Clarification and Linguistic Analysis
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Ambiguity

Lexical ambiguity (vagueness): when more than one sense corresponds to a given word.
ex. = 'good':   'This is a good hammer' (useful/functional)
'She is a good daughter' (nice)
'He is a good person' (moral)
'I am a good student' (exemplary)

Semantic ambiguity (equivocation): when a sentence means more than one thing based on an ambiguity in meaning of a given word.
ex. = 'Tom is cool' (cool = chilly, or 'a happening dude?')

Syntactic ambiguity (amphiboly): when a sentence means more than one thing based on the structure of the sentence
ex. = 'He brushed his teeth on the carpet' (on the carpet = location, or means of brushing?)

Grouping ambiguity (composition/division): when ambiguity concerns individuals or classes
ex. = "Secretaries make more than lawyers." (True if we are referring to the group of secretaries as a whole, since there are more secretaries than lawyers. False if we take each as individuals, since lawyers on average make more than secretaries).

Try out some ambiguities (some borrowed from Moore/Parker, *Critical Thinking*, 7th edition)
1. The Jets tackle threw a block at the Dolphins linebacker.
2. I watched my mother take off in the plane, her mighty nose pointed toward the sky.
3. Charles drew his gun.
4. They were both exposed to someone who was ill a week ago.
5. Dawn has her father's nose.
6. Abraham Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Address while traveling from Washington to Gettysburg on the back of an envelope.
7. In one of Shakespeare's famous plays, Hamlet relieves himself in a long soliloquy.
8. For dinner, you may choose chicken or beef with vegetables.
9. When Queen Elizabeth exposed herself before her troops, they all shouted 'Hurrah!'
10. Help wanted: Must have some experience lifting heavy equipment with hard hat and work overalls.
11. Check out our price on suit alternations cut ridiculously low!
12. The police killed the dog after mauling a girl.
13. He ate the cookies on the couch.
14. I know a little German.
15. She saw the farmer with binoculars.

16. The boys chased the girls, and they giggled a lot.
17. She disputed his claim.
18. My sister does not use glasses.
19. Automobile accidents kill 110 per day—let's resolve to do better!
20. Lawyers give poor legal advice without charge.

Ambiguous riddle: "Think of three words ending in -*gry*. *Angry* and *hungry* are two of them. There are only three words in the English language. What is the third word? The word is something everyone uses every day. If you have listened carefully, I have already told you what it is." (*from Richard Lederer*) Hint: the answer hangs upon an ambiguity of use/mention.

Use vs. Mention

A frequent cause of ambiguity is failure to distinguish between use and mention. Not only in language do we often employ words to express meaning, but also we *talk about words*. Consider the following:

      Blue is a color

      Blue is four letters long

It should be clear that in the former sentence, the word 'blue' here refers to the word as it means, viz., "the color blue." In the latter, the word is used to talk about 'blue' viz., "the word 'blue.'" Use/mention mistakes can often be avoided by using quotes to specify when the word itself is being referred to (mention), and without quotes when the word is being employed in the sentence (use)—as I have in order to disambiguate in this very paragraph. A related distinction is viewing whole sentences (not just words) in terms of *type* and *token*.

Type vs. Token

Consider the following:

> John is thirteen years old.
> John is thirteen years old.

How many sentences are there in the above box? You many have said one, or you might have said two. Both answers are correct, but are talking about two different things. People who said that there is only one sentence in the box are picking up on the *sentence type*, meaning that there is only one sentence here which is repeated twice. People who said two are picking up on the sentence as *token*, a string of words. There are two sentences interpreted as *token*, but only one interpreted as a *type*.

Indexicality

Some words are *indexical*, where their reference is relative to the circumstances of their being uttered. Saying "My name is Tom" is true when asserted by me, but false when uttered by you. This hangs upon the indexical word 'my.' Likewise "It is now three-thirty" is true (at most) twice a day. Again, this hangs upon the indexical 'now.' The token that expresses the type of a sentence containing an indexical can be determined true or false with reference to the context of the type-utterance. The meaning of a sentence can often be analyzed such that it loses its token-reflexivity by replacing each occurrence of the indexical by a speaker's name, place or time (at the risk of perhaps making the sentence sound naively tautological in most cases).

Definitions vs. Examples

1. *ostensive definition*: definition which stipulates a correlation between word and object, often by pointing, or some other non-verbal clue as to the object being defined.
2. *extensional definition*: definition by specifying a class of objects to which the word refers.
3. *intensional (lexical) definition*: The set of all and only those properties an object must have to correspond to a given word (*necessary and sufficient conditions*)
   a) *stipulative definition*: definition of a new word (e.g., a lot of current computer lingo)
   b) *definitions used to reduce vagueness*: definitions for the purposes of specifying exactly who might qualify for the term (e.g, "full-time student" means a student taking at least 12 credits).
   c) *theoretical definitions*: a definition by connecting a word with other words in a theory (e.g., "death" means cessation of brain functioning)
   d) *persuasive definitions*: definitions that carry rhetorical force ("homosexuality" is defined as the sinful and unnatural desire to engage in sexual activity with someone of the same gender). Common subspecies of persuasive definitions are *euphemism* and *disphemism*. For more on persuasive definition, see Kahane/Cavender pp. 146-152