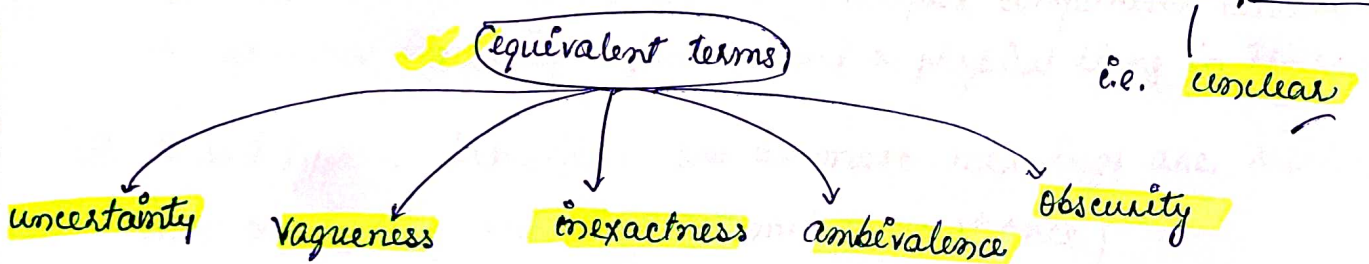


## 9. Ambiguity

→ Meaning: Quality of being open to more than one interpretation.



(example: if a character is unhappy in his life and at the end of the novel or play he approaches the river and the story ends. In such situation there may be multiple interpretations

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→ may be going to commit suicide  
→ may be going to start a new life spending time with the nature.

— That is, there is an ambiguous ending. The interpretation is open to the readers.

→ The term has been widely used in criticism to identify a deliberate poetic device after the publication of

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a follower of  
"New Criticism"

"Seven Types of Ambiguity"  
(by William Empson in 1930)

→ Definition in "A Glossary of Literary Terms":

"the use of single word or expression to signify two or more distinct references, or to express two or more diverse attitudes or feelings."

— "Multiple meaning" & "plurisignation" are its alternative terms.

x Emerson's Seven types of ambiguity:

(i) Metaphor — e.g. My father is a lion.

(When two things are said to be alike which have different properties). This concept is similar to Metaphysical Conceit.

(ii) Opposites making/producing a new idea

also known as paradox.

example: "this is the beginning of the end."  
"save money by spending it" ] thought provoking

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(iii) **Pun**

playing with the meanings of the words.

(with the words having multiple meanings)

— basically making of funny statements using words humorously. (or joke)

Example: A leopard does not change its **spot**. — spot has two meanings

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one is the  
place  
(living place)

other is  
the spot on  
its body.

(iv) **Words producing an abstract thought**

also known as **Freudian Slip** (unintentional error revealing subconscious feelings)

→ any kind of misspeak (what we call 'slip of tongue')

→ for example, a child calls his/her teacher 'mom' accidentally.

(in this situation, the audience or the reader finds a scope for a psychoanalytic interpretation / multiple interpretations will come out)

(v) Unfortunate confusion

x words producing a concrete thought

example: Speaker 1: What are you doing?

Speaker 2: I am lying on bed.

here the 'Speaker 1' may produce an image instantly as how 'Speaker 2' is lying (like a dog, like a cow...)

these things come to mind instantly and automatically.

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(vi) Fill it in

When the statement says nothing / or incomplete and the readers are forced to invest a statement of their own.

(vii) Binary oppositions

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When we think of one idea or concept its opposite comes to our mind abruptly.

example: day - night / dark - bright / black - white etc.  
(exposing the fundamental divisions)

— hampers the process of exploration.