ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: Everyday communication is enlivened by ambiguous language, from idioms to metaphors, parodies to multiple-meaning words. The complexity of the English language is not limited to spelling and grammar but extends beyond word and phrase meaning in everyday use. Ambiguous language is ubiquitous. It can be used deliberately to attain attention, enhance creativity and express higher-order language (Nippold, 2007); however, due to the inherent ambiguity of natural language and a continuum of development (Akearn, 1982), even neurotypical adults can be confronted with situations in which they experience confusion and miscommunication due to the use of some form of ambiguous language (Srioka, Platovna & Siminova, 2016). One cannot participate in a conversation for more than a few minutes without encountering at least one form of ambiguous language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Ambiguity is so engrained in the foundations of language that often speaker and listener are both completely unaware of its use (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Ambiguous language often goes unnoticed for extended periods of time until it causes a breakdown in communication. Often, it is only then that the speaker and listener are made aware of the presence of such uses of language. Indeed, even neurotypical adults often have difficulty in interpreting ambiguity even when it is pointed out to them, and overestimate the degree to which they have disregarded their own utterances (Keyser and Herzy 2002).

RESULTS: When completing the protocol, the evaluation team was in agreement concerning the usage of homonyms and homophones but did not agree on the usage of metaphors, slang, jargon and idioms.

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While both speakers demonstrated a decrease in the use of ambiguous language in the second conversation, it is noteworthy that the non-SLP demonstrated a more significant difference in reduction of usage. Different types of ambiguous language affect different strengths in speech (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphors and idioms are more prevalent in our daily language and the non-SLP was more tuned to identifying these forms.

CONCLUSION: The evaluation team consisted of three evaluators. One evaluator was an older adult who served as a way to gauge age gap and non-SLP. It is hypothesized that this age gap served as a factor in the inability for the team to agree on the uses of slang/idioms/jargon.

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While both speakers demonstrated a decrease in the use of ambiguous language in the second conversation, it is noteworthy that the non-SLP demonstrated a more significant difference in reduction of usage.

Ambiguity is a major form of language disfluency whereby the complex nature of language can lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding. These results indicated that regardless of training and presentation of a protocol, the evaluators were not able to have complete inter-rater reliability, particularly for "ambiguous" or hard ambiguities.

It is hypothesized that the "curse of knowledge" (a bias related to Theory of Mind in even neurotypical adults) plays a major role in the evaluators’ inability to identify some forms of ambiguous language.

While both speakers produced uses of all categories of ambiguous language use, the non-SLP produced fewer across all categories and categories.

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REFERENCES


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