1. Definitions

Much confusion arises from not knowing what a word or sign means. When such confusion arises, we frequently ask for a *definition*.

- An **ostensive definition** is a definition that supplies the meaning of a term by pointing at an example of it. For example, if you didn't know what a "canard" meant, I could define it by pointing at a duck and saying 'that is a canard'. The problem with ostensive definitions is that they admit of confusion, e.g. is a canard a duck or is it just a duck's beak? Is it that particular kind of duck, ducks in general, or just female ducks?
- A **dictionary definition** is a definition that supplies the meaning of a term by describing how the word is generally used across multiple contexts.
- A **stipulative definition** is a definition of a term for a particular context. For example, if I say 'in this context, I'm going to use the term 'rabbit' to refer to ducks', then I say 'I want to eat some rabbit', you have probably understood me as saying that *I want to eat some duck*.

Stipulative definitions play an important role in contexts where greater precision of language is needed. For example, consider cases of deception. First, we could try to define *deception* by pointing to some clear cut cases of deception. For example, we might ostensively define *deception* by pointing to the following case:

> Ostensive definition of *deception*: John *knowingly* tells Mary that Justin Bieber will be at Tudek park (knowing that she loves Bieber and will surely go to Tudek). Meanwhile, John breaks into her apartment and robs her.

But, such an ostensive definition, as we have seen, would leave us unsure about whether a variety of different cases are instances of deception.
Second, we could simply appeal to a dictionary definition of "deception":

> To cause someone to believe something that is not true, typically in order to gain some personal advantage.

This definition leaves a lot to be desired since it admits cases that are *not cases of deception* and fails to cover cases that *are deception*.

- *Dictionary definition overdetermines* the cases that count as deception by admitting cases that should not count as deception
  - *Higgs Boson Example #1*: Suppose that I have been told that scientists have just discovered the Higgs Boson particle and I say to a friend "Scientists have discovered the Higgs Boson particle." Later, it turns out that scientists did not actually discover the Higgs Boson particle and there was a mistake in their experiment. According to the dictionary definition, I have *deceived* my friend. But

this doesn't seem right and we wouldn't agree with our friend who utters, "you jerk! You deceived me as you caused me to believe something false."

- *Dictionary definition underdetermines* the cases that count as deception by failing to admit cases that should count as deception
    - *Higgs Boson Example #2:* Suppose that I know that Mary thinks my beat-up, engine-rusting Honda Civic is in perfect condition. She does not really know about cars and thinks that the car is in perfect condition because Jon (a friend of mine) lied to her. He tells her that I keep it in perfect condition, that there is no rust, that it is perfectly safe, and worth $20,000. Now suppose that I meet Mary to sell her my car. She plans to buy my car but I also repeat what Jon told her. Mary hands me a check for $20,000. Note that I did not *cause* Mary to believe something untrue (Jon did), but I have *deceived* her because I *reinforced* a false impression that I know to be influencing Mary.

Both ostensive and dictionary definitions are insufficient for certain purposes.

- The ostensive definition does not give us a sense of how we should extend one particular example of deception to other cases
- The dictionary definition both *overdetermines* and *underdetermines* the cases of deception, we run into the issue of lacking a clear specification of whether a case of deception or not.

Without a clear specification of what counts as *deception*, we can run into a variety of different problems.

- Problem #1 (legal problems): we might be unsure whether to charge a criminal with *theft by deception* or some other crime.
- Problem #2 (breakdowns in communication): we don't know *exactly* what someone is saying. If a male friend of ours tells us that his girlfriend deceived him, we might be unsure just what our friend means by this. Did his girlfriend lie to him, did she tell unwittingly tell him something false, did she just neglect to tell him something and thus reinforce a false impression in her mind?
- Problem #3 (errors in reasoning): we can be think a word (or grammatical structure) means one thing and credit the argument, but it really means something different (more on this later)

In order to avoid these types of problems, it is useful to stipulate a very precise definition to cover as many cases as possible. Here is an example of a definition of 'deception' defined in the context of the Pennsylvania law concerning *theft by deception*.

Theft by deception - 18 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 3922
(a) Offense defined.--A person is guilty of theft if he intentionally obtains or withholds property of another by deception. A person **deceives** if he intentionally:
(1) creates or reinforces a false impression, including false impressions as to law, value, intention or other state of mind; but deception as to a person's intention to perform a promise shall not be inferred from the fact alone that he did not subsequently perform the promise;
(2) prevents another from acquiring information which would affect his judgment of a transaction; or

(3) fails to correct a false impression which the deceiver previously created or reinforced, or which the deceiver knows to be influencing another to whom he stands in a fiduciary or confidential relationship. (b) Exception.--The term "deceive" does not, however, include falsity as to matters having no pecuniary significance, or puffing by statements unlikely to deceive ordinary persons in the group addressed.

In the above definition, the conditions under which a person deceived are clarified for a variety of different cases. The benefit of such a definition is that we have more precise conditions under which a person *deceives* in the context of theft and so we can avoid problems associated with law, communication, and reasoning.

In Class Discussion: Consider the Verdict (Ex.5-3)

However, there is a serious problem with stipulative definitions.

- Problem #1 (too taxing): stipulative definitions are extremely precise and require a lot of cognitive resources (e.g., memory, time spent learning)
- Problem #2 (too many): stipulative definitions tend to be precise definitions of terms tailored to specific situations and so we need a stipulative definition for all of the various contexts, e.g. deception in relationships, deception in unjust political regimes, etc.

2. The Fallacy of Ambiguity

Since all three different definitions have problems. Perhaps the lesson we can take away from this is that we are forced to deal with some amount of indeterminacy but we should be precise when it matters. Let's look at a case where it does matter by turning to problem #3 associated with defining terms. This said that a lack of clarity with respect to what a word means can lead us to (improperly) credit the argument.

An expression **p** is **ambiguous** if and only if **p** has at least two distinct meanings. For example, 'bank' is ambiguous between a financial institution and the slope of land bordering a stream.[1] The **fallacy of ambiguity** (or fallacy of equivocation) is when the meaning m_1 of an expression is used in a premise but a different meaning m_2 is employed either in another premise or in the conclusion. More broadly, the fallacy of the ambiguity is committed when there is any type of deception or confusion due to the ambiguous use of terms.

Example #1, see pp.132 – innocent vs. guilty

Example #2 of the Fallacy of Ambiguity	
1	The average American family has 2.4 children.
2	Liz's family is average.
3	Therefore, Liz's family has 2.4 children.

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[1] Ambiguity is distinct from other kinds of indeterminacy affecting language, e.g. vagueness, generality, uninformative, and underspecific. To give one example, a term like 'tall' or 'heap' are **vague** if and only if they admit borderline cases, i.e., whether it is intrinsically uncertain whether a particular item is *tall* or *not tall*. In the case of a vague term like tall, it is not the case that 'tall' has two distinct meanings. Rather, it is the case that the boundary or cut-off for the non-tall end and the tall things begin is objectively uncertain.

Notice that the term 'average' is used in two different senses. In (1), it is used as a *statistical average* or *mean* whereas in (2), it is not *atypical* (in the sense either that she has 1, 2, or 3 children or in the sense that they are not unusual).

Example #3 of the Fallacy of Ambiguity	
1	Politician X created 50,000 new jobs
2	Therefore, politician X is a job creator.

Notice that in the above example, "create" has two possible meanings

$Create_1$: added 50,000 new jobs to the existing total of jobs
$Create_2$: added 50,000 new jobs but the total number of jobs did not increase 50,000

A politician might argue that she is a job creator (rather than destroyer) when in fact they are *also* destroying jobs, e.g. by turning every full-time job into two part-time jobs.

Some fallacies of ambiguity are very subtle. Consider the following argument and then take a look at p.22 of J. Eric Oliver's *Fat Politics* (see last page)[2]

Example #4 of the Fallacy of Ambiguity	
1	If more and more people are becoming *overweight* in this country, then we need to devote more money for physical education courses, create more governmental organizations to study obesity, and subsidize drug companies and organizations that provide pharmaceutical solutions to those Americans gaining more and more weight.
2	More and more people in America are becoming *overweight*. Between 1987 and 1988, the number of Americans classified as "overweight" rose over 37 million.
3	Thus, we need to devote more money for physical education courses, create more governmental organizations to study obesity, and subsidize drug companies and organizations that provide pharmaceutical solutions to those Americans gaining more and more weight.

3. Amphiboly

Some ambiguity is *semantic*, i.e. confusion about which one of two distinct meanings is being used is the result of a term having two different senses. Another kind of ambiguity is *syntactic* or *grammatical*. For example, consider the following three sentences:

(1) Visiting relatives can be a nuisance.
(2) Flying planes can be dangerous.
(3) The uncle of the boy and the girl arrived late

In (1), it is ambiguous whether 'visiting relatives' is a noun phrase and so "visiting" is an *adjective* that modifies relatives (e.g. my visiting relatives, Aunt Cecilia and Aunt Mary, are nice) or whether 'visiting relatives' is a verb phrase (e.g. as in 'I am visiting my relatives).

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[2] Oliver, J. Eric. 2006. *Fat Politics: The Real Story Behind America's Obesity Epidemic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.22.

An **amphiboly** is a fallacy whereby an individual infers a conclusion on the basis of a misinterpretation of the intended meaning of a sentence that can be understood in at least two different grammatical ways. More broadly, however, an amphiboly is any kind of mistaken reasoning resulting from a sentence having a misleading (or careless) grammatical structure.

> Example #1, p.136 "This cereal contains 100% natural fruits and grains"
> Example #2: This drug is doctor recommended (recommended by [a] doctor or recommended by a number of doctors)
> Example #3: A CD that reads *Best of the Beatles* (this is misleading since you are thinking you are getting a CD that features the best songs of the Beatles (Paul, Ringo, John Lennon, George Harrison) when it is really a CD by Pete Best who was an early member of the Beatles, i.e. [*Pete*] *Best of the Beatles*.[3]
> Example #4: Come and stay in our luxurious B&B that has a spectacular mountain view, private bath and kitchen. (the bath is private but the kitchen is not)

Homework Exercises
Ex. 9-1,
Ex. 9-2 #1-4, 8
Ex. 9-3 #1-2
Review Questions, p.139 #1-2, 4-6

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[3] S. Morris Engel, *The Study of Philosophy*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.