcher used Clare’s (2013) theory of ambiguity to classify and re-examine headlines containing ambiguous phrases or sentences to ensure they are structurally ambiguous. As a result, the researcher used Carnie’s (2013) syntactic theory to find possible explanations for each ambiguous phrase or sentence. Bornstain’s (1997) tree diagram theory was used to reveal structural ambiguity. When encoding the tree diagram, the researcher used Carnie’s

(2013) part of speech theory and Crystal (2008) phrase theory. In resolving structural ambiguity, the Fromkin et al's (2010) theory of causes of structural ambiguity was used.

3.7 Research ethics

Research ethics include principles that guide researchers on how to conduct research without causing any harm to related entities through research ethics, researchers are warned not to deceive, violate privacy, violate rights, or prejudice (Bhattacharjee, 2012). A sense of research ethics is necessary so that researchers can make wise decisions. In the above context, the researcher has considered the ethics of research so the data collected in this study are only used for academic purposes and not for the researcher's personal interests or economic reasons. No human participants were involved as the headlines were found in the public domain and are readily accessible online. Therefore, the researcher applied for ethical exemption from the institution and received an approval for the study. Additionally, the APA referencing style was used to acknowledge all sources.

3.8 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the methodology used in this study. The research methods and design used in this study were discussed, and the reasons why the qualitative methods and case designs are the most appropriate options for the research in question are covered. Shared information about the populations and samples generated from selected populations were presented. Considering that it is impossible for the researcher to study the entire population of interest, the researcher explained why the sampling method and the selected sample were the most suitable for this study. Furthermore, the procedure for selecting the headlines analysed in this study is clearly stipulated. The next chapter presents the results of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the data that was collected. The study collected 30 structurally ambiguous headlines that were published between the 1st of February 2020 and 31st December 2020 of *The Namibian* newspaper. The purpose of the study is to depict the structural ambiguity in the headlines of *The Namibian* by using tree diagram of syntax and to find the cause of the ambiguity. The researcher used Claire's (1993) ambiguity theory to identify ambiguous headlines and then used the parts of speech theory to illustrate ambiguity using tree diagrams. The causes of ambiguity were identified using Fromkin et al.'s (1991) theory of causes of structural ambiguity.

4.2 Data presentation

The table below shows the structurally ambiguous headlines chosen from *The Namibian* newspaper:

TABLE 1: Structurally ambiguous headlines

NO.	HEADLINE	DATE (2020)
1	Charged person excused from court in lockdown	1 April
2	Namibian nurses to work in Germany	4 February
3	How to communicate with customers in a crisis	2nd April
4	Private hospital denies dumping patient	3 rd April
5	Geingob welcomes Chinese loans	6 April

6	WHO advises against travel, travel restrictions with China	13 February
7	MISA takes on Malawian deputy minister for insulting a journalist	14 February
8	Boxing star Jonas rape charge dropped	5 March
9	Shack dwellers trained in sustainable innovation	3 March
10	Managing an employee with depression	4 March
11	Reporting on the frontlines of covid-19	15 April
12	You can't over prepare for a presentation	6 March
13	Opposition sue Swapo for lockdown violation	21 April
14	China reports first new local virus case in four days	23 March
15	Nahas wants apology over audio	9 October
16	Removal company returns customers waste after they failed to pay	7 August
17	Warning against abuse of emergency numbers	11 August
18	Witness recounts death threat before killing	12 August
19	Shop employee assault draws condemnation	8 July
20	Mother appeals for help with triple joy	15 July
21	Political activists Angula remembered	17 July
22	N\$600m for school, hostel upgrades	17 July
23	Namibia gets 272m for conservation, tourism	17 July
24	Killer cuts woman's throat after threat	28 July
25	Taking care of a child with special need	29 July

26	Naule re-elected Khomas chairman	30 July
27	Namibia at 25 confirmed cases	2 June
28	Tackling corruption in government	8 June
29	Nujoma threatens Swartbooi with legal action	15 June
30	Girl (15) shot in freak accident	9 December

4.3 Data analysis

4.3.1 Datum 1

Charged person excused from court in lockdown

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by the prepositional phrase (pp) which can be linked to more than one phrase. The phrase ‘in lockdown’ can be attached to the charged person or to the court. The two interpretations are explained below:

- a) The court has excused people who are under lockdown.
- b) The court is under locked down and has therefore excused charged people.

The headline above may be misleading, especially to a reader who does not continue to read the entire article. Prepositional phrases may sometimes cause ambiguity if not placed strategically in the headline. Sevida (2015) also agrees that the cause of structural ambiguity is mostly by the prepositional phrases. It is suggested by Sevida (2015) that to avoid misleading the reader, the readers should read the whole article to comprehend the true meaning of the ambiguous headline, and this is what the researcher had to do to comprehend the title.

Below are illustrations of ambiguity using tree diagrams:

Figure 1. Datum 1a first interpretation

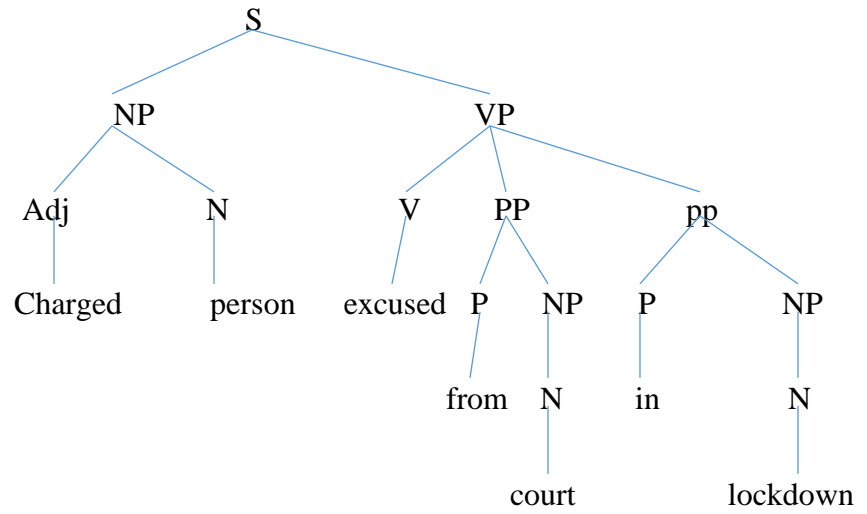
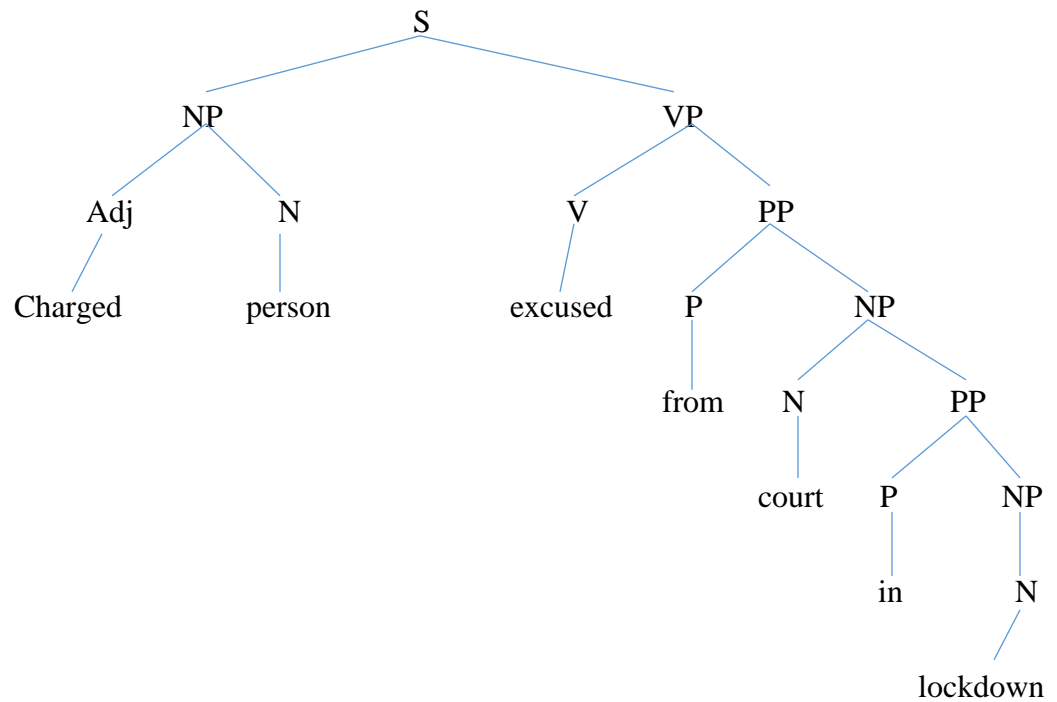


Figure 2. Datum 1b second interpretation



4.3.2 Datum 2

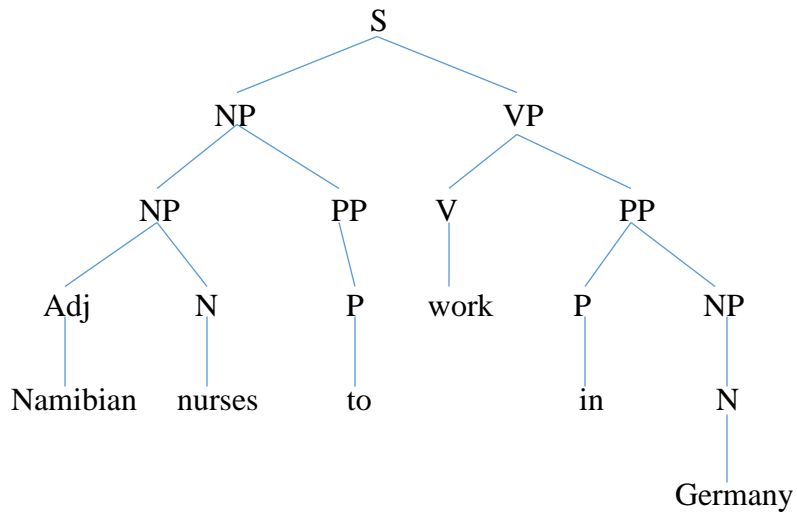
Namibian nurses to work in Germany

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by negation scope. Therefore, according to Crystal (2008), ambiguity in this headline was caused by the sentence and not phrase. The headline's expression can take scope over each other in various ways in the meaning of the sentence. After reading the article, the two interpretations are explained below:

- a) Namibian nurses will be working in Germany, probably exchanging jobs with the German ones.
- b) Some Namibian nurses will be going to work in Germany.

According to Alozie and Akpevweoghene (2017), one of the main reasons why newspaper readers do not effectively comprehend the actual messages of the journalists just by glance it for the ambiguity in the headlines. Consequently, the readers struggle to give possible meaning to the headlines which no doubt has more than one conceivable meaning. Furthermore, Fromkin et al. (2010) also have a theory on the causes of structural ambiguity and indicated that negation scope is indeed a cause of structural ambiguity. However, even though Kristian (2018) states that utilising tree diagrams is one of the mostly used ways to describe a visual representation of the syntactic structure, the above headline seems to only have one tree structure. The mere fact that the quantifier was excluded, it gives room for one to interpret the headline as being generalised to all nurses or only to some nurses. But, these interpretations somewhat cannot be exposed by the tree diagram. The illustration of the tree structure is showed below:

Figure 3. Datum 2 a and b, first and second interpretation



4.3.3 Datum 3

How to communicate with customers in a crisis

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by a prepositional phrase. The phrase ‘in a crisis’ can be attached to the person educating or to the customers. Below are the interpretations:

- a) How to communicate to customers while the organisation is in a crisis.
- b) How to communicate to a customer who themselves are in a crisis.

The ambiguity in the headline is the failure to specify who exactly is ‘in the crisis’. A customer who wants to learn how to be spoken to when they are in a midst of a crisis would be keen to read the entire article. However, it is discouraging to read an article and only to realise that its focus is on management. Syntax is an integral part of linguistics which provides meaning to a sentence (Nurradiatumardiah, 2020). Yule (2010) admits that sentences become ambiguous when they lack syntax properties. There are many rules involved in learning grammar. The easiest way to

understand grammar is to learn through the formed tree diagram and use grammatical rules. After reading the article, ambiguity in this case could have been avoided if the editors wrote:

How to provide customer service during a crisis

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. This would mean that how to communicate to customers while the organisation is in a crisis.

Below are the illustrations using tree diagrams:

Figure 4. Datum 3a first interpretation

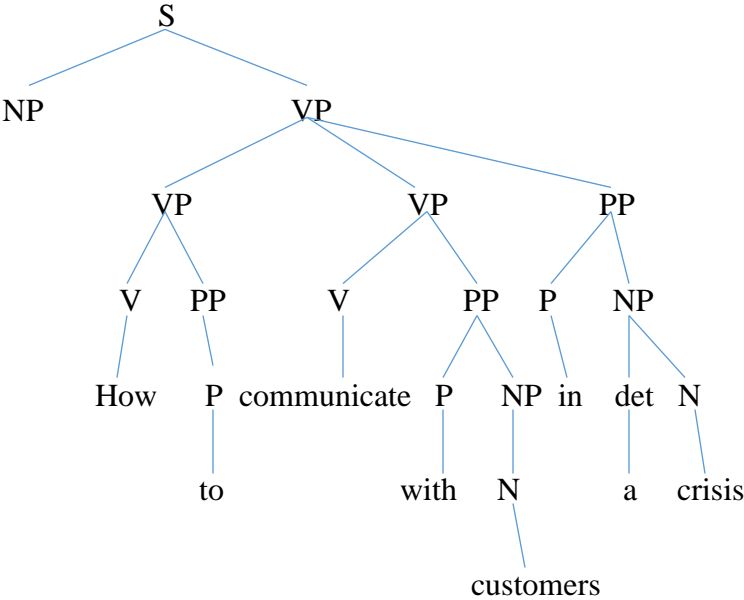
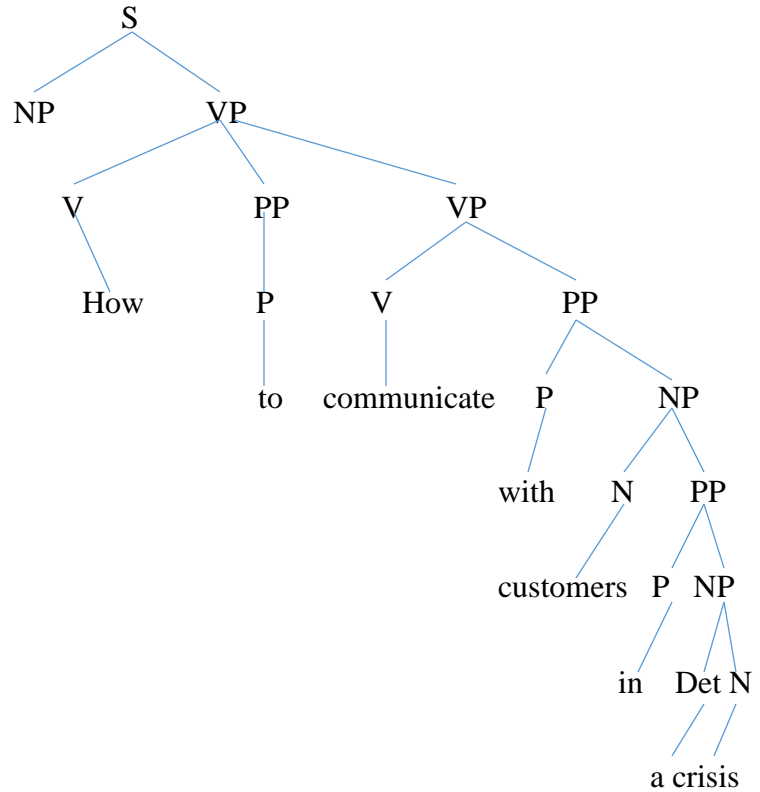


Figure 4. Datum 3b second interpretation



4.3.4 Datum 4

Private hospital denies dumping patient

The above headline is ambiguous, and it is caused by a present participle which is a word composed of verbs and can be used as an adjective or verb tense. The above headline's ambiguity is caused by a sentence and not the phrase as Crystal (2008) explains. The possible meanings are explained below:

- a) The private hospital dumped a patient, and they are now denying it.
- b) The hospital denied a patient who usually dumps by the hospital.

The function of a sentence in a text or dialogue is to convey certain information to readers or listeners. The arrangement of words in a sentence can produce specific meanings and the

rearrangement of the same words can give readers or listeners different meanings (Smith, 2015). The term ‘dumping’ in the above headline could be used as a verb to indicate that the hospital dumped or as an adjective to describe the type of patient and therefore causing ambiguity. After reading the article, a deck head could have been used to clarify the ambiguous headline such as below:

Hospital prematurely discharges a patient

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. This would mean that the hospital dumped a patient and they are now denying it.

Below are the illustrations of ambiguity using the tree diagrams:

Figure 5. Datum 4a first interpretation

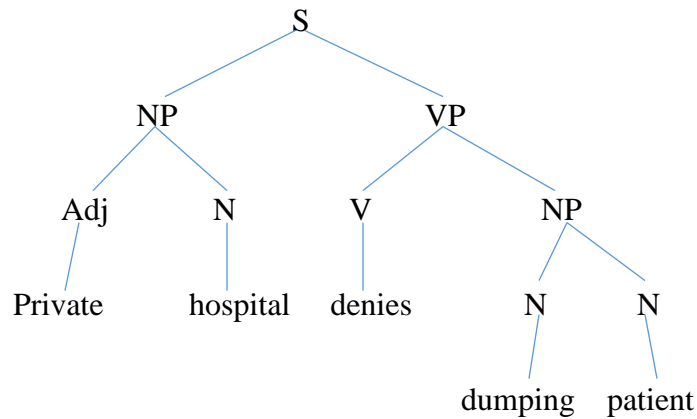
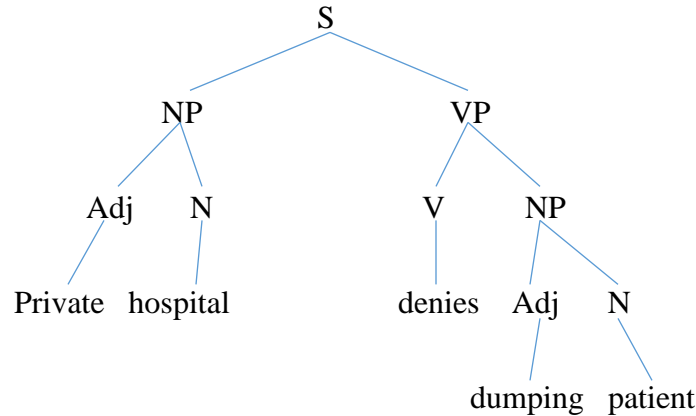


Figure 6. Datum 4b second interpretation



4.3.5 Datum 5

Geingob welcomes Chinese loans

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by negation scope. The headline's expression can take scope over each other in various ways in the meaning of the sentence. According to Crystal (2008) ambiguity is caused by the sentence and not the phrase. Below are the two interpretations:

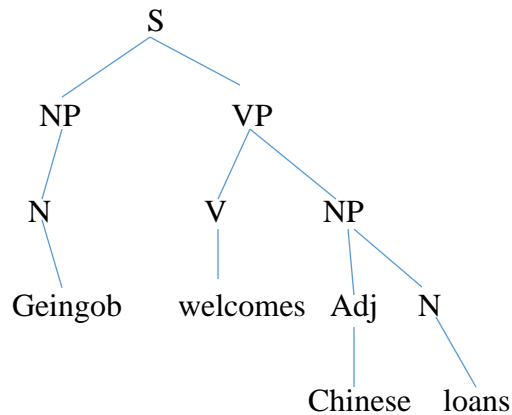
- a) Geingob has already received the loans and is welcoming them.
- b) Geingob is inviting the Chinese to provide loans.

Smith (2015) proffers that in linguistics, syntax can be challenging as one needs to know how to combine words together in order to construct a phrase or sentence and avoid ambiguity at the same time. Despite understanding the full meaning of the words, one still finds it difficult to place words in a sentence and at the same time making grammatical and logical sense. The editor or journalist could have added a deck head to provide clarity on exactly what Geingob is welcoming. After reading the article, the deck head could have read:

Chinese fund new Namibian airport construction project

With the above deck-head, the reader can understand the headline more clearly. This would mean that the government has already received the Chinese loans and they welcome them. Furthermore, Bornstain (1997) also says that the tree diagram can present the hierarchical structure of a sentence but despite these interpretations the headline can only be illustrated using one tree structure.

Figure 7. Datum 5 a and b, first and second interpretation



4.3.6 Datum 6

WHO advises against travel, trade restrictions with China

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by negation scope. The headline's expression can take scope over each other in various ways in the meaning of the sentence. The two interpretations are explained below:

- a) WHO is against countries who are practising travel and trade restrictions with China.
- b) WHO is opposing countries from practising travel and trade restrictions with China.

It has been suggested by Triangga (2014) that more work should be done in the investigation of ambiguity in newspaper headlines. Newspapers are supposed to inform the readers and not mislead them, however when different people read the above headline and spread the information read,

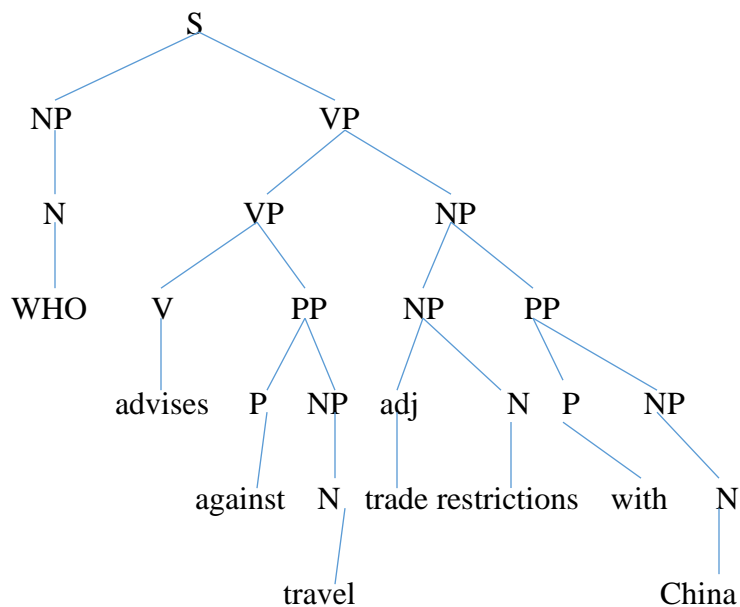
there will be different messages put across. Tree diagrams are supposed to assist with illustrating ambiguity in headlines. But, it seems like ambiguous headlines which are caused by negation scope are not showable using the diagram. After reading the article, to avoid the above headline being ambiguous, a deck head could be added that reads:

WHO does not recommend restrictions

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. This would mean that to save the economy of the African countries, trade with China should not be restricted.

The headline is ambiguous because it can be interpreted in more than one expression. However, it somewhat cannot be illustrated using two tree diagram structures. Below is an illustration of ambiguity, but it can only be shown using one tree diagram:

Figure 8. Datum 6 a and b, first and second interpretation



4.3.7 Datum 7

MISA takes on Malawian deputy minister for insulting a journalist

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by a prepositional phrase. The phrase ‘for insulting a journalist’ may be attached to MISA or the Malawian deputy minister. The interpretations are explained below:

a) MISA insulted a journalist themselves.

b) The Malawian deputy minister insulted the journalist and MISA is taking them on.

The disadvantage of reading an ambiguous text is merely on the fact that one does not receive immediate feedback. Crystal and Davy (1969) were not wrong to emphasize that writers should try and understand their text from all angles, especially that people are diverse and might interpret a text differently. After reading the article, perhaps a deck head in this regard would have also clarified the ambiguous headline such as:

Violation of media freedom still a thing

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. This would mean that the Malawian deputy minister insulted a journalist and MISA is taking them on.

The two interpretations found in the ambiguous headline can be illustrated using two tree diagrams.

Find below tree structures:

Figure 9. Datum 7a first interpretation

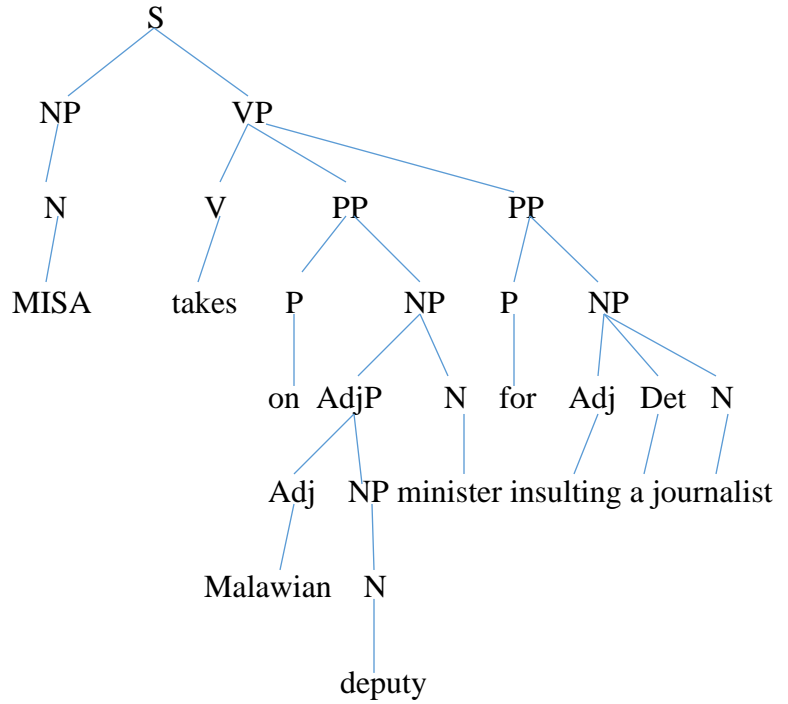
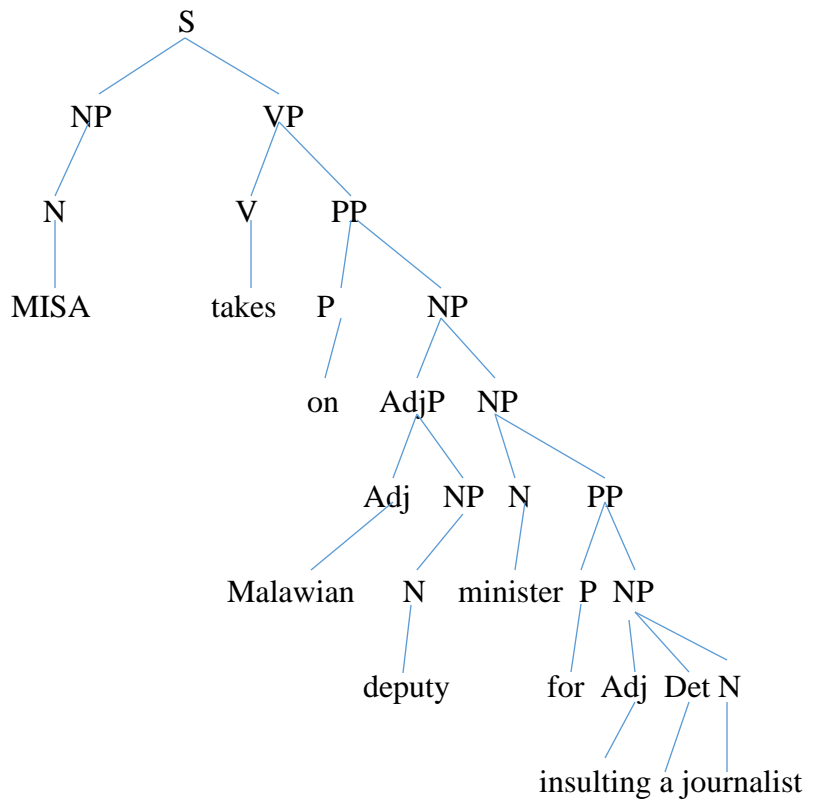


Figure 10. Datum 7b second interpretation



4.3.8 Datum 8

Boxing star Jonas rape charge dropped

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by active or passive meaning. An active sentence can be described as the subject that is doing the action and the receiver is the object as they received the action. The rape charge could be against Jonas himself or it could be that he charged someone for rape, therefore this ambiguity is caused by a sentence and not phrase. Below are the possible meanings of the headline:

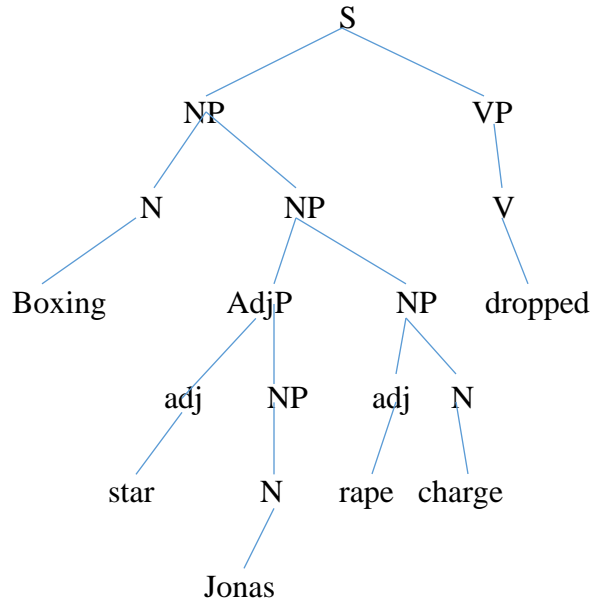
- a) Jonas has a rape charge against someone and it was dropped
- b) Jonas has been charged for rape and now the charge has been dropped.

Again, like ambiguous headlines caused by negation scope, it seems like ambiguous headlines caused by active and passive meaning somewhat also cannot be illustrated using more than one tree diagram. The theory of tree diagram by Bornstain's (1997) is used to explain structural ambiguity but when the researcher used this theory to explain the possible meanings using tree diagram, not more than one tree diagram could be used. After reading the article, below is a secondary head that could be used to clarify the ambiguity in the headline:

Inadequate evidence against Jonas

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. This would mean that the Jonas has been charged for rape and now the case has been dropped. The two interpretations found in the ambiguous headline can somewhat not be illustrated using two tree diagrams. Find below one tree structure:

Figure 11. Datum 8 a and b, first and second interpretation



4.3.9 Datum 9

Shack dwellers trained in sustainable innovation

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by a prepositional phrase. The phrase ‘in sustainable innovation’ can be attached to a venue which is called sustainable innovation such as MTC innovation centre in Namibia or to a teaching/course. Below are the interpretations that can be derived from the ambiguous headline:

- a) The Shack dwellers had training and the training was about sustainable innovation.
- b) The Shack dwellers had their training at the sustainable innovation centre.

To begin with, to establish the kind of ambiguity the study employed the theory of Clare (1993). The theory states that structural ambiguity occurs when sentences or phrases can be interpreted in two or more senses. A reader would think that the shack dwellers are at an innovation centre trying to better their housing constructions to make it more affordable, but another reader would think the shack dwellers are being taught about sustainable innovation to sustain the initiative. This type

of headline can be very confusing for the readers and a deck head could be added to further explain what it means. After reading the article, below is a possible deck head for the headline:

Graduates urged to build new systems

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. This would mean that the shack dwellers had training on sustainable innovation.

The two interpretations found in the ambiguous headline can be illustrated using two tree diagrams. Find below tree structures:

Figure 12. Datum 9a first interpretation

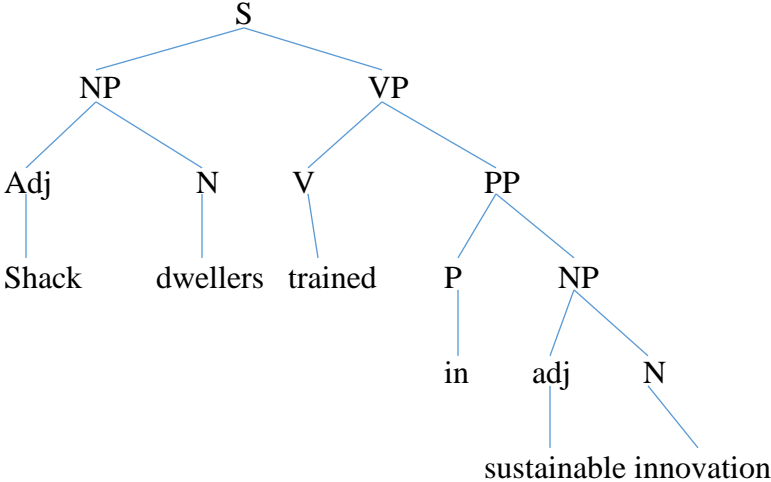
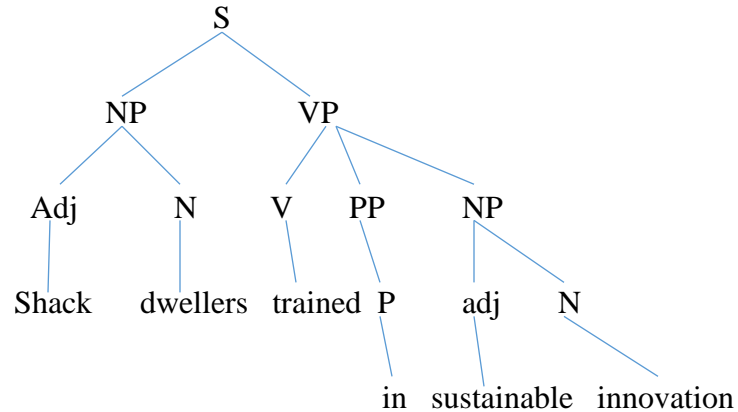


Figure 13. Datum 9b second interpretation



4.3.10 Datum 10

Managing an employee with depression

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by a prepositional phrase. The phrase ‘with depression’ can be attached to the person managing or to the employee themselves. Below are the interpretations from the headline:

- a) How to manage an employee while being depressed.
- b) How to manage an employee who has depression.

It seems as if ambiguity is mostly caused by prepositional phrases in *The Namibian* headlines. This agrees with Sevida (2015) study which revealed that ambiguity in headlines is mostly caused by prepositional phrases. According to Radford (1997), syntax focuses on how words can be laced together to make up phrases and sentences. But, ambiguity in sentences does not necessarily mean that the sentences are wrong but that the headline expresses more than one meaning. After reading the article, a deck below could have been used to indicate who has the depression:

Employees suffer from depression daily

The above deck head would have provided a reader with a clear understanding that the ‘depression’ mentioned in the headline is attached to the employee.

The two interpretations found in the ambiguous headline can be illustrated using two tree diagrams.

Find below tree structures:

Figure 14. Datum 10a first interpretation

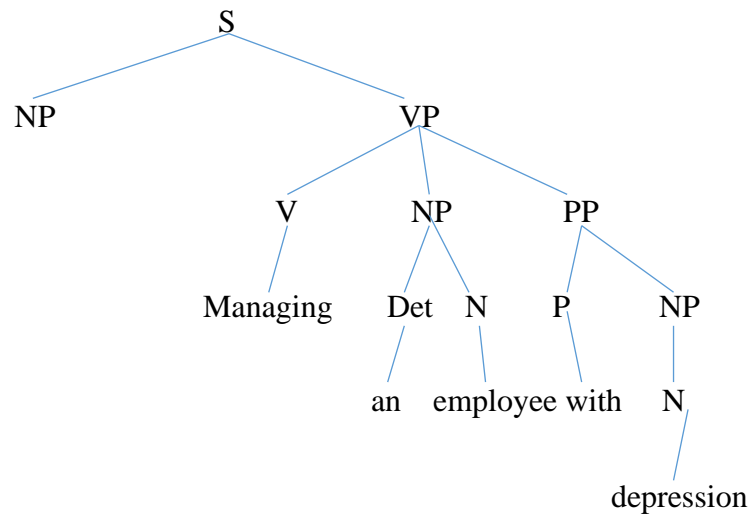
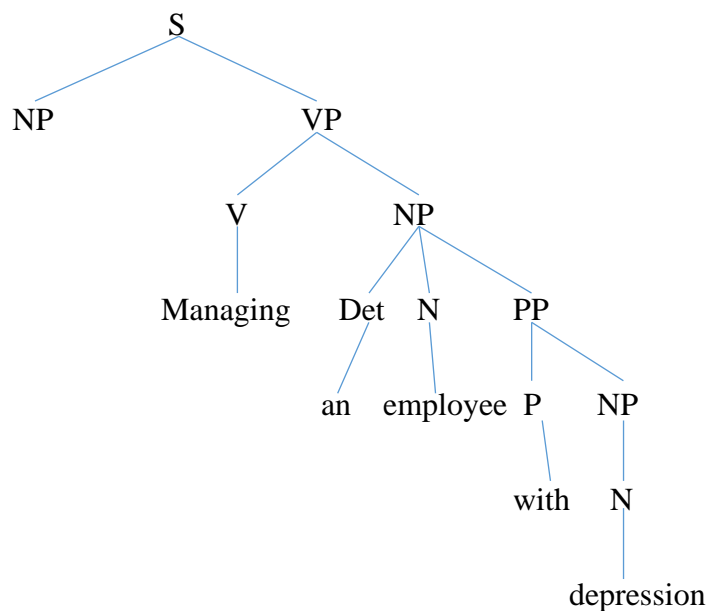


Figure 15. Datum 10b second interpretation



4.3.11 Datum 11

Reporting on the frontlines of covid-19

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by a prepositional phrase. The phrase ‘on the frontlines’ could be attached to the person reporting or the frontlines of covid-19. Below are the interpretations from the ambiguous headline:

- a) The reporter is reporting about the frontlines of covid-19.
- b) The reporter is reporting while at the frontlines of covid-19

Fromkin et al. (1991) agree that “when you know a language, you can speak and be understood by others who know that language” (p. 3). Headlines are written in English and the editors also expect the readers who understand English to understand them but once a headline is ambiguous it does not matter if a reader understands English because it still confuses a reader. After reading the article, perhaps for readers to understand the above headline as advised by Sevida (2015), a reader should read the whole article to get clarity.

The two interpretations found in the ambiguous headline can be illustrated using two tree diagrams. Find below tree structures:

Figure 16. Datum 11a first interpretation

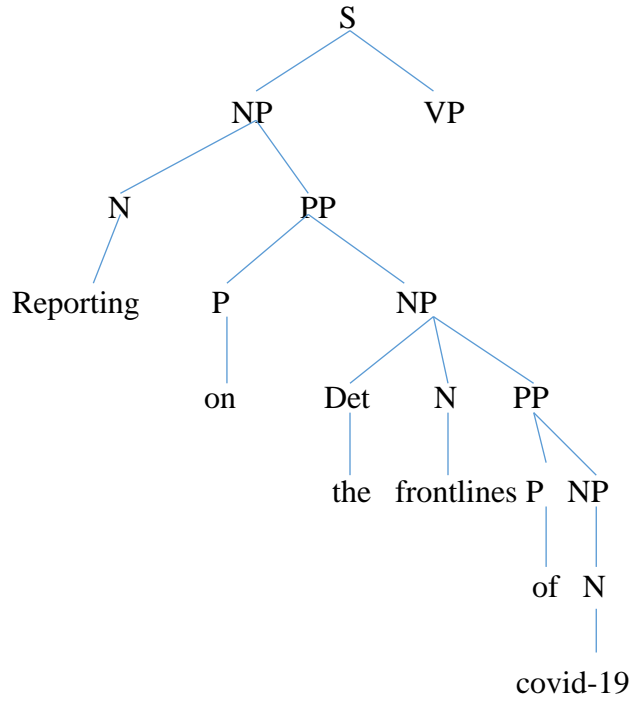
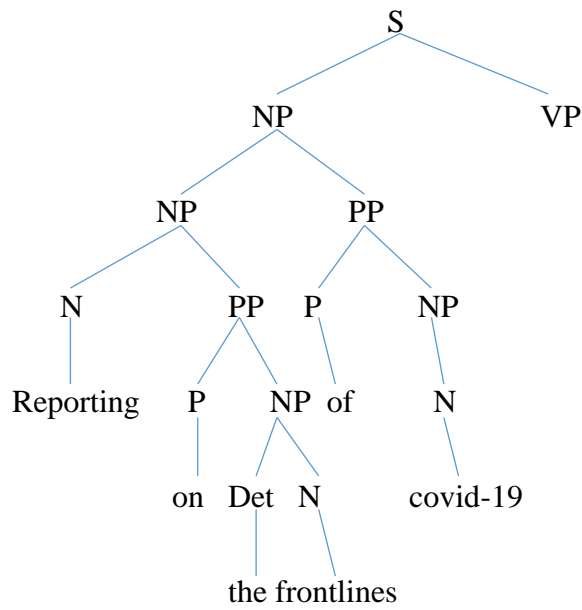


Figure 16. Datum 11b second interpretation



4.3.12 Datum 12

You can't over prepare for a presentation

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by negation scope. The headline's expression can take scope over each other in various ways in the meaning of the sentence. Below are the two interpretations from the above headline:

- a) One should never feel like they prepared more than they should for a presentation.
- b) One should not over prepare for a presentation.

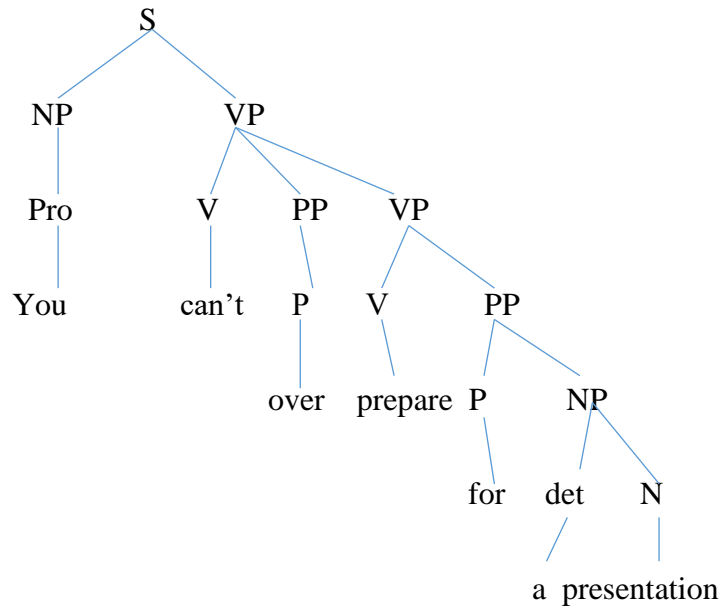
Despite the headline being ambiguous the two interpretations somewhat cannot be illustrated using two tree structures. The idea is that one either should not or should over prepare for a presentation. Therefore, according to Crystal (2008), the above headline's ambiguity is caused by the entire sentences and not a phrase. How one understands the above headline is entirely up to the person's understanding because either way, the interpretations can all be linked the headline. After reading the article, perhaps a deck head such as the one below could have been used to make the readers understand what the headline is about:

Prepare! Prepare! Prepare!

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. This would mean that one should never feel like they prepared more than they should for a presentation.

Since ambiguity is caused by negation scope, it seems as if the two interpretations cannot be illustrated using two tree diagrams. Find below tree structure:

Figure 17. Datum 12 a and b first and second interpretation



4.3.13 Datum 13

Opposition sue SWAPO for lockdown violation

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by active or passive meaning. An active sentence can be described as the subject that is doing the action and the receiver is the object since they received the action. Whilst in a passive sentence, the subject of the sentence received the action. This sentence with active and passive meanings may puzzle readers. Below are the interpretations from the above headline:

- a) The opposition was charged for lockdown violation and is therefore suing SWAPO for it.
- b) SWAPO violated the lockdown rules.

Charina (2017) explains that a written text can have different interpretations from different people and these different interpretations among readers are created by ambiguity. However, with the above headline being politically affiliated, the first instinct from an editor is to make it catchy. Also, amphibology is defined by Ullmann (1977) as a phrase that is made deliberately ambiguous.

The unclearness is probably created to keep the reader keen to read the content, but this might not always be the case as sometimes it could discourage a reader. After reading the article, a deck head such as the one below could be used to further entice a reader:

Rules should apply to SWAPO

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. This would mean that SWAPO is the one that violated lockdown restrictions. The two interpretations found in the ambiguous headline can be illustrated using two tree diagrams. Find below tree structures:

Figure 18. Datum 13 a first interpretation

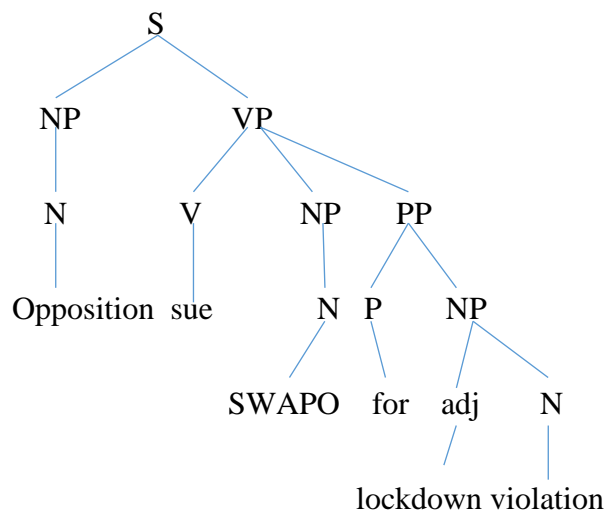
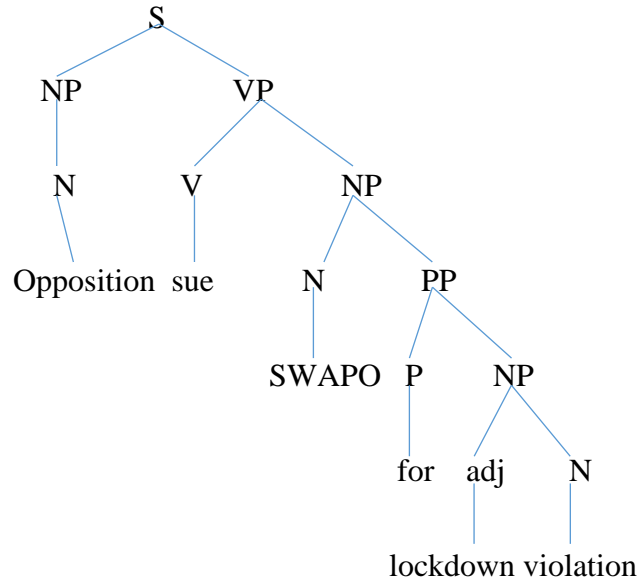


Figure 19. Datum 13 b second interpretation



4.3.14 Datum 14

China reports first new local virus case in four days

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by negation scope. The headline's expression can take scope over each other in various ways in the meaning of the sentence. Ambiguity happens from the different categories of the word 'first'. The term 'first' can be attached to the verb 'report' or the Noun phrase 'new local virus'. Below are the interpretations from the above ambiguous headline:

- a) China was the first to report new local virus cases.
- b) China reported its first new local virus case.

The theory of tree diagram by Bornstain (1997) is used to explain structural ambiguity and to show all the possible phrases or sentences that contained ambiguity. Ambiguous headlines caused by negation scope earlier could somewhat not be illustrated using two tree structures. However, with the above headline ambiguity can be illustrated using two tree structures. The idea that ambiguity

caused by negation scope cannot be illustrated using more than one tree structure is therefore limited to some headlines only. After reading the article, a deck head such as the one below could be used to further clarify the headline:

First case detected

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. This would mean that China reported its first new local virus case. The two interpretations found in the ambiguous headline can be illustrated using two tree diagrams. Find below tree structures:

Figure 20. Datum 14 a first interpretation

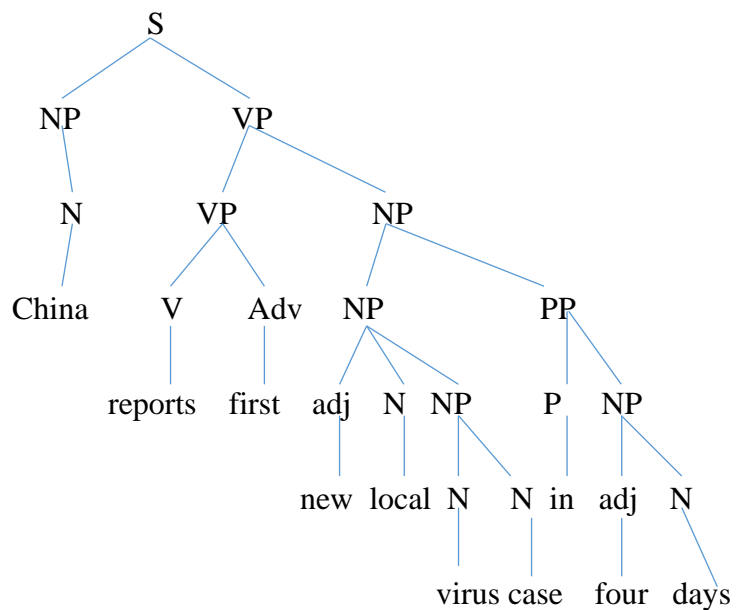
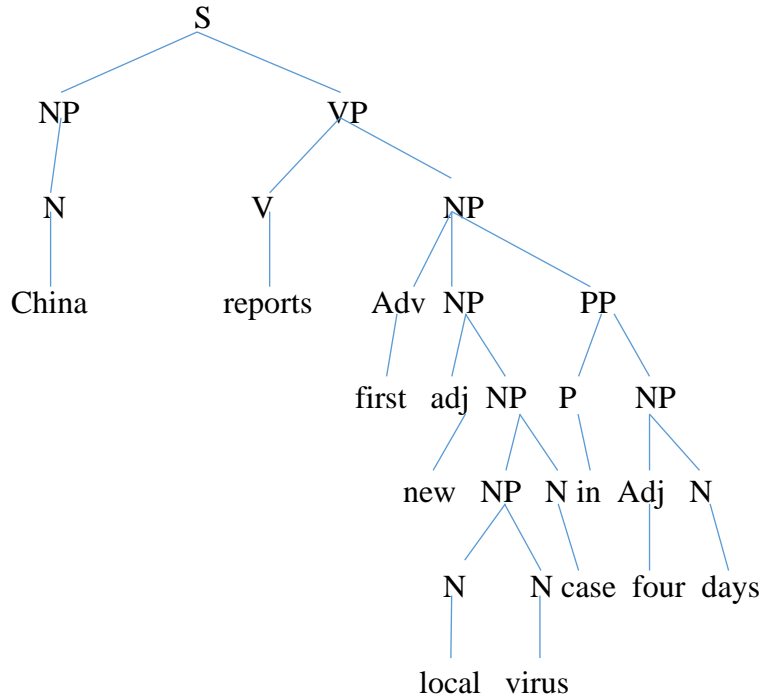


Figure 21. Datum 14b second interpretation



4.3.15 Datum 15

Nahas wants apology over audio

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by negation scope. The headline's expression can take scope over each other in various ways in the meaning of the sentence. Below are the two interpretations from the above headline:

- a) Nahas wants an apology because of an audio that was sent out or circulating.
- b) Nahas wants an apology, but it should be over an audio.

Ndimele (1997) indicates to the foregoing by declaring that “structural ambiguity results from the way an entire sentence is organised to produce several interpretations” (p. 75). However, the interpretation of phrases with two or more possible meanings may not be due to the way the entire sentence is organised as Ndimele's (1997) opinion would like one to accept as true, especially when taken literally, but due to the word or the syntactic structure of the phrase in the sentence.

The structural ambiguity is caused by the sentence even though ‘over audio’ is a prepositional phrase, the prepositional phrase is only connected to the apology. After reading the article, the entire sentence would be less ambiguous should a deck head been used, such as:

Audio goes viral

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. This would mean that Nahas wants an apology because of an audio that was circulating and not a recording audio.

The two interpretations found in the ambiguous headline can be illustrated using two tree diagrams.

Find below tree structures:

Figure 22. Datum 15a first interpretation

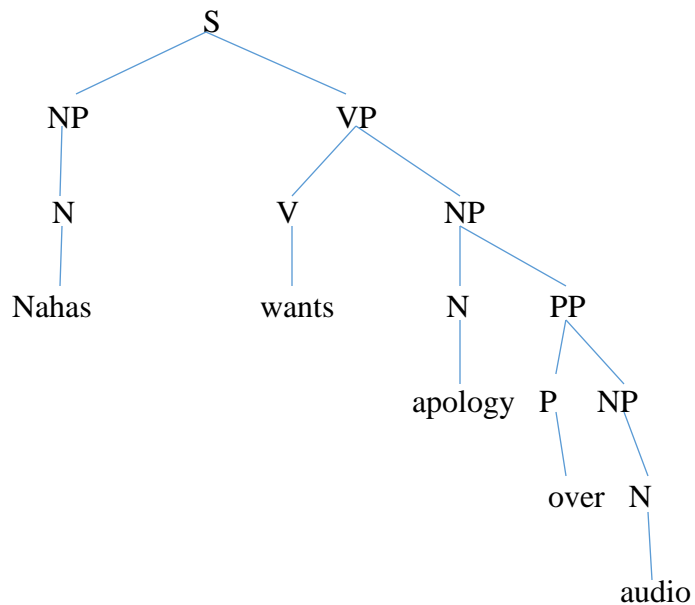
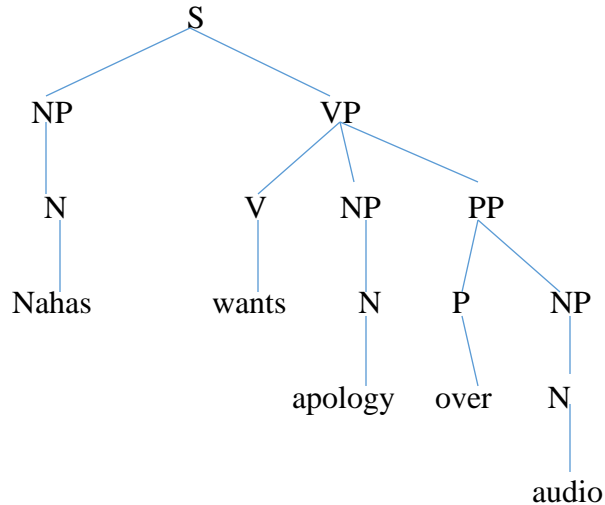


Figure 23. Datum 15b second interpretation



4.3.16 Datum 16

Removal company returns customers waste after they failed to pay

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by a prepositional phrase. The phrase ‘after they failed’ can be attached to the customers or to the removal company. Below are the interpretations from the ambiguous headline:

- a) The removal company failed to pay for they waste site and therefore returned the customers waste.
- b) Customers failed to pay and then the removal company returned their waste.

Even though there is one surface structure in this headline, there are two deep structures that come out of it and its all dependent on how the reader understands it. The reader who takes on the second interpretation would think the removal company is inconsiderate for failing to pay but then that’s not even what the headline wanted to convey. After reading the article, the below deck head could have been used to better sensitise with the readers:

Customer intentionally delays payment

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. This would mean that the waste removal company has returned waste to the customers that have not paid. The two interpretations found in the ambiguous headline can be illustrated using two tree diagrams. Find below tree structures:

Figure 24. Datum 16a first interpretation

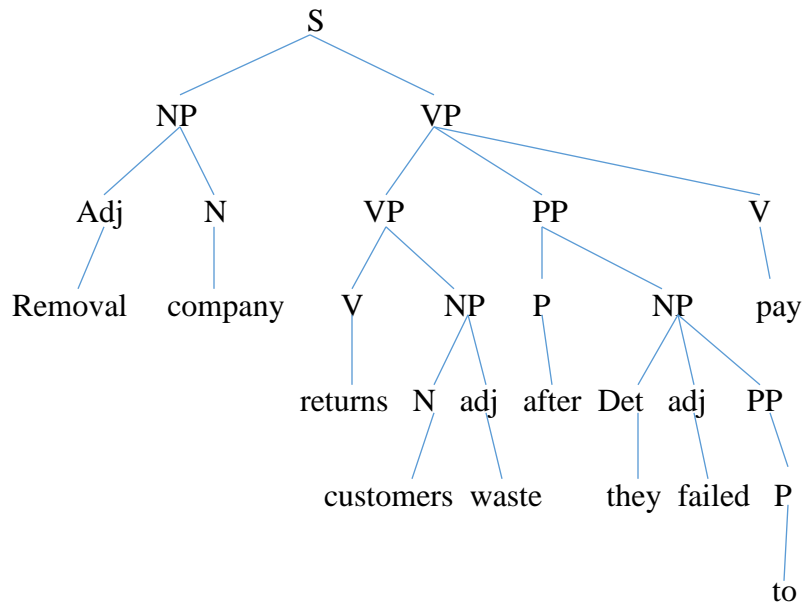
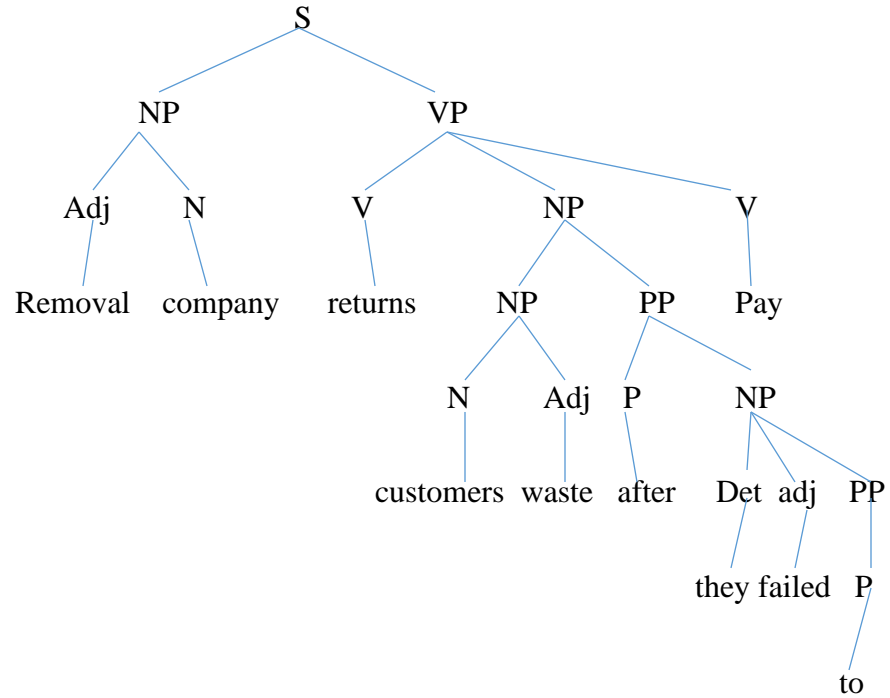


Figure 25. Datum 17b second interpretation



4.3.17 Datum 17

Warning against abuse of emergency numbers

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by negation scope. The headline's expression can take scope over each other in various ways in the meaning of the sentence. Below are the interpretations from the ambiguous headline:

- a) Emergency companies are being warned against abusing their numbers.
- b) People should stop calling emergency numbers unnecessarily.

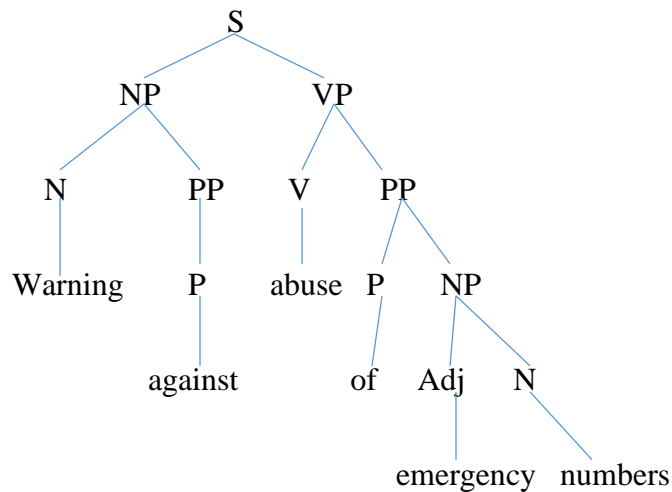
Again, the above ambiguous headline somewhat cannot be illustrated by using more than one tree diagram even though ambiguity is supposed to illustrate this. This finding goes against Bornstain's (1997) theory that states that tree diagrams can be used to explain structural ambiguity. The above headline is a warning and it needed to convey the right message when one reads the headline. If someone takes the first interpretation, their first thought would be that emergency services are

unavailable due to their lines being busy because of personal calls. Should one spread this, it might ruin the brand of the emergency companies, simply because the reader just went with what they understood. After reading the article, deck head such as the one below could have been used to clear the misunderstand and to make the reader understand the headline without reading the whole article:

Prank calls on a rise

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. This would mean that emergency numbers such as the police and fire station keep getting prank calls. The two interpretations found in the ambiguous headline cannot be illustrated using two tree diagrams. Therefore, find below one tree structure:

Figure 26. Datum 17 a and b first and second interpretation



4.3.18 Datum 18

Witness recounts death threat before killing

Ambiguity in this headline is caused by active and passive meaning. An active sentence can be described as the subject that is doing the action and the receiver is the object as they received the action. Below are the interpretations derived from the ambiguous headlines:

a) The second possible meaning is that the witness of the killing was also present when the person killed was receiving death threats.

b) The witness of a murder also ended up killing the person that kept death threatening them.

When one reads an ambiguous headline like this it confuses the reader on who did the killing as it could mean that the witness was receiving death threats and after frustration, she killed the person threatening them. One ends up making their own conclusion about the headline without a clear understanding of what it truly means because of the ambiguity. Ammar (2011) proffer that ambiguous headlines hinder readers from grasping the true meaning of the article and it sometimes causes them to skip or read half the content. After reading the article, perhaps the deck head below could have been used to clear the confusion:

Sister killed after death threats

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. This would mean that the witness was not recounting the death threats before killing but that the sister who is now killed was the one being threatened in the witness's presence. The two interpretations found in the ambiguous headline are illustrated using two tree diagrams. Therefore, find below two tree structures:

Figure 27. Datum 18a first interpretation

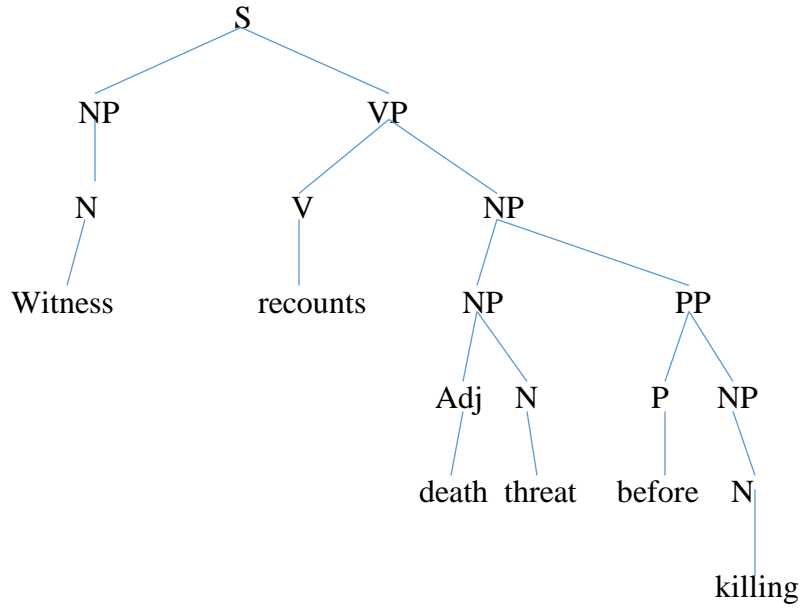
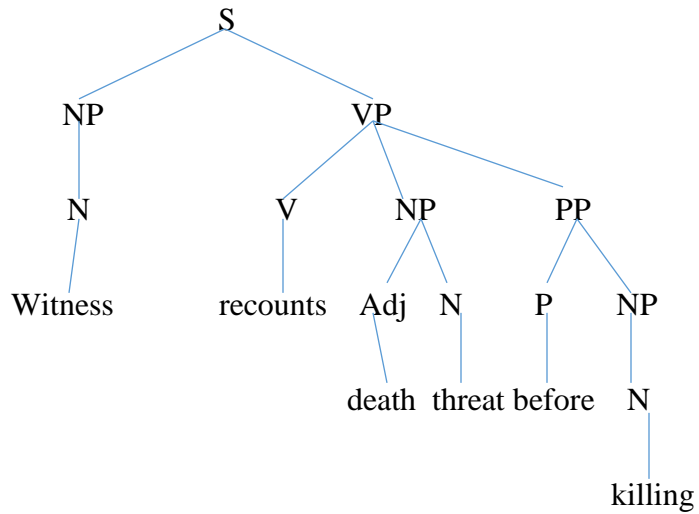


Figure 28. Datum 18b second interpretation



4.3.19 Datum 19

Shop employee assault draws condemnation

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by negation scope. The headline's expression can take scope over each other in various ways in the meaning of the sentence. Below are the interpretations from the ambiguous headline:

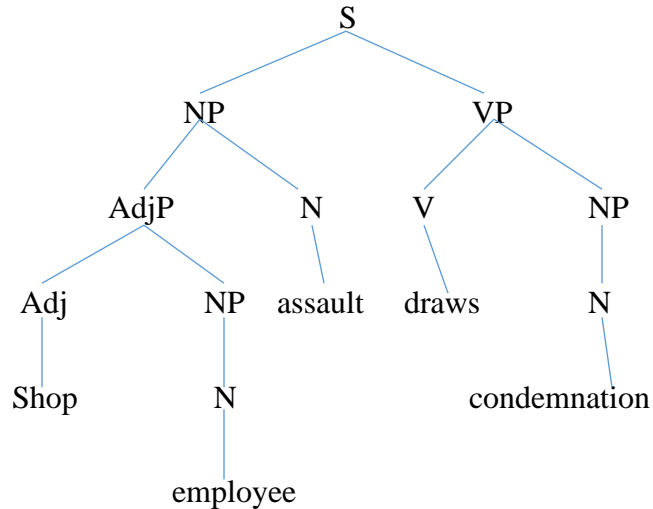
- a) The employee assaulted a customer and then it drew condemnation.
- b) The employee was assaulted by a customer, and it drew condemnation.

A news headline is an integral part in a news story. Once deliberately written, it can have 2 consequences. It's either the reader would be made curious from not understanding the headline to read the whole article or it could hinder a reader from continuing to read the article or the newspaper. The above headline would either frustrate a customer or another employee, depending on which interpretation they take, however, to avoid this, a deck head should have been written:

Customers banned

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. After reading the whole article, this would mean that an employee has been assaulted by customers and not the other way round. The two interpretations found in the ambiguous headline perhaps cannot be illustrated using two tree diagrams. Therefore, find below tree structure:

Figure 29. Datum 19 a and b first and second interpretation



4.3.20 Datum 20

Mother appeals for help with triple joy

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by a prepositional phrase. The phrase ‘with triple joy’ can be attached to help and the mother. Below are the two interpretations from the ambiguous headlines:

- a) The mother appeals to receive help for the triple joy
- b) The mother is seeking for help while with the triple joy and not necessarily for them.

The ambiguous headline is confusing since the reader might think that the mother is seeking for help and not necessarily for the triple joy. After reading the whole article, perhaps the entire headline could have read like the one below:

mother appeals to receive help for the triple joy

The above headline is short and concise for a headline and it would have been used to make it clear for the reader. This is in agreement with Bednarek and Caple (2012) who said that news headlines must be accurate, concise, simple, clear and up to date. News headlines must avoid

duplication and redundancy After reading this one can intentionally continue to read the whole article or to stay without reading it. Below are the tree structures to illustrate these interpretations:

Figure 30. Datum 20 a first interpretation

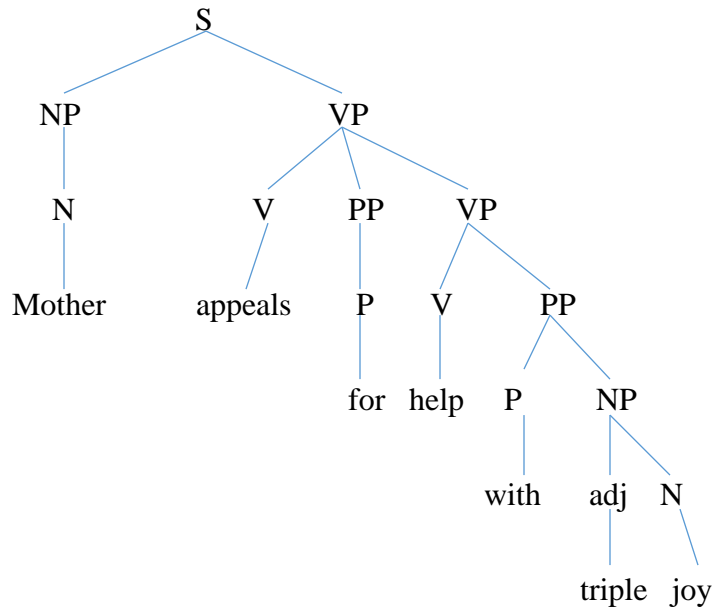
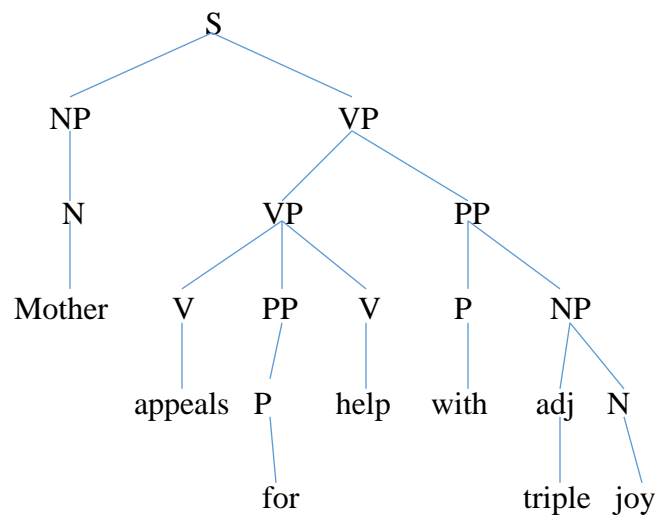


Figure 31. Datum 20b second interpretation



4.3.21 Datum 21

Political activists Angola remembered

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by negation scope. The headline's expression can take scope over each other in various ways in the meaning of the sentence. Below are the interpretations from the ambiguous headline:

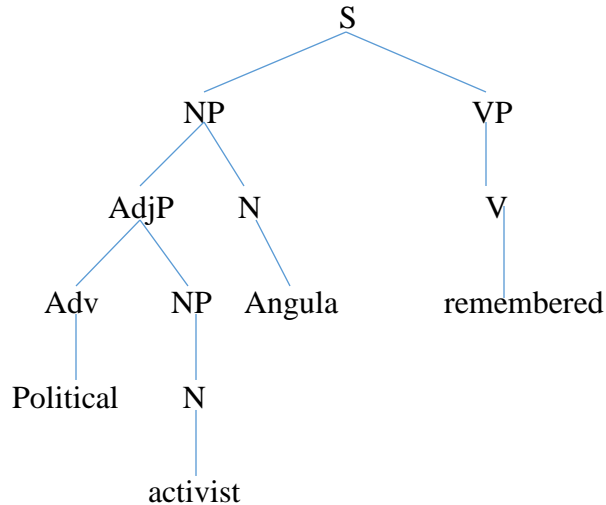
- a) The activist Angola actually remembered what he needed to narrate.
- b) The activists Angola is being recalled for who he is or was.

Despite the headline having two expressions, it can somewhat only be illustrated using one tree diagram. After reading the whole article, the headline means that the activists are actually being remembered for who they and what they have achieved. Therefore, a deck head could have been used to clarify the headline such as:

A political icon

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. The two interpretations found in the ambiguous headline somewhat cannot be illustrated using two tree diagrams. Therefore, find below tree structure:

Figure 32. Datum 21 a and b first and second interpretation



4.3.22 Datum 22

N\$600m for school, hostel upgrades

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by modification scope. Modification scope occurs when a phrase or sentence has two constituents of the same category like NPs linked together with a conjunction like ‘and’ ‘or’. Below are the interpretations for the ambiguous headline:

- a) The 600m is for both the schools and hostel upgrades.
- b) The 600m only modifies the school and not the hostel.

Based on the headline above, it is evident that structural ambiguity is a kind of ambiguity that arises from a phrase or sentence that has more than one underlying tree structure. The individual words above are not necessarily ambiguous, but their combination may be interpreted in two or more different ways. The adjective ‘600m’ may be taken to refer to the ‘school’ and ‘hostel’ or only the hostel. However, instead of adding a deck head, Sevida (2015) also suggests that readers should read the whole article to get a better understanding.

Below are the two tree structures to illustrate the ambiguity:

Figure 33. Datum 22a first interpretation

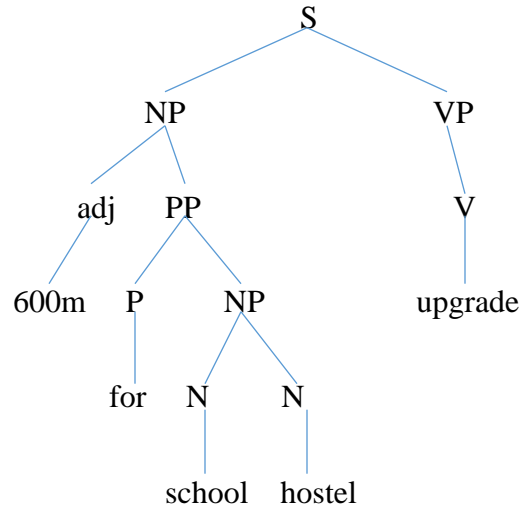
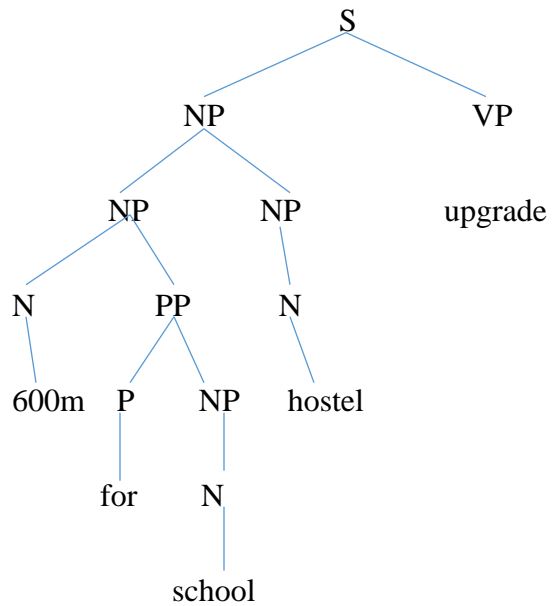


Figure 33. Datum 22b second interpretation



4.3.23 Datum 23

Namibia gets 272M for conservation, tourism

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by modification scope. Modification scope occurs when a phrase or sentence has two constituents of the same category like NPs linked together with a conjunction like ‘and’ ‘or’. Below are the interpretations from the ambiguous headlines:

a) The 272m modifies both the conservation and tourism.

b) The 272m modifies both the conservation and tourism

The ‘comma’ in headlines usually indicate the conjunction ‘and’. Already without the conjunction, the headline can be confusing, therefore the word ‘each’ could have been added after the adjective 272M to indicate that the amount is the same for both and not being shared. Below is the illustration of ambiguity using the tree diagram:

Figure 34. Datum 23a first interpretation

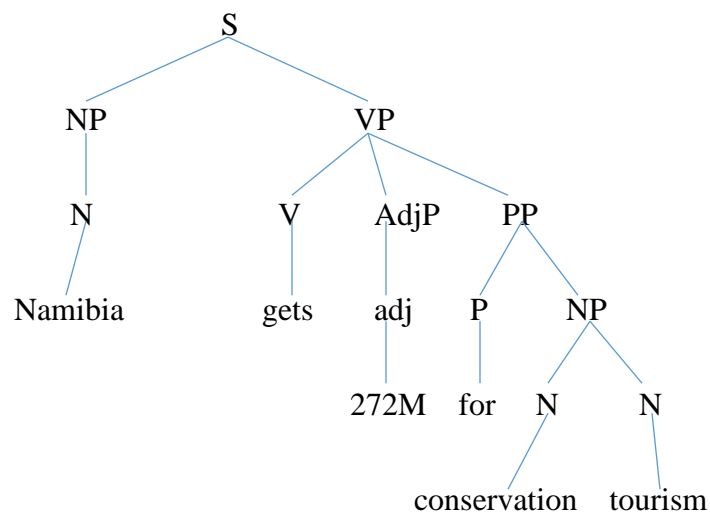
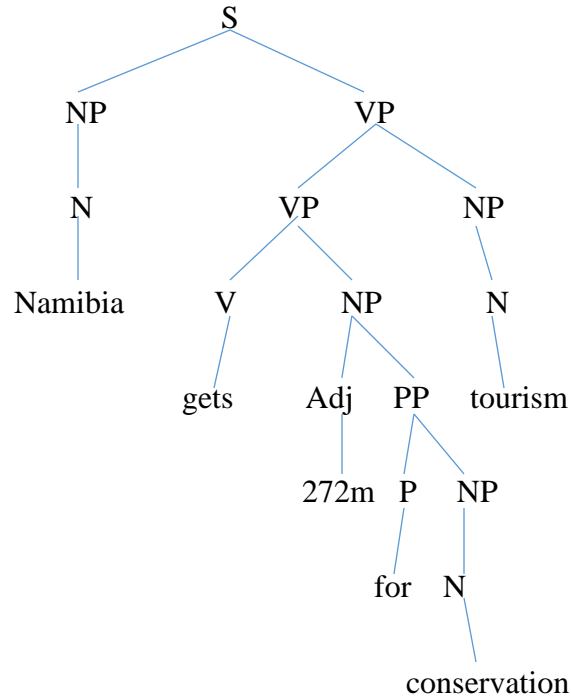


Figure 35. Datum 23b second interpretation



4.2.24 Datum 24

Killer cuts woman's throat after threat

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by a prepositional phrase. The phrase 'after threat' can be attached to the killer and to the woman as well. Below are the interpretations from the ambiguous headline:

- a) The killer did the threat before killing the woman.
- b) The woman threatened the killer and was killed after threatening.

The above headline is ambiguous, and the prepositional phrase can be read two way-either as 'killer threatened woman before killing her', in which it is an adverbial phrase, or 'The woman threatened and was killed for it', in which it is an adjectival phrase. Moving the prepositional phrase might not help, for instance 'after threat, killer cuts woman's throat', it still reads ambiguous. Therefore, a deck head in this regard would have assisted in bringing about clarity.

Women must report threats from men

Below are the illustrations using the tree diagrams:

Figure 36. Datum 24a first interpretation

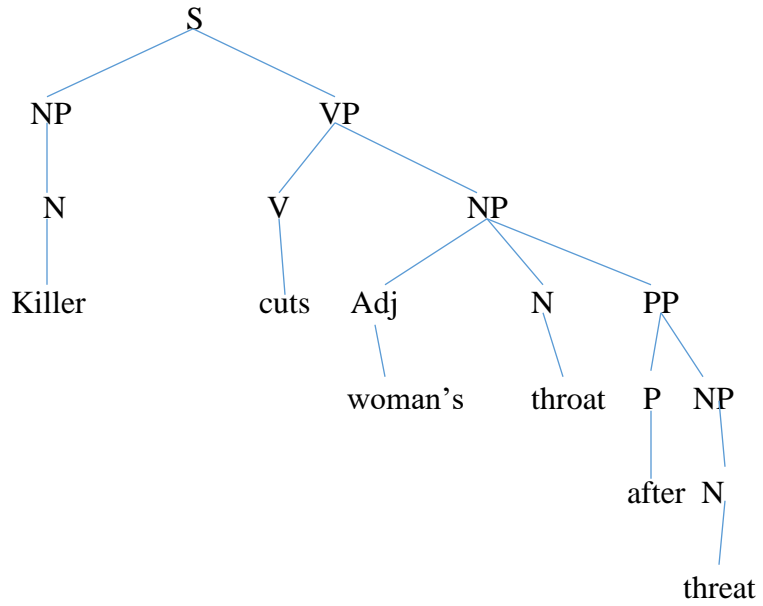
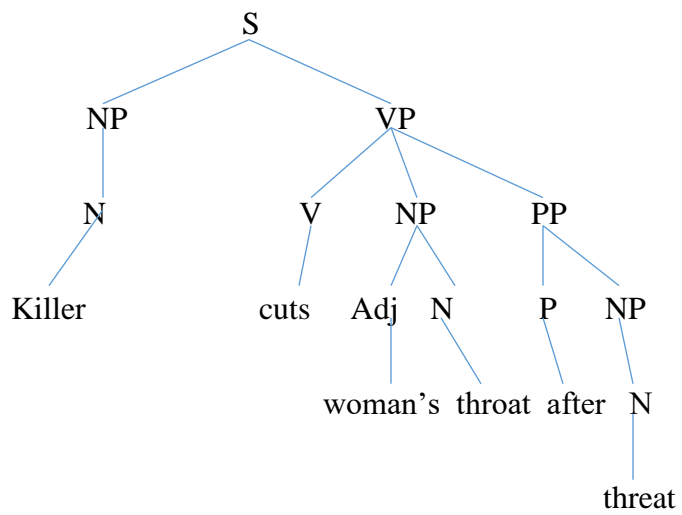


Figure 37. Datum 24b second interpretation



4.3.25 Datum 25

Taking care of a child with special need

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by a prepositional phrase. The phrase ‘with special need’ can be attached to the caretaker and to the child. Below are the interpretations from the ambiguous headlines:

- a) Taking care of a child who has special needs.
- b) The care taker is the one with special needs while taking care of a child.

The above headline is ambiguous and the prepositional phrase can be read two way-either as ‘taking care of a child while having special needs’, in which it is an adverbial phrase, or ‘taking care of a child who has special needs’, in which it is an adjectival phrase. Moving the prepositional phrase might not help, for instance ‘with special needs, taking care of a child’, it still reads ambiguous. Therefore, a deck head in this regard would have assisted in bringing about clarity.

Special children matter

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. After reading the whole article, this would mean that the headline is concerned with taking care of a child who has special needs. The two interpretations found in the ambiguous headline are illustrated using two tree diagrams. Therefore, find below tree structures:

Figure 38. Datum 25a first interpretation

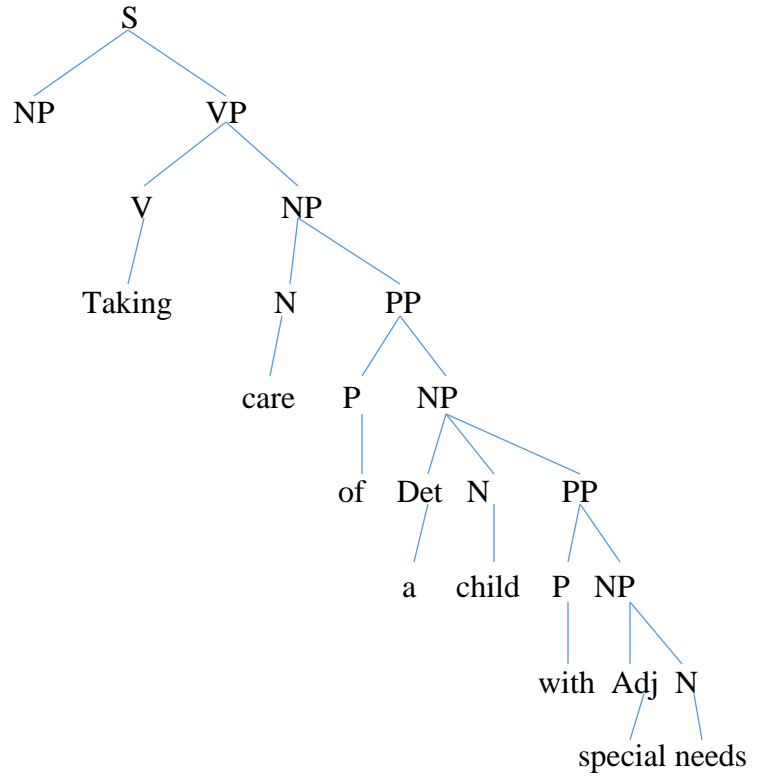
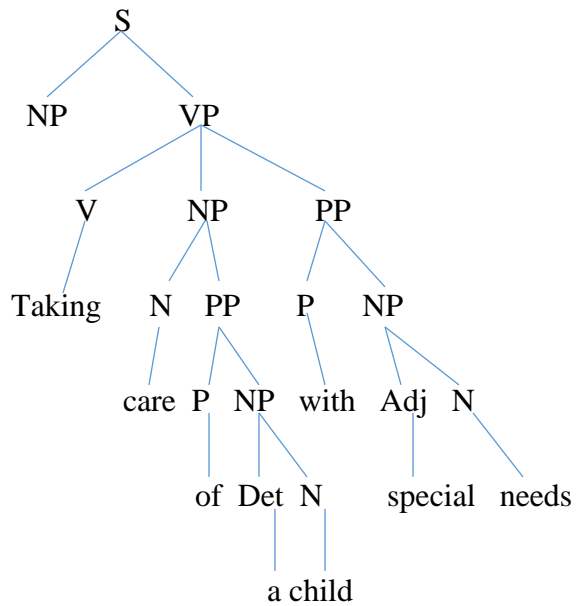


Figure 39. Datum 25b second interpretation



4.3.26 Datum 26

Naule re-elected Khomas chairman

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by active or passive meaning. An active sentence can be described as the subject that is doing the action and the receiver is the object because they received the action. Below are the interpretations caused by the ambiguous headline:

a) Naule was re-elected to being the Khomas chairman, in this interpretation Naule received the action.

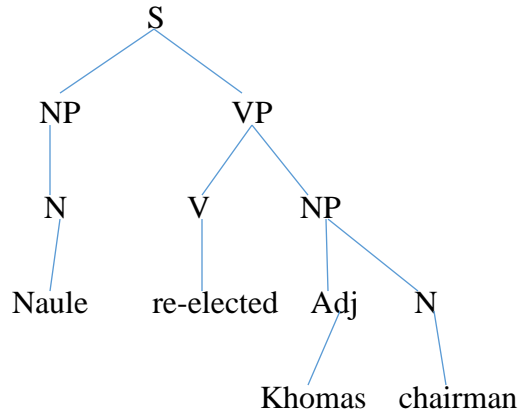
b) Naule did the re-election of the Khomas chairman, in this interpretation Naule is the doer of the action.

For someone who does not know who Naule is, they will think that Naule was in power to re-elect Khomas chairman. However, after reading the whole article it seems Naule was re-elected in power. Structural ambiguity is when a sentence has more than one meaning or interpretation. The above headline could have been accompanied by a deck head that reads:

Naule in power again

Despite the ambiguity in the headline of Naule re-electing and Naule being re-elected, it seems as if it can only be illustrated using one tree diagram. Below is an illustration using a tree diagram:

Figure 40. Datum 26 a and b, first and second interpretation



4.3.27 Datum 27

Namibia at 25 confirmed cases

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by a prepositional phrase. The phrase ‘at 25’ can be attached to Namibia and the confirmed cases. Find below interpretations from the ambiguous headline:

- a) Namibia has recently confirmed 25 cases.
- b) Namibia at the age of 25 just confirmed cases for the very first time.

The prepositional phrase ‘at 25’ is causing trouble in the headline since it can modify either ‘Namibia’ or ‘confirmed cases’. Once a modifier is misplaced, it needs to be moved elsewhere in the sentence to avoid possible confusion. But should it be moved to the front and read ‘At 25 cases, Namibia has recently confirmed’ the sentence still sound ambiguous. Therefore, perhaps a deck head, like the one below could have been used to clarify the confusion:

Another covid-19 infection added

With the above deck-head the reader can understand the headline more clearly. After reading the whole article, this would mean that ‘at 25’ is modifying the cases and not Namibia. The two

interpretations found in the ambiguous headline are illustrated using two tree diagrams. Therefore, find below tree structures:

Figure 41. Datum 27a First interpretation

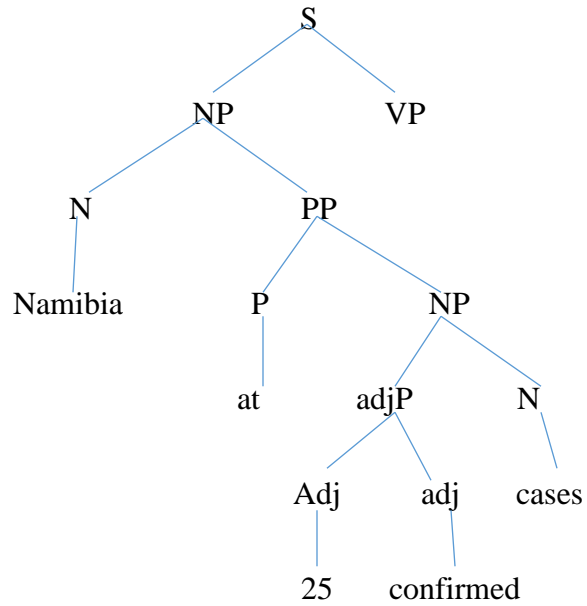
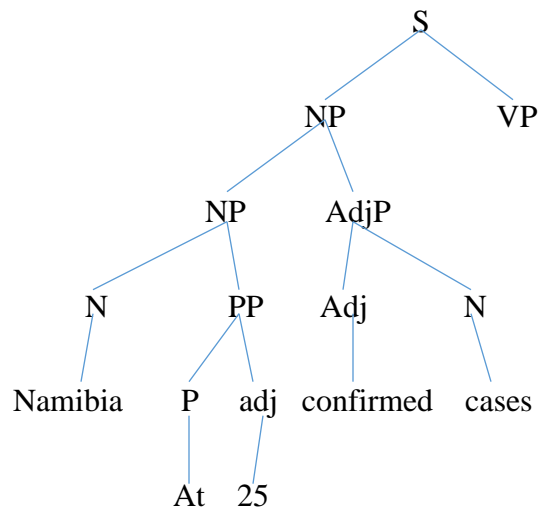


Figure 42. Datum 27b Second interpretation



4.3.28 Datum 28

Tackling corruption in government

The present participle is a word composed of verbs and can be used as an adjective or verb tense.

Below are the interpretations from the ambiguous headline:

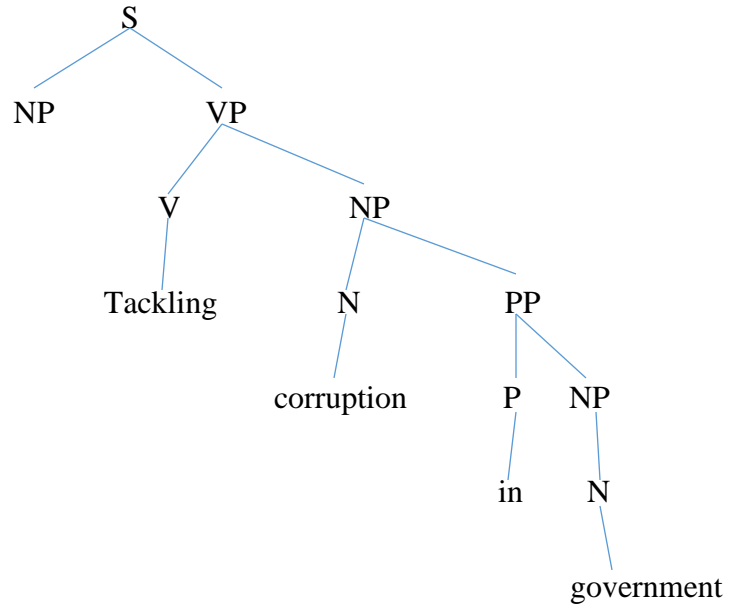
- a) The government is trying to establish how to tackle corruption in the country.
- b) How to tackle the corruption happening in the government.

Even though headlines are purposely made catchy to grasp the reader's attention, they make the readers struggle to give possible meaning to the headlines which no doubt has more than one conceivable meaning. Perhaps a deck head such as the one below could be used to clarify the ambiguity:

It starts with political will

Despite the headline being ambiguous, it seems as if it can only be illustrated using one tree diagram. Below is an illustration using a tree diagram:

Figure 43. Datum 28 a and b, First and second interpretation



4.3.29 Datum 29

Nujoma threatens Swartbooi with legal action

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by a prepositional phrase. The phrase ‘with legal action’ can be attached to both Nujoma and Swartbooi. Below are the interpretations from the above headline:

- a) Nujoma threatened Swartbooi using legal action
- b) Nujoma threatened Swartbooi who already has legal action.

Nwala (2017) has also indicated that language of media has ambiguity and failure. To add on, Sevida (2015) also concluded that the location of the modifier as ambiguous because it can be added to the next or previous phrase or lexical category in the heading that has more than one interpretive meaning to the reader. Therefore, the placement of the modifier causes confusion to the reader and this might discourage a reader from reading the article. Furthermore, Sevida (2015)

suggests that to avoid confusion when approaching an ambiguous headline, the reader should comprehend the context of the article as a whole.

Ambiguity is exposed using the tree diagrams below:

Figure.44 Datum 29a first interpretation

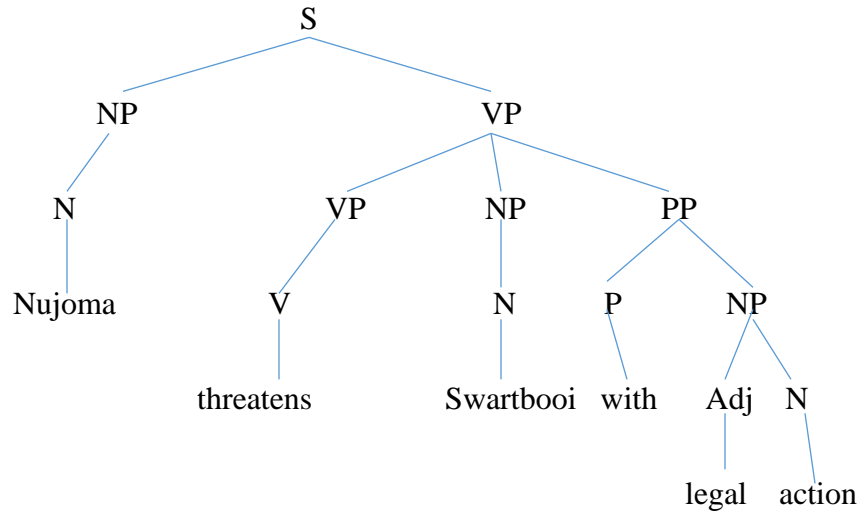
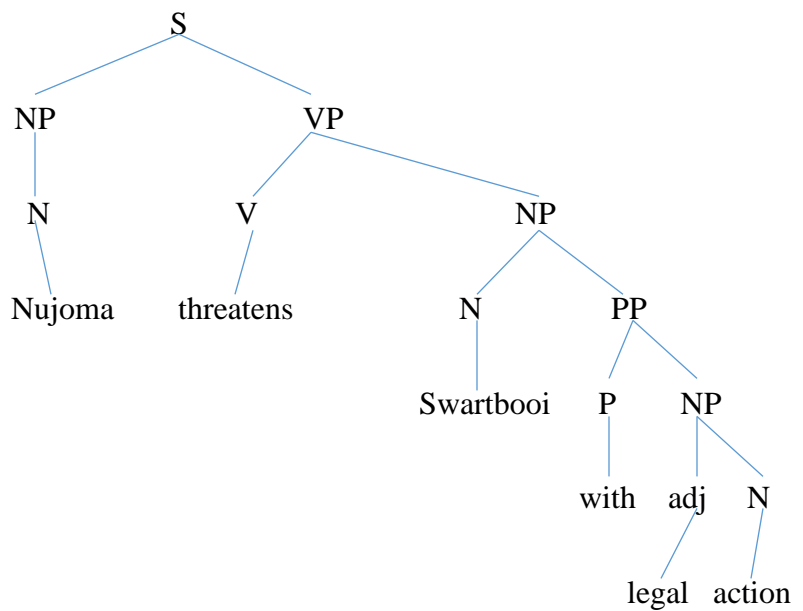


Figure. 45 Datum 29b Second interpretation



4.3.30 Datum 30

Girl (15) shot in freak accident

The headline has two underlying interpretations caused by active or passive meaning. An active sentence can be described as the subject that is doing the action and the receiver is the object because they received the action. Below are the interpretations from the ambiguous headline:

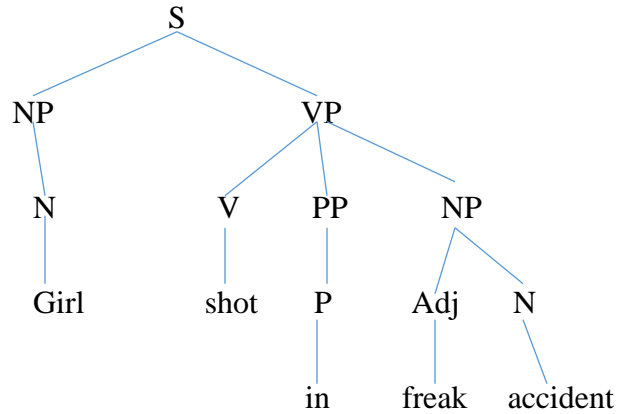
- a) The girl did the shooting in a freak accident
- b) The girl was shot in a freak accident.

According to Triangga (2014) the journalist and editor may be creating ambiguous headlines on purpose, as an interesting headline will attract more readers' attention to be able to read the entire article. However, the headline above can be misleading if one does not read the content of the article, the reader will either think that a 15-year-old girl shot someone in a freak accident or that she was shot in a freak accident. But, to avoid this it is suggested that editors should always use secondary headlines called sub-heads or deck heads for readers to obtain reasonable interpretations of intentional or unintentional ambiguous headlines and to maintain the interest of the reader to read the content of the headline (Nwala, 2017; Alozie & Akpevweoghene, 2017). The headline could have included a deck head that reads:

Boys mistakenly fire uncle's gun

Below is an illustration of the headline using a tree diagram:

Figure 46. Datum 30 a and b first/second interpretation



Despite the headline being ambiguous, the tree diagram perhaps cannot expose the ambiguity since it can only be illustrated using one tree diagram.

4.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the researcher presented 30 ambiguous headlines that were collected from *The Namibian newspaper*. The headlines were analysed by employing analysed them and illustrated their ambiguity using tree diagrams. The researcher used Clare's (2013) theory of ambiguity to classify and re-examine headlines, Carnie's (2013) syntactic theory, Bornstain's (1997) tree diagram theory, Carnie's (2013) part of speech theory and Crystal (2008) phrase theory. In resolving structural ambiguity, the Fromkin et al.'s (2010) theory of causes of structural ambiguity was used. The chapter also revealed that not all ambiguous headlines can be illustrated using the tree diagram.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions and the interpretations drawn from the finding of the data collected. Conclusions about this study are made based on the three research objectives which were to:

1. Explain the several meanings and interpretations in each ambiguous headline
2. Illustrate the structural ambiguity in the headlines by tree diagram; and
3. Outline the causes of structural ambiguity in the headlines.

5.2 Conclusion

Structural ambiguity mostly happens in written language which may lead to confusion. Often, structural ambiguity may be found in headline news. Sometimes, from only reading the headlines, the reader gets unclear descriptions. However, the purpose of the current research was to explain structural ambiguity in the headlines of the *The Namibian* newspaper by tree diagram and to describe the causes of structural ambiguity in these headlines.

The first research problem was formulated to provide several meanings in each ambiguous headline. The researcher provided several possible meanings from the ambiguous headlines that are most suitable by the news context. Most interpretations only presented 2 meanings and these were presented as such. But, this does not indicate that this is the limitation to the interpretations.

Moreover, the second research problem was formulated to illustrate the structural ambiguity in the headlines by tree diagram. There is a diagram that represents two different meanings which

possible occurred from the headlines. Nonetheless, the researcher has discovered that it seems like not all ambiguous headlines can be illustrated by tree diagram. Ambiguity caused by negation scope could not be illustrated using more than one diagram even though the headlines could be interpreted in more than one meaning. But, this does not include all headlines caused by negation scope because for some like Datum 14 and 15 could be exposed using two tree structures. Also, these results are like ambiguity caused active and passive meaning as indicated by Datum 26 and Datum 30.

In the final analysis, structural ambiguity happens in the headlines of *The Namibian* newspaper and ambiguity mostly occurs from a ‘prepositional phrase’ which acts as a modifier. The modifier placement is made ambiguous because it is attached to the proceedings phrasal category in the headline which then affects the headline into having more than one interpretation for the readers. This has been shown in the results using tree diagrams that the modifier placement can be as a compliment to the following phrasing category in the headline. When the headline is a phrase, the headline is the phrasal category. Meanwhile, when the headline is a sentence, the head of the headline is a sentence, the head of the headline is the tense maker of the verb. Overall there are 9 ambiguous headlines caused by negation scope, 12 ambiguous headlines caused by a prepositional phrase, 5 ambiguous headlines caused by active or passive meaning, 2 ambiguous headlines cause by modification scope and 2 ambiguous headlines caused by present participle.

5.3 Recommendations

After completion of this research, the researcher hopes that the research can be of use to the readers, especially English students and the next researchers who want to study in the same field of syntax analysis. The English students may use this research to obtain more references and to

get the real examples of structural ambiguities that occur in written communications especially in the newspaper headlines.

Additionally, for the next researchers who are interested in studying in the same fields can research on other sections of syntax. They can research using other objects like written documents, such as grammar, magazines, books, or even social media posts. Also, to achieve more prospect on the ambiguous headlines, the future researcher can opt to have participants to provide different interpretations of the headlines that are not only limited to the researchers understating and knowledge.

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APPENDIX

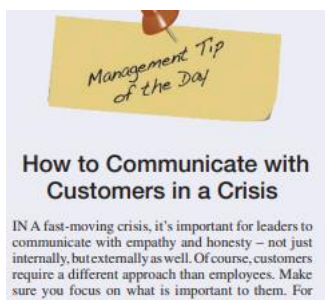
Datum 1



Datum 2



Datum 3



Datum 4

Private hospital denies dumping patient

• SHINOVENE IMMANUEL

THE Lady Polwartha Private Hospital has denied allegations by the health minister that it dumped a Covid-19 patient at a state hospital.

Health minister Kalumbi Shangula accused one of Namibia's biggest private hospitals of not informing the government when it transferred the patient last month.

HOSPITAL: continued on page 2

Datum 5

Geingob welcomes Chinese loans

• SHINOVENE IMMANUEL

PRESIDENT Hage Geingob says Chinese loans will be crucial to supplement the government's efforts to revive Namibia's economy.

Presidential spokesperson Alfredo Hengari confirmed this in a statement issued on Saturday that summarised a call between Geingob and Chinese president Xi Jinping the previous day.

According to the statement, Geingob believes "substantial investments, increased grants and favourable loan assistance from our all-weather friend China will be crucial and most welcome to complement our ongoing internal efforts, to help revive the growth of our



Hage Geingob

Datum 6

WHO advises against travel, trade restrictions with China

• ARLANA SHIKONGO

THE World Health Organisation says countries should

Datum 7

Misa takes on Malawian deputy minister for insulting a journalist

PRETORIA — The Media Institute of Southern Africa (Misa) in Malawi is demanding a public apology from deputy transport and public works minister Charles Mchacha after he verbally attacked and intimidated Nation Publications Limited journalist Bobby Kabango. In a statement, Misa Malawi said Mchacha "used all sorts of swear words" in a recorded phone conversation with Kabango who was pursuing a story on how the deputy minister allegedly acquired public land in Blantyre. "We believe honourable Mchacha's actions were a violation of media freedom and freedom of expression and can be construed as an



Charles Mchacha

Datum 8

Boxing star Jonas' rape charge dropped

• **HELGE SCHÜTZ**

JONAS Junias Jonas' long-running ordeal with the Brazilian justice system is finally over after his charge of rape was recently rejected.

Jonas (26) was arraigned on a charge of rape at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, but the charge has now finally been lifted.

Committee, (NNOC) Abner Xogub said the judges had "clearly and unanimously rejected the complainant's evidence of any untoward or sexually motivated conduct on the part of Jonas".

According to a press release issued by the NNOC, the Brazilian court rejected the charge, although it found Jonas guilty of "interfering with a person".

Datum 9

Shack dwellers trained in sustainable innovation

NGHINOMENWA ERASTUS

THE first trainees of Permaculture Global Movement graduated from

to living guides communities to mimic the patterns and relationships that can be found in nature and can be applied to all aspects of

vation and applying such has the potential to transform communities from being dependent consumers to being responsible producers.

Datum 10



Datum 11

Reporting on the frontlines of Covid-19

... perspectives from Namibian journalists

Datum 12

You Can't Over-prepare for a Presentation



WRITING A speech or presentation is challenging, and memorizing it takes even more time and effort. But whether you're speaking at a conference, setting a direction for your team, or persuading upper management to greenlight an idea, it's important to know your presentation cold. Transitions can be especially tricky,

running errands. Or you can rehearse a portion of your script right before bedtime or multitask as you brush your teeth. Finally, have a plan for any slip-ups. Prepare two or three go-to phrases, such as, "Let me refer to my notes," or "I'm struggling to remember my next point. Let me take a

Datum 13

Opposition sue Swapo for lockdown violation

• SAKEUS IIKELA

Datum 14

China reports first new local virus case in four days

Datum 15

Nahas wants apology over audio

• ELIASER NDEYANALE

riolic attack on the person of Mr by me to defame Mr Angula Angula made with collaboration are strongly denied and in fact

Datum 16

Removal Company 'returns' Customer's Waste After They Failed To Pay

Datum 17

Warning against abuse of emergency numbers

• TATUMI ENOP

Warn community members ing the recourse that wa waste spread incidents to stop van

Datum 18

Witness recounts death threat before killing

Datum 19

Shop employee assault draws condemnation

Datum 20

Mother appeals for help with triple joy

Datum 21

THE NAMIBIAN

NATIONAL NEWS

FRIDAY 17 JULY 2021

Political activist Angula remembered

Datum 22

N\$600m for school, hostel upgrades

Datum 23

Namibia gets N\$272m for conservation, tourism

Datum 24

Killer cuts woman's throat after threat

• WERNER MENGES

Datum 25

Taking care of a child with special needs

Datum 26

NEW TERM ... The new Khomas Boxing Federation, from left: Jason Naule (chairman), Mwila Musolo (treasurer), Ngendinomuwa Andimba (secretary general) and Joel Mungungu (vice chairman).

Naule re-elected
Khomas chairman

Datum 27

Namibia at 25 confirmed cases

Datum 28

Tackling corruption in government

can turn the tide against corruption Monetary Fund show that overall Research conducted in this area also

Datum 29

Nujoma threatens
Swartbooi with legal action

Datum 30



Girl (15)
shot in freak
accident



ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Ethical Clearance Reference Number: SHS 0027 Date: 30 April 2022

This Ethical Clearance Certificate is issued by the University of Namibia Decentralized Ethics Committee (DEC) in accordance with the University of Namibia's Research Ethics Policy and Guidelines. Ethical approval is given in respect of undertakings contained in the Research Project outlined below. This Certificate is issued on the recommendations of the ethical evaluation done by the School of Humanities, Society & Development Decentralized Ethics Committee.

Title of Project: Investigating Structural Ambiguity in Newspaper Headlines: A Case Study of Selected Headlines in *The Namibian* Newspaper between 1st February And 31st December 2020

Researcher: Elisabeth Massamba

Student Number: 201134187

Supervisor(s): Dr S. Mungungu-Shipale

Centre for Research Services

Take note of the following:

1. Any significant changes in the conditions or undertakings outlined in the approved Proposal must be communicated to the ethics committee. An application to make amendments may be necessary.
2. Any breaches of ethical undertakings or practices that have an impact on ethical conduct of the research must be reported to the ethics committee
3. The Principal Researcher must report issues of ethical compliance to the ethics committee (through the Chairperson) at the end of the Project or as may be requested by the ethics committee
4. The ethics committee retains the right to:
 - i) Withdraw or amend this Ethical Clearance if any unethical practices (as outlined in the Research Ethics Policy) have been detected or suspected,
 - ii) Request for an ethical compliance report at any point during the course of the research.

The ethics committee wishes you the best in your research.

Prof. Trywell Kalusopa (Chairperson, Decentralised Ethics Committee)

Prof. Davis Mumbengegwi (Head, Multidisciplinary Research)