UN Human Trafficking Reports as Viewed through the Lens of Vagueness: A Semantico- Pragmatic Study

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Abstract

Human trafficking is widely recognized as a major challenge of the 21st century. The United Nations (UN), as the primary deliberative, policy-making, and coordinating entity, plays a crucial role in defining the collective vision for effectively combating human trafficking. Consequently, the UN publishes reports on human trafficking to provide an in-depth analysis of trafficking trends, information on victims, and prosecutions related to this crime. Due to the sensitivity of this issue, vagueness is sometimes employed in these reports. Vagueness is a common phenomenon encompassing expressions inherently lacking in precision and utilized for various interactional and social purposes. This paper aims to semantically investigate and pragmatically analyze the use of vagueness in these reports. The study contributes to the fields of semantics and pragmatics by examining how vague expressions function in discourse, thereby enriching linguistic theory and its applications. To achieve this aim, the researchers have adopted Channell's (2000) seminal work on vagueness on the semantic level and Levinson's (2000) Neo-Gricean approach on the pragmatic level. Four UN reports on human trafficking are purposefully selected and analysed qualitatively. The paper has come to certain conclusions, among which all the types of vague expressions identified in Channel's (2000) taxonomy of vagueness have been found in UN reports on human trafficking. Vagueness is often used to omit less important information, avoid conveying incorrect information, and attract attention. Vagueness in the UN reports on human trafficking serves several functions, including vague language helps to establish effective communication through concise language, promoting interactive mutual understanding between the interlocutors.

Keywords: human trafficking, Neo-Gricean pragmatics, semantico-pragmatic, the UN reports, vagueness

تقارير الأمم المتحدة حول الإتجار بالبشر من خلال عدسة الابهام: دراسة دلالية- تداولية

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المستخلص :

إن الاتجار بالبشر من التحديات الكبرى التي تواجهنا في القرن الحادي والعشرين. وتلعب الأمم المتحدة، باعتبارها الكيان الأساسي الذي يتولى وضع السياسات والتنسيق، دوراً حاسماً في تحديد الرؤية الجماعية لمكافحة الاتجار بالبشر بفعالية. ونتيجة لذلك، تنشر الأمم المتحدة تقارير عن الاتجار بالبشر بهدف تقديم تحليل متعمق لاتجاهات الاتجار بالبشر، والمعلومات عن الضحايا، والملاحقات القضائية المتعلقة بهذه الجريمة. ونظراً لحساسية هذه القضية، فإن الابهام يُستخدم أحياناً في هذه التقارير. والابهام ظاهرة شائعة تشمل التعبيرات التي تفتقر بطبيعتها إلى الدقة وتستخدم لأغراض تفاعلية واجتماعية مختلفة. تهدف هذه الورقة إلى التحقيق الدلالي والتحليل التداولي لاستخدام الابهام في هذه التقارير. وتساهم الدراسة في مجالات الدلالات والتداولية من خلال فحص كيفية عمل التعبيرات المبهمة في الخطاب، وبالتالي إثراء النظرية اللغوية وتطبيقاتها. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، تبنى الباحثون العمل الرائد الذي قام به شانيل (٢٠٠٠) حول الابهام على المستوى الدلالي ونهج ليفنسون (٢٠٠٠) الجديد على المستوى التداولي. وقد تم اختيار أربعة تقارير للأمم المتحدة حول الاتجار بالبشر بشكل مقصود وتحليلها نوعيًا. وتوصلت الورقة إلى استنتاجات معينة، من بينها العثور على جميع أنواع التعبيرات المبهمة التي تم تحديدها في تصنيف شانيل (٢٠٠٠) للإبهام في تقارير الأمم المتحدة حول الاتجار بالبشر. وغالبًا ما يستخدم الابهام لحذف المعلومات الأقل أهمية وتجنب نقل المعلومات غير الصحيحة وجذب الانتباه. ويخدم الابهام في تقارير الأمم المتحدة حول الاتجار بالبشر عدة وظائف، بما في ذلك اللغة المبهمة تساعد على إقامة اتصال فعال من خلال لغة موجزة، وتعزيز التفاهم المتبادل التفاعلي بين المحاورين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الابهام، الاتجار بالبشر، التداولية النيو-غريسية، تقارير الأمم المتحدة، الدلالية-التداولية

1. Introduction

The United Nations (UN) is the platform where nations gather for discussion on critical matters, including human rights, social and economic advancement, human trafficking, and counterterrorism. It is essential for reducing tensions among nations, avoiding wars, and ending currently progressing hostilities. It offers the tools to support the upholding of global peace and security, the enhancement of the lives of the most insecure, and the creation of policies related to issues affecting all people (United Nations, 2004).

As a global organisation, the UN addresses the entire world and simulates its problems by continuously presenting reports that cover the diversity of the population's concerns. Thus, different kinds of messages are consistently being emitted to the world through UN reports. One of these social issues is human trafficking. Human trafficking is based on exploiting and violating human rights. This can be done through the recruitment, transfer, transportation, or harbouring of people through threat, force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of authority, or giving or receiving payments or benefits to obtain the approval of an individual in a position of control for exploitation (United Nations General Assembly, 2017). Recently, there has been growing evidence of the wide-ranging negative consequences of human trafficking on societies (Zimmerman & Kiss, 2017). Therefore, it should be considered a global social concern that needs to be shed light on from different viewpoints, including linguistics. As with any other kind of discourse, the UN reports encompass vague language since vagueness is a natural language phenomenon and performs multifunctional tasks in discourse (Koester, 2007).

On the linguistic level of meaning, both semantics and pragmatics are considered to be valuable; semantics maintains the relations of signs to applicable objects, and pragmatics is the study of the relations of signs to interpreters (Baymot, 2021). Thus, as with any other semantic source, vague language can provide feedback that assists certain pragmatic sources to achieve effective communication. Hence the present paper attempts mainly to answer the following questions:

1.   What are the vague lexical items and expressions that are used in the UN reports on human trafficking?

2.   What are the implied meanings behind the use of vagueness in the UN reports on human trafficking?

3.   What are the communicative functions that result from the use of vagueness in the UN reports on human trafficking?

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To achieve the aim and the research questions, the paper operates on two levels. The first is the semantic level to examine vagueness depending on Channel's (2000) taxonomy since vagueness is a semantic feature of language expressions. The second is the pragmatic level, where the implied meanings and the pragmatic functions are detected. On the pragmatic level, Levinson's (2000) Neo-Gricean approach is adopted since it is an approach of generalized conversational implicature. He regards it as a form of utterance-type meaning. Levinson's notion of utterance-type meaning suggests that recipients interpret utterance tokens to mean what their type means unless stated otherwise. Levinson's (2000) Neo-Gricean approach starts with lexical inferences and advances towards explaining the way sentence semantics is connected with pragmatics. This means that "general pragmatic inference... is crucial input to semantic representation" (Levinson, 2000, p. 187). Eventually, pragmatic inferences appear to be encoded in semantic representations. Such an approach is convenient with the methodology of the present study, which adopts vague language as a starting point towards achieving certain pragmatic purposes.

It is hoped that this study will be of value to linguists, students of linguistics, and researchers in the field of linguistics who look for insights into the importance of vagueness and its applicability in different kinds of discourse to achieve various communicative functions. Understanding how vague language is used in the context of human trafficking can provide a lens for understanding reports and speeches in similar contexts, for example, the use of vague language in statements about a political event.

2. Theoretical Framework
2.1 Key Words
2.1.1 The Interdisciplinarity of Semantics and Pragmatics

Semantic is primarily concerned with analysing the literal meaning of words rather than their intended meaning by the addresser in a particular context (Idrees & Jameel, 2023). As described by Tariq and Hameed (2021), pragmatics involves the comprehensive examination of language usage in its broadest sense. El–Samir and Al-Azawy (2014) affirm that although semantics and pragmatics are distinct fields, they are nevertheless interrelated and mutually supportive. A proper understanding involves both disciplines without a clear boundary between them.

According to Khalil (2020), the semantico-pragmatics interface has consistently yielded more comprehensive, cohesive, and unbiased linguistic conclusions. In Falkum's (2011) view, semantics directly pertains to linguistic expressions as part of the conceptual structure of an utterance, whereas pragmatics emerges from inference, heuristics, world knowledge, and contextual understanding. Consequently, Gricean theories of pragmatics

propose that semantic content influences how an expression is interpreted rather than exactly correspond between an expression and its content. Therefore, Gricean pragmatic theories split the interpretation into two parts: the semantic content, which establishes the literal meaning of an expression, and cooperative social reasoning, which establishes the inferred meaning by using this literal interpretation (Grygiel, 2016).

2.1.2 Vagueness

According to Ullmann (1972, p. 118), the roots of vagueness in natural language can be traced back to several factors, including the general nature of words, context-dependent meanings, the lack of clear boundaries in the non-linguistic world, and a lack of knowledge about word meanings. Channell (1994) defines vagueness as a term or expression that can be compared to another with a similar meaning, whether deliberately unclear or inherently uncertain. In addition, as Channell (1994) and Brown and Levinson (1987) note, adherence to politeness rules within a specific culture can sometimes result in vagueness. As a result, understanding the causes of vagueness is crucial for effective communication and clarity in language.

It is traditionally believed that vagueness is undesirable in language use. This idea that vagueness is a negative aspect in language stems from an essentialist approach to meaning. However, this traditional view contrasts with the fact that vague language is widely used and is often seen as an effective means of communication. Added to that, vague language is a common element of everyday communication and is equally important in the preciseness of non-vague language (Zhao, 2010). This can be the case when the addresser is intentionally vague to mislead the listener, even though they know exactly what the subject is (Merzah & Abbas, 2020). Furthermore, vague language is a ubiquitous feature, not only in informal conversations but also in various types of discourse, such as newspapers, business transactions, and scientific contexts (Ismail et al., 2022).

In Zhang's (1998) analysis, distinctions are made between the concepts of fuzziness, generality, vagueness, and ambiguity. Fuzziness is predominantly used in scientific disciplines such as mathematics and logic, whereas vagueness is more commonly observed in diverse fields like linguistics and psychology. Furthermore, the term generality pertains to the capacity of a term or sentence to encompass a broad category, as opposed to a specific and precisely defined topic.

In contrast to vagueness, ambiguity involves uncertainty about the mappings between different levels of representation (Kennedy, 2019). According to Scheffler (1979), a word can be considered ambiguous if it has several readings in the dictionary and is associated with different real expressions.

While vagueness refers to imprecise meanings of terms, ambiguity deals with multiple interpretations and structural properties (Kennedy, 2019). Ambiguity and vagueness are different forms of interpretative uncertainty that carry different implications for semantic theory and the philosophy of language.

2.1.3 Channell's (2000) Classifications of Vague Language

1. Hedges: As defined by Lakoff (1973, p. 471), a hedge is "a word or phrase whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy." Khalil (2017, p. 328) claims that their conceptual origins can be traced back to Zadeh's seminal work on "fuzzy set theory" in 1965. Hedges can be categorised as approximators and shields:

A. approximators: These lexical items can influence the truthfulness of a proposition by altering or recalibrating its original meaning and, in some cases, establishing a range within which variations can occur (Cai-yan & Lu-ting, 2014). Approximators are subdivided into adaptation and rounders:

• Adaptation: Channell (2000, p. 114) claims that adapters are devices used by addressers to convey uncertain meanings and bring their expressions closer to reality. Examples of such adapters include terms such as "almost," "a little bit," "sort of," "kind of," and "somewhat."

• Rounders: they offer approximations, typically in terms of measurement, and express a spectrum of values such as "roughly fifty meters," "near this location," and "approximately half past ten" (Clark, 2016).

B. Shields: Clark (2016, p. 57) claims that they are expressions that indicate the addresser's level of uncertainty about a statement, such as "according to, "it is said that," "it seems to," etc. They are divided into two categories: plausibility shields and attribute shields:

• Plausibility shields: According to Sabet and Zhang (2015), they protect the addresser from having to make a firm or personal commitment to the truth of his statement. Such as "I think, "possibly, and "as far as I can tell." Yue and Wang (2014) suggest that modal verbs can help soften the tone, while hesitation words express reserved and cautious attitudes.

• Attribution shields: they refer to the linguistic expressions that attribute responsibility for a statement to a source other than the addresser (Clark, 2016). These expressions, include "it has been stated that," "according to (X)," and "as is widely recognized".

2. Vague words: They are referring to terms that have indefinite, unclear, or imprecise meanings, such as "things," "something," "such," or any term that prompts further questions for clarification (Pan, 2012).

3. Vague implication: According to Wahyuningsih (2014), vague implication pertains to utterances that have precise linguistic

expressions but can often be misinterpreted. This form of vagueness arises when an exact numerical value or a numerical descriptor is used in the plural. It can also occur when rounded numerical values are utilized without strict precision. For instance, the statement "Officials are concerned, she said, because the river, which was measured at 38 feet Wednesday afternoon" (From CNN, June 28, 2006, cited in Pan, 2012).

2.1.4 Neo-Gricean Theories: Levinson's (2000) Revisionist Approach

The original Gricean model has led to numerous revisions and reinterpretations and has given rise to various new approaches. As a result, the Neo-Gricean theory has brought about a profound change in pragmatic theorising and continues to serve as a fundamental pillar in contemporary discussions within linguistic pragmatics and the philosophy of language (Huang, 2017). According to Sbisà (2006), the neo-Gricean perspective considers linguistic communication as the comprehension of the addresser's communicative intention by the addressee. It recognises that relying solely on language rules does not always guarantee successful communication; hence, it emphasises the role of inferential activity in this process.

Grice (1975) argues that the primary aspect of the Quality maxim, namely "Try to make your contribution one that is true," holds paramount importance and that other maxims only apply if this principle is fulfilled. Franke (2009) asserts that the Neo-Gricean approach is closely aligned with Grice's notion of cooperation in conversation but focuses on explaining pragmatic inference primarily through a more detailed explanation of the maxim of Quantity, thus emphasising the significance of informativeness in discourse. Thus, Neo-Gricean pragmatics retains parallels with Grice's original maxims, as its proponents adhere to his initial perspective and view the meaning of utterances, including implicatures, as reflecting the addresser's intended meaning (Jaszczolt, 2010).

Nashmi and Mehdi (2022) argue that communication is a cooperative process that lies at the centre of the pragmatic concept, relying on the shared knowledge of the participants. Accordingly, both the addresser and the listener use defaults to enable efficient communication. Levinson (2000) proposes distilling the original Gricean theory into three neo-Gricean pragmatic principles:

The Q-Principle: This principle can be encapsulated in the phrase 'What is not said is not the case'. From the perspective of the addresser, it advises against making claims that are less informative than one's actual understanding of the world allows. For the listener, it encourages the assumption that the addressers have expressed themselves as strongly as possible within their knowledge.

The I-Principle can be formulated as follows: Avoid making your contribution more informative than necessary. From the perspective of

the addresser, aim to convey the information that is essential for achieving your communicative goals. From the addressee's perspective, the principle suggests that simple expressions are typically representative examples. This means that one should interpret an utterance to the extent that it aligns with their existing knowledge of the world.

The M-Principle: Essentially, this principle states that using marked or more elaborate expressions is a signal for an abnormal situation. From the addresser's perspective, the use of marked expressions is discouraged unless the intention is to draw the listener's attention to something abnormal in the situation. For the listener, following this heuristic leads to interpretations that differ from those resulting from the addresser's use of unmarked or brief expressions.

Each of the three principles outlined by Levinson (2000) consists of two aspects: an addresser's maxim, indicating what the principle requires the addresser to say, and an implication for the recipient, determining what the addressee can infer from it. Levinson observes potential conflicts between these principles. For example, the Q-principle and the I-principle can contradict each other: while one principle suggests that if an addresser does not say something, it should be excluded, the other implies that if an addresser does not say something, it can be assumed. Similarly, while the I-principle advises adopting conventional interpretations, the M-principle encourages seeking non-standard ones (Kasmirli, 2016).

2.2 Related Works

Since vagueness is part of language, it was examined in some different genres and contexts. The following are some studies that tackled the concept of vagueness:

Ismail et al. (2022) have conducted a study entitled "Vague language: A critical reading". The researchers have used secondary data from studies conducted in the mid-20th century to support the importance of politeness in communication, gender, culture, press releases, and education. They have conducted a discourse analysis focusing on vague language. They have found that addressees were dissatisfied when with the description of terms and possible interpretations of a text. Furthermore, the use of vague language has led to controversial discussions about semantics and pragmatics among specialists in discourse genres. The addressee's comprehension of quantifiers and linguistic approximators was constrained by the vagueness inherent in speech. Therefore, the addressers have been encouraged to refrain from using vague language.

AL-Mimari and AL-Zebari (2021) have conducted another study on vagueness titled "Vagueness in Researches Abstracts". The researchers have used Kempson's model of vagueness to examine two abstracts. The model

includes four types of vagueness: Referential vagueness, indeterminacy of meaning, lack of specification in the meaning of an item, and disjunction in the specification of the meaning of an item. Before being reviewed and published, the chosen abstracts have been taken from "College of Basic Education Researches Journal" in Iraq and the "AL-Kitab Journal for Pure Sciences" in Iraq. The results show that the researchers have found 8 instances of vagueness in their study sample. Referential vagueness accounted for half of the total, while indeterminacy of meaning and lack of specification in the meaning of an item each accounted for 25%. Finally, no instances of disjunction in the specification of the meaning of an item have been identified. In summary, it has been deduced that imprecise word choice resulting from mishandled punctuation marks and inadequate comprehension lead to the use of vague words or expressions while writing abstracts.

Du (2021) has done a study titled 'The Pragmatic Study of Vague Language in English Political News from the Perspective of Adaptation Theory.' This research has looked at vague language within the framework of Adaptation Theory and at the main pragmatic purposes of vague language. The study data has consisted of over 20 political news reports from China Daily. The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of vagueness in English political news discussions and analyse how it is used to efficiently adapt to the mental and physical world. The results of the study is that linguistic manifestations vary from one language to another. Factors such as interpersonal cooperation, politeness, face-saving tendencies, and other considerations can influence the use of language in cross-cultural contexts. As a result, communicators should express themselves through vagueness rather than using direct forms of communication.

Another study entitled 'A Pragmalinguistic and Sociopolitical Analysis of Vague Language in Two Iranian Presidents' International Interviews' has been conducted by Allami et. al. (2021). This study has presented a qualitative analysis of vagueness in political interviews with two Iranian presidents within the framework of pragmalinguistics and sociopolitical factors. The data has included nine question-answer exchanges extracted from seven internationally broadcast interviews. A comprehensive analysis of 57 instances of vague language use has been undertaken, focusing on 21 pragmalinguistic strategies of vagueness. The results have suggested that vagueness in political discourse is influenced by several factors, including face management, sociopolitical and situational adaptation, conflict avoidance, and personal characteristics of interviewers and interviewees. Vagueness has been observed to reflect diplomatic prudence or wisdom.

Although the UN reports on human trafficking are essential in forming the public's perception and reaction to human trafficking, the function and

implication of vagueness in this context have received no scholarly attention. Therefore, this study fills the gap in the literature by conducting a semantico-pragmatic analysis of vagueness in the UN reports on human trafficking.

3. The Analytical Part

3.1 Methodology of the Study

This study is mainly a qualitative one, but it is supported by manual statistics to get more precise and adequate results. The semantico-pragmatic analysis of vagueness in the UN reports on human trafficking serves as a representation of the qualitative aspect of this study. This paper consists of four reports from the UN that address the issue of human trafficking. The four chosen reports are sufficient to answer the study's questions since they achieve "data saturation." Given (2008) defines data saturation as the moment at which no new information can be gleaned from the gathered data, at which point data gathering should end. The reports analysed represent a suitable and representative body of data since they meet certain criteria. These reports adhere to the nature and type of data intended for the study, as they take a direct approach to addressing human trafficking. Furthermore, as numerous vague words are disclosed during the primary reading, they serve as a useful guide for selecting the data. The reports are published on the UN's sole official website, which raises the accuracy of the information. The approach relies on the idea that vague language is crucial to the creation of general conversational implicatures, which includes the addresser and the addressee, to promote successful communication. This analysis follows certain procedures: Carefully reading each report in its entirety to get a clear understanding of it; examining the report to determine the types of vague expressions that are discovered and, therefore falls under the semantic level; recognising the heuristics of the sentences that contain vague expressions; determining which heuristic is achieved leads to identify the implied meanings; and using the heuristics to determine the pragmatic functions of vague language.

3.2 Data Analysis

The semantico-pragmatic analysis of vagueness in the UN reports has revealed significant findings. The number of vague expressions is 91. As shown in Table 1, hedges had the highest frequency among other types of vagueness, while vague implicature had the lowest frequency. Table 1 presents manual statistics for the frequency of vague expressions in the reports analyzed:

Table 1

Frequencies of Vague Expressions

Hedges				Vague words	Vague implicature
Approximators		Shields			
Adaptations	Rounders	Plausibility shields	Attribution shields		
20	8	9	5	33	16
Total number of vague expressions					
91					

Figure 1

*Frequencies of Occurrence of Vague Expressions*
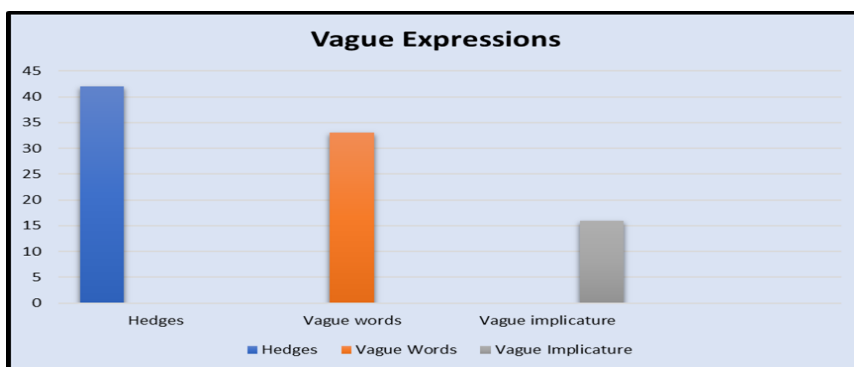
Note: Figure 1 provides a graphic view of the numbers stated in Table 1

Regarding the heuristics, the total frequency of heuristics is 47, as shown in Table 2. The results showed that the I-Heuristic had the highest occurrence among the other heuristics, while the M-Heuristic had the lowest occurrence.

Table 2

Frequencies of Heuristics

Q-Heuristic	I-Heuristic	M-Heuristic
15	24	8
Total frequency of heuristics		
47		

Figure 2

Frequencies of Heuristics
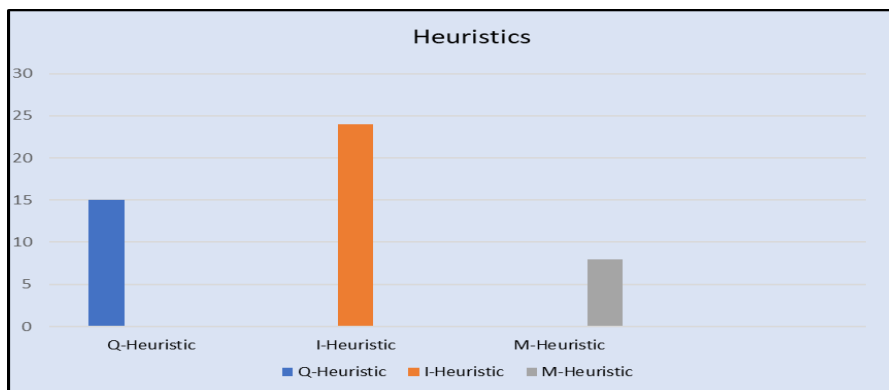
Note: Figure 2 illustrates the frequencies presented by Table 2

The overall number of the detected pragmatic functions is 10. According to Table 3, the majority of the functions have been detected more than once in the analysis. However, function No. 4, *In situations where the addresser does not have specific information, he makes use of vagueness, allowing the addressee to fill in the gaps based on their knowledge and assumptions* has been detected only once to score the lowest frequency. The pragmatic function, *Vague language helps to establish effective communication through concise language, promoting interactive mutual understanding between the interlocutors*, scored the highest frequency.

Table 3

Frequencies of The Pragmatic Functions

No.	Pragmatic functions	Freq.
1	Vague language helps to establish effective communication through concise language, promoting interactive mutual understanding between the interlocutors	10
2	Vague language enables the addresser to convey uncertain information while allowing the addressee to understand the statement under the assumption that the addresser has provided sufficient information	6
3	Vague language helps to achieve effective communication by providing the right amount of information	7

4	In situations where the addresser does not have specific information, he makes use of vagueness, allowing the addressee to fill in the gaps based on their own knowledge and assumptions	1
5	Vague language allows the addresser to maintain communication through uncertainty and possibility and enables the addressee to enrich the information provided	4
6	Vague language helps the addresser to maintain the message encoded in the ideas and gives the addressee more freedom to interpret the potential message	5
7	Vague language facilitates effective communication by portraying common mental models (beliefs and ideas) between the interlocutors	6
8	Vague language is meant to compensate for the lack of specific information that sounds essential in the communication process	2
9	Vague language helps to attract the addressee's attention and stimulate curiosity	3
10	vague language helps the addressee to interpret people and events as intended and to draw the intended implications from them	3
Total		47

3.2.1 Discussion

Using vague expressions sparingly helps prevent potential confusion or misunderstandings that could arise from imprecise language. The results showed that hedges are the most frequently occurring linguistic devices because they convey certain cues. In the context of the reports, hedges are used to convey information about human trafficking, creating uncertainty and reducing the impact of certain statements. For example, by utilising almost in the sentence "It is happening on every continent and in **almost** every country," the addresser finds a compromise between stating that human trafficking occurs on all continents and admitting that there may be

some nations where it is either less common or not recorded. By employing this hedge, the addresse avoids making a firm assertion that could be refuted or disputed by counter-examples. The use of hedges recognises that the information presented may not be absolute or universally applicable. For example, in the sentence, "The report said this was especially alarming considering **many may not** identify themselves as victims, or **may** be too afraid to attempt an escape at all." According to Ruzaite (2007), hedges are expressions that help the addresser to avoid clear-cut, categorical claims. They enable the addresser to distance themselves from a claim and, in return, reduce their commitment to it.

Vague implicature scored the lowest frequency among other vague expressions because not every accurate expression is unspecified or underspecified in the context of human trafficking and may therefore be misunderstood. By using precise numbers and specific details, such as "Globally, the number of victims detected fell by **11 per cent** in 2020" and "**2.4 million** have been trafficked into forced labour worldwide of these, **600,000 to 800,000** are trafficked across borders each year and **12,000 children** are working as slaves on cocoa plantations in West Africa", the report aims to provide a clearer picture of the problem. The use of vague implicature has an important impact in these reports on understanding the problem of human trafficking. Where the addressee interprets the expressions according to his perception.

Vague words achieved mid-rank frequency because the addresser used vague words sparingly. In addition, not all words and nouns are vague to the addressee. Vague words allow for a wide range of interpretations; therefore, they increase flexibility and inclusiveness in conveying information on human trafficking. They can encompass a variety of individuals, situations, or concepts; for example, in the sentence "At the same time, **women** investigated for people trafficking are also significantly **more** likely to be convicted than **men**." In this sentence, the addresser conveys a general idea about those convicted of human trafficking without specifying specific details. Vague words help to balance the conveying of information on human trafficking in these reports. The addresser is keen to provide sufficient, simple information to his recipient instead of overwhelming the addressee with unnecessary details or even the useful use of these words is conveying information to fit the addresser's knowledge as, for example, "**Millions** of victims of human trafficking are going unnoticed around the world." Moreover, we live in an accelerating world where events and people change rapidly. Thus, precise numbers that indicate vague implicature may last for a short time. Such precise statistics are continuously changing to cope with the accelerated events around us. Thus, implicature has scored the lowest

frequency.

The I-Heuristic scored the highest frequency among the other heuristics because of the addresser maxim of "minimization," which encourages the use of concise and minimal linguistic information to achieve communicational ends. The I-Heuristic aligned with the context of reports on human trafficking by straightforwardly exemplifying vague expressions without providing unnecessary specific details or elaboration for the addressee. The use of a semantically minimised language expression implicates more specific interpretations. Moreover, the inferences drawn from the I-heuristic are consistent with the addressee's real-world knowledge about human trafficking. Therefore, the addressee is expected to interpret and expand the interpretation of the information according to their comprehension and certain co-textual and contextual factors. For example, in the sentence, "There are also **higher** levels of impunity in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Countries in these regions convict **fewer** traffickers and detect **fewer** victims than the rest of the world." The statement above clearly indicates that there are considerable cases of impunity in Africa. These cases have led the authorities to convict only a few of the traffickers and detect only a few of the victims.

The M-Heuristic has scored the lowest frequency since the addresser maxim is based on using marked expressions, while the UN is a global organisation and its reports are written formally and straightforwardly. Therefore, the M-Heuristic is rare in such contexts. In the context of the human trafficking report, the M-Heuristic succeeds in capturing the addressee's attention and interpreting the intended implications. According to Levinson (2000, p. 136), the use of a marked expression indicates a different interpretation from the one that would have been inferred from the use of an unmarked expression. As an example, in the sentence "**According to** the report, scammers operating in one southeast Asian country are estimated to be generating **between** $7.5 and $12.5 billion, or **half** the value of that country's GDP," $7.5 and $12.5 are marked expressions (vague implicature expressions) since, as the definition of marked expression states, they refer to highly precise and exact numbers. Such expressions, as Levinson (2000, p. 136) believes, can lead to different interpretations by different addressees. Therefore, they are not widely found in the reports, leading to the scarcity of the M-Heuristic since human trafficking represents one of the most common social issues in the world and forms a stereotypical situation worldwide.

The Q-Heuristic has achieved the mid-rank frequency in the reports analysed because the addresser in these reports sometimes lacks knowledge of some information about human trafficking, so the addresser often uses this

heuristic where information is intentionally left unsaid or vague. It plays a role in the analysis of reports on human trafficking by conveying uncertain or sensitive information while maintaining a level of plausible deniability. It helps the addressee make multiple interpretations that align with his assumptions. For example, in the sentence "Up until very **recently**, **most of** them [chocolate manufacturers] could not guarantee this... because their supply chains were not free of child slavery," the addresser employs vague expressions to compensate for his lack of knowledge about the time and the names of chocolate manufacturers. In addition, the Q-Heuristic shows that by using vague expressions the addresser can provide information without committing to a specific claim as in the sentence "Human trafficking to recruit victims into criminal activity, is just one aspect of transnational organised crime, **according to** a policy report issued by UNODC," where the addresser distances himself from stating information that has a legal dimations.

Heuristics play a crucial role in deriving implied meanings in communication by guiding how addressers and addressees interpret messages. Omitting Less Important Information: By employing vague language, addressers imply to be conveying the most important aspects of the message, ensuring that the core information is communicated effectively without distraction. Avoiding Conveying Incorrect Information: Vague language can imply that the information is derived from external sources or general consensus rather than being an authoritative statement from the addresser. Attracting Attention: The addressers imply that some aspects of this issue are abnormal and stimulate the addressee to think critically.

The pragmatic function that scored the highest frequency is *Vague language helps to establish effective communication through concise language, promoting interactive mutual understanding between the interlocutors*. It allows the addresser to convey information that is not overly specific or detailed while still conveying the intended message. This enables interpretation and understanding by the addressees to be more powerful. This pragmatic function affects the human trafficking report by serving as a communication strategy that allows for flexibility in interpretation while conveying the main message of the report. An example of this pragmatic function is in the sentence: "Related restrictions **may** have pushed this form of trafficking into **more** concealed and **less** safe locations, making it harder to identify victims." The pragmatic function that has the lowest frequency is *In situations where the addresser does not have specific information, he makes use of vagueness, allowing the addressee to fill in the gaps based on their knowledge and assumptions* because, most of the time, the addressee assumes that the addresser has provided enough information or can

accurately interpret the intended message. In the context of the human trafficking report, this pragmatic function allows the addressees to interpret vague expressions and fill in the missing details based on their knowledge and assumptions. This leads vague language to a means for employing text, context, and cognition (real-world knowledge of human trafficking) to achieve optimum interpretation. For example, in the sentence, "While **moving people** is an intrinsic part of trafficking, this **may** occur within as well as across borders, and it **may** take a **variety** of forms." The addressee interprets that several techniques are used to transport individuals, such as cars, planes, or ships, both domestically and internationally, with the aim of human trafficking.

4. Conclusion

4.1 What are the vague lexical items and expressions that are used in the UN reports on human trafficking?

Various lexical items and expressions have been frequently used by the addressers, as indicated in Table 1. These expressions have been parallel to Channel's (2000) taxonomy of vagueness, which was discussed earlier in the present paper.

4.2 What are the implied meanings behind the use of vagueness in the UN reports on human trafficking?

The reliance on vagueness in the UN reports on human trafficking leads to several implicit meanings. Firstly, omitting less important information: More often than not, the addresser believes that detailed information is unnecessary for the addressee and that using vague language achieves its goal of concisely conveying important facts. Additionally, avoiding conveying incorrect information: The addresser uses vague expressions when he does not have accurate information about certain facts or is unsure about the validity of some facts. They tend to use vague expressions that imply the information provided comes from a source other than the addresser. Finally, attracting attention: The addresser often uses expressions that convey a sense of vagueness, leaving certain details or aspects open to interpretation. The addressee can become intrigued by this and notice something abnormal.

4.3 What are the communicative functions that result from the use of vagueness in the UN reports on human trafficking?

The vagueness in the UN reports on human trafficking are intentional various for communicative functions. Firstly, it serves as a communicative strategy by providing concise and efficient information that is sufficient for conveying the intended message. Vague language enables the establishment of interactive mutual understanding between the addressers and addressees which

facilitates the effective transmission of information. Furthermore, vague language can promote effective communication by drawing on mutual mental models between interlocutors. The addressees are free to interpret the statements in accordance with their knowledge and presumptions when the addresser use vague language to convey uncertain information.

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