A Pragmatic Analysis of Vague Language in the News Articles on the Iraqi Security Crisis

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Abstract—There is a well-known belief among linguists and discourse analysts saying that vague language is one of the common features of political language. In order for the linguists to include vague language within the domain of linguistic analysis, they started formulating vagueness within the principles of the pragmalinguistic theory. However, the pragmatic perspective had not been paid much attention yet. With the accelerated events in the Middle East, the best way to get information is to appreciate some news items because they are objective facts that are accessible and easy to comprehend for everybody (Pan, 2012, p. 2530). Iraq has witnessed many periods of serious escalation among which is the one started in April 2014 in which, the ISIS influence started expanding suddenly and rapidly causing infrastructure damage and causalities. The present paper aims at investigating vague expressions in news articles on the security situation in Iraq in the period mentioned above by means of Grice's cooperative principle to find out the purposes vague language serves and its effects on these news articles.

Index Terms—vagueness, news, cooperative, maxims, articles, pragmatic

I. INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, an expression is pragmatically vague when it leaves some of the semantic features unspecified. For example, *person* is not specified concerning the features of [male] vs [female] and [old] vs [young] (Channell, 1994). An expression is vague if (a) it can be contrasted with another word or expression which appears to render the same proposition, (b) it is purposely vague or if (c) the meaning arises from intrinsic uncertainty (Channel, 1994, cited in Wenzhong and Jingyi, 2013, p. 104). *Intrinsic uncertainty*, here, does not mean that the speaker/ writer is ignorant of certainty. Rather, vagueness caries a sense of indeterminacy in language use. This indeterminacy is the speaker's/ writer's choice; a choice to use a vague expression rather than a precise one for one purpose or another (Channell, 1994, pp. 196-198).

Speaking or writing, we rarely express ourselves very clearly, precisely, or explicitly about what we mean. In many times, we are vague, indirect, and unclear about just what we are committed to. Superficially speaking, this appears to be an inadequacy of human language (Jucker, 2003, p. 1738). Ideally, there is a common assumption that the language which is imprecise and vague should be avoided as a defect whenever possible. However, for several linguists, this notion of language is rather plain. Precise language is not necessarily more efficient than vague language and vagueness could be a positive feature of human language (Jucker, 2003, p. 1738). Moreover, too much precision can, sometimes, lead to time wasting and inflexibility since vague words are often enough to present a meaningful message and no vague language is used for delivering a negative connotation. Thus, vagueness is an important part of everyday language. There is a common knowledge that the language is supposed to be both formal and concise in order to directly convey the facts and information to readers. However, vagueness attracts more attention and raises the reader's suspicions and, therefore, the reader starts searching deep in the report to achieve a better understanding than when the language is not vague (Stubbs, 1986, p.1; Williamson, 1994, p. 4869; Van Deemter, 2010, p. 10 and Sabet and Zhang, 2015, p. 4).

In language, vagueness is neither all "bad" nor all "good" because the most important thing is that vague language is used appropriately. The appropriateness of vagueness differs from one text to the other. A medical report, a legal contract, an academic paper, a political radio interview or a casual chat all differ in their degree of vagueness. Thus, the variation in the precision of utterances in the contexts is part of the speaker's communicative competence, and interpreting such expressions is a natural part of language use (Jucker, 2003, p. 1738). Accordingly, understanding the nature and role of vagueness in language is critical to an understanding of language itself (Channell, 1994, p. 3).

From a pragmatic perspective, there is a growing awareness of the contradiction between vagueness and Grice's cooperative principle; no vague language occurs without violating the Cricean maxims. Some scholars believe that the vague language is a sort of violation of Grice's cooperative principle, which often leads to failure of communication; whereas others have opposite views in this respect (Pan, 2012, p. 2530).

The news articles, especially the ones which present hard news (spot news and breaking news), are dynamic and the situation reported is often changeable. Sometimes the reporters are unable to get all the facts immediately for one reason or another. Thus, they resort to vague language to protect them from making false statements (Wahyuningsih, 2014, p. 16).

This paper is intended to investigate and pragmatically analyze the vague language in news articles on the Iraqi security crisis in the period after April 2014 in which, the violent and chaotic Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or al-Sham (also referred to as ISIS or ISIL) seized Mosul (Iraq's second city) and started advancing rapidly towards Baghdad and other cities. This kind of corpus has been chosen for analysis for two reasons. The first reason is a socio- political one; at that time, the events took place rapidly and abruptly. Thus, such news articles are supposed to be loaded with details which people in general seemed to be raring for and eager to know since the ISIS forces, at that time, represented a serious source of threat not only for Iraq and its surrounding countries, but for other vast areas in the world. The second reason is a linguistic one; the rapidity, abruptness and importance of the events that such news articles tackle put the news agencies in a sort of race towards achieving scoops. Such an achievement could sometimes be accomplished on the expense of clarity and, thus, vagueness could easily become a feature in the language of such texts. The confusing and shocking climate at that time would so probably lead the reporters to adopt vague language in their articles.

It is worth mentioning that it is not part of the present research paper claim that news articles on the Iraqi security crisis show more or less instances of vagueness (or any of its types) than any other comparable or incomparable corpora. The aim is to find out the purposes that vague language serves and its effects on these news articles. The pragmatic analysis for the news articles is based on the theoretical framework developed from Grice's cooperative principle.

The corpus consists of eight rather long news articles on the Iraqi security crisis which belong to the period after April 2014. The articles have been chosen randomly (except the fact that they tackle the crisis mentioned earlier) and downloaded from four famous broadcasting websites (www.associatedpress.com, www.reuters.com, www.cnn.com and www.bbc.com) and subjected to careful analysis.

II. VAGUENESS VS AMBIGUITY

It is worth clarifying the idea that vagueness and ambiguity are different concepts. In spite of being two varieties of interpretive uncertainty, ambiguity and vagueness differ both in their essential features and in their significance for the semantic theory and the philosophy of language (Kennedy, 2012, p. 508). Ambiguity is for an expression to have more than one meaning, but vagueness involves uncertainly about the meanings of particular terms. Dealing with an ambiguous expression, we have more than one meaning to assign depending on certain criteria, but it is often difficult to decide on the meaning of a vague expression since no choices are available (Gillon, 2004, p. 394 and Kennedy, 2012, p. 508).

Ambiguity is associated with bits of utterance related to any of the levels of linguistic analysis, starting from phonemes to discourses, and these written or spoken bits of utterance are characterized with more than one meaning. The following is an example from the 1980s British comedy series *A Bit of Fry and Laurie* (created by Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie) (Kennedy, 2010, p. 517):

Fry: "You have a daughter, I believe."
Laurie: "Yeah, **Henrietta**."
Fry: "Did he? I'm sorry to hear that. That must've hurt."
(Kennedy, 2010, p. 517)

The example above illustrates a case of phonological ambiguity making use of the pronunciation of the name *Henrietta* and the sentence *Henry ate her* (Kennedy, 2010, p. 517).

An example of lexical ambiguity is between the name *Nancy* and the British slang term *nancy*, which means *weak* when used as an adjective:

FRY: "Something I've always been meaning to ask you: How did you manage to keep Nancy for so long?"
LAURIE: "I've never been nancy."
(Kennedy, 2010, p. 517)

III. TYPES OF VAGUE LANGUAGE

According to Channell (2000, cited in Cai-yan and Lu-ting, 2014, p. 820- 822) vague language can be classified into three types as follows:

1. Hedges. According to research, hedges have been derived from Zadeh's "fuzzy set theory" in 1965. According to this theory, an individual is in the set to a certain degree rather than being in the set or not. Hedges have become a focal point of study since then and many scholars have tried defining them from different viewpoints (Yue and Wang, 2014, p. 50). Lakoff (1973, cited in Yue and Wang, 2014) has given us the most well-known definition of hedges as being "words whose meaning implicitly involves fuzziness, whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy" (Yue and Wang, 2014, p. 50). According to Prince *et al* (1982, cited in Cai-yan and Lu-ting, 2014, p. 821), hedges consist of two categories as follows:

A. Approximators. They are words or phrases that can affect the truth value of the proposition by changing, rectifying the original meaning or, sometimes, setting a range for changes. They are used to vaguely refer to amounts, times, dates and refer, also vaguely, to factual information, such as quantities and times (Cai-yan and Lu-ting, 2014, p. 821). Approximators, on their turn, are sub-classified into:

• Adapters. They are the words or phrases that speakers or writers can use to help them express some uncertain meanings and then make their utterance more close to reality. The expressions in this category can modify the language which is close to the truth value of the proposition. It includes words and phrases such as *almost, a little bit, sort of, kind of, somewhat, really, to some extent,* etc. (Cai-yan and Lu-ting, 2014, p. 821 and Yue and Wang, 2014, p. 50).

• Rounders. They are words or phrases used to make a range for adjustments in language mostly being the modifiers of numbers and figures. These expressions help the hearer to get a range of information instead of the precise definite information. Such words and phrases are *around, nearly*, *about, between, approximately, roughly,* etc. (Cai-yan and Lu-ting, 2014, p. 821 and Yue and Wang, 2014, p. 50)

B. Shields. They "are fuzzy words or phrases that affect the degree of the speaker's commitment to the true condition of Proposition" (Yue and Wang, 2014, p. 50). Rather than changing the original meaning of language, shields can make the tone more indirect (Yue and Wang, 2014, p. 50). They are also sub-classified into two categories:

• Plausibility shields. They are the hedges which people use to indicate that the information they provided is not absolutely true. They can easily be "achieved with modal verbs which can soften the tone and hesitation words which can express a reserved and prudent attitude" (Yue and Wang, 2014, p. 50). Such shields include *I think, I suppose, I am afraid*, *probably, as far as I can tell, seem, I'm afraid etc.* (Cai-yan and Lu-ting, 2014, p. 821).

• Attribution shields. They are expressions, such as according to, it is said that, it seems to, presumably, …says that…, as is well known, the possibility would be…etc., which people use to indicate that they are not sure about the accuracy of information they provided and then achieve the goal to save their face. They are mostly manifested in third person viewpoint expressions leading opinions to be expressed through a third person.

Generally speaking, hedges are the words or phrases which have the job of making things fuzzier or less fuzzy and they represent the core of vague language. The effect of hedging exists in the interpretation of the utterance rather than in the semantic meaning of the utterance itself. The interpretation of the utterance depends on the context, the semantic meaning of the sentence uttered, the particular hedges used and the belief system of the receiver (hearer/ reader). Moreover, hedging could sometimes give an indication of the speaker/ writer's intentions (Fraser, 2010, p. 25).

2. Vague words. In the explanation of vague language, there is the notion that vague words are vague themselves. In reference, they are the words whose meanings are imprecise, uncertain or indefinite (Pan, 2012, p. 2531). Vague words are the ones that are unable to refer to accurate information and their main characteristic is the uncertain boundaries of the word itself. Williamson (1994) states that "vague words often suffice for the purpose in hand, and too much precision can lead to time wasting and inflexibility" (p. 4869). As for Wahyuningsih (2014), vagueness, this way, can be a vague noun or reference used to refer to entities. Examples are *and things, something, such, anything, thing, what is name*, *stuff, like, whatever, sort of*, or any word in the language that creates inquiry and elicits questions for further information (p. 8).

3. Vague implication. Vagueness by implication refers to those utterances which have accurate expressions but are often misunderstood. In this kind of vagueness, there is an exact number or a plural number name with vague meaning or it can be round number used without strict accuracy (Wahyuningsih, 2014, p. 9). Thus, the vague implicature is vague not because of lack of information or unclarity; it is vague because its meaning is unspecified or underspecified in the context which might very probably lead to misunderstanding or even wondering about something. An exact number or a plural number name or an apparently precise sentence can be used and understood to have a vague meaning (Wahyuningsih, 2014, p. 9). For example, "Officials are concerned, she said, because the river, which was measured at 38 feet Wednesday afternoon, was not expected to crest until Wednesday night." (From CNN, June 28, 2006, cited in Pan, 2012, p. 253).

The phrase **38 feet** can be either precise or vague, depending on how readers think the practical length; whether more or less than the number (Pan, 2012, p. 253).

IV. THE COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE

Grice (1975) has come with the theory of conversational implicature describing how people interact with each other in conversation by working out the implied meaning behind utterances (pp. 41- 58). He proposed the concept of implicature to indicate the inferred nonliteral meaning distinguishing between what is said and what is meant, implied, suggested, etc. Moreover, he proposed the cooperative principle which is essentially the theory about how people use language to have better communication. The statement of the principle is "make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice, 1975, p. 45). To further illustrate the cooperative principle, Grice (1975) puts forward four categories of maxims and the relevant sub-maxims:

1. The maxim of quality

Try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically:

a. Do not say what you believe to be false.

b. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

2. The maxim of quantity

a. Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purpose of the exchange.

b. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

3. The maxim of relevance
Make your contribution relevant.
4. The maxim of manner
Be perspicuous and specifically;
a. Avoid obscurity
b. Avoid ambiguity
c. Be brief
d. Be orderly
Grice (1975, pp. 45-46)

The cooperative principle describes what actually happens in a conversation; when we speak we generally have something like the cooperative principle and its maxims in our mind to subconsciously guide us. We try to say things which are true, relevant, as well as informative enough, and in a clear manner. Hearers will also try to interpret what is said to them in this way (Pan, 2012, p. 2532).

News items can be considered as a type of conversation in which reporters are speakers and the readers are hearers. Accordingly, reporters may flout the four maxims of the cooperative principle. Thus, "English news should be created more clearly (manner), truthfully (quality), give amount of information (quantity) and directly address the target consumers (Relation)" (Pan, 2012, p. 2532).

News is, then, better to be dealt with precisely and implicature should be avoided. However, it is difficult to find out a piece of English news that follows the maxims. Reporters have a tendency for vagueness in order to present current affairs or social phenomenon in a skillful and technical way for readers who are allowed to freely understand the news item which becomes more reasonable and easier to understand (Pan, 2012, p. 2532).

V. THE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The present paper aims at investigating and pragmatically analyzing the use of vague language in news articles the topic of which is concerned with the Iraqi security crisis. It goes beyond dispute that the security situation in Iraq has witnessed serious escalation in the period after April 2014 when important Iraqi cities have been conquered by the ISIS. The security events in Iraq have topped the headlines in the media and reporters have done everything possible to win the competition like in reporting what has been going on in Iraq. For this purpose, the reporters have mainly relied on some linguistic tools one of which is vagueness. Thus, vague language has been carefully investigated and pragmatically analyzed in eight news articles on the Iraqi security crisis belonging to that period in particular. Grice's cooperative principle and its maxims have been adopted for the pragmatic analysis. The articles have been downloaded from the internet from different broadcasting corporations. In the corpus analysis, two aspects of the texts have been put into consideration. First, the researcher's socio- political knowledge as an Iraqi citizen who has witnessed different critical periods in the history of Iraq starting from the 80s' Iraqi- Iranian war. This kind of knowledge has helped a lot in figuring out how much information available in the text for vagueness to exist or not. Second, the linguistic domain of the text represented by the linguistic concept of vagueness itself together with its types. The types of vagueness have been identified depending, first, on the definition of each type and, second, on a particular reading process. This reading process is characterized by reading the whole news article twice, and sometimes thrice, to get a precise general view about the amount of information available to cover the topic of the article and then reading each sentence as a unit by itself focusing mainly on the degree of clarity to identify whether there is any kind of vagueness in the sentence. This way, no difficult indecisive cases have appeared where it is difficult to decide whether there is vagueness or not or which type of vagueness used.

Concerning the frequency of occurrence of vague language instances, there have been 190 instances of vague language in the eight articles analyzed. These instances have been investigate and pointed out depending on the three types of vague language discussed earlier. The following table shows the distribution of the 190 instances of vague language among these three types:

TABLE I.
THE FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE OF EACH TYPE IN THE EIGHT ARTICLES

hedges	vague words	vague implicature
101	35	54

The following table shows the distribution of the 101 instances of hedging on its types:

TABLE II.
THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE 101 INSTANCES OF HEDGING ON ITS TYPES

approximators		Shields	
adapters	rounders	plausibility shields	attribution shields
28	50	11	12

According to the statistics above and depending on Grice's cooperative principle together with its maxims, the following points of analysis can be derived:

1. Flouting the maxim of quality. One of the most conditional features of news reports is accuracy; without which the reputation of the news agency or broadcasting corporation is threatened. However, it is sometimes difficult for the reporters to figure out the vivid reality of the piece of news which they report. Thus, to avoid inexactitude, inadequacy and incompleteness of the information, reporters resort to vague words and shields (a subdivision of hedges).

Vague words, on the one hand, give very little portion of the truth and, sometimes, supply only confused part of the truth. Shield (plausibility and attribution shields), on the other hand, are used to indicate that the information provided is not absolutely true or that speakers/ writers are not sure about its truthfulness. As a result, violation of Grice's quality maxim occurs because, in this case, the reporters are not sure that at least some of the pieces of news components are not false and they cannot provide adequate evidence to support their statements. In news articles on the Iraqi security crisis, vague words have occurred 35 times and shields have occurred 23 times. Accordingly, the quality maxim has been flouted 58 times.

Consider the following extracts from the news articles on the Iraqi security crisis in which the flouting of the quality maxim is apparent. The first extract contains vague words, the second has plausibility shields and the third has attribution shields.

The United States' former Cold War foe Russia has been conducting airstrikes in Syria against opponents of its closest regional ally Bashar al-Assad, … (Stewart and Isabel, 2015).

Russia has also joined a Baghdad-based intelligence cell along with Iran, Iraq and Syria that has provided information on Islamic State targets.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi faces intense pressure from the ruling coalition and powerful Shi'ite militias to request Russian air strikes on Islamic State, (Stewart and Isabel, 2015).

The word *opponents* is mentioned without naming even one of those opponents, the word *information* is too generic and there is no indication to the kind of information or its source and the word *pressure* could refer to multiple facets of pressure but none of these facets is specified. Obviously, there is clear doubt about the truth of the pieces of news provided because the reporters try to evade more details to prove the truthfulness of their statements.

The Iraqi government is believed to command hundreds of thousands of US-trained and US-armed security personnel, so on paper they ought to be able to easily overcome a militant group … (From the Section Middle East, 2014).

The phrase is believed shows that the reporter lacks an adequate evidence for his statement; otherwise, he/ she would have avoided this plausibility shield and provided, at least, an authentic source for the piece of news.

Iraqi forces backed by U.S.-led airstrikes drove Islamic State militants out of the center of Ramadi on Monday and seized the main government complex there, according to military officials, who said insurgents are still dug into pockets of the city west of Baghdad (Salaheddin, 2015).

The phrase *according to military officials* is an example of an attributive shield through which, the reporter directs the responsibility of truthfulness away from him/ her. Accordingly, the reporter is neither sure of the truthfulness of the statement nor has a piece of evidence to support it.

2. Flouting the maxim of quantity. According to this maxim, the contribution should be as informative as is required; neither more nor less than is required. Using vague language in news articles on the Iraqi security crisis has led to flouting this maxim. The flouting occurred for two reasons. The first is the use of vague language through approximators (a subdivision of hedges which has occurred 78 times) for both of its types; namely adabters (occurring 28 times) and rounders (occurring 50 times). Approximators have provided less than the required information because the information they provide is hardly close to reality, indefinite and imprecise. Thus, there is always a missing component of reality. Consider the following extract which contains adabters (written in bold letters) and rounders (underlined):

Dozens of people including 60 children, have died on the mountain, …. Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights spokesman Kamil Amin said it was possible that as many as 500 Yazidis had been killed. The ministry had also heard reports -- but had not confirmed -- that **some** had been buried alive...

It's difficult to be accurate about these numbers …. We have heard **some reports** from activists and local journalists that **some families** were buried alive.

CNN is unable to authenticate reports regarding the Yazidi death toll or the allegation that **many** were buried alive.

Amin said Kurdish forces were able to break the siege by ISIS and help thousands of stranded Yazidis board trucks, …

In total, U.S. military aircraft have delivered more than 74,000 meals and more than 15,000 gallons of fresh drinking water, Centcom said.

Iraqi security forces have been able to airlift about 100 to 150 people a day off Sinjar Mountain… But time is running out for many who cannot reach airdropped supplies (From the Section Middle East, 2014).

The adabters *some, some reports, some families*, and *many* in the extract above neither provide definite numbers nor specify clear indication about the families or reports. Thus, the vagueness here is caused by absence of essential details for the reader to understand. For example, why certain people have been killed while the others have been buried alive and the numbers for each group are indefinite. On the same way, the rounders (*dozens, as many as 500 Yazidis, thousands of stranded Yazidis, more than 74,000 meals and more than 15,000 gallons* and *about 100 to 150 people*) elude the reader and deprive the news from objectivity because of the lack of exact information. This way,

approximators (both adabters and rounders) create deficiency in the amount of information provided causing the quantity maxim to be flouted.

The second reason behind the flouting of the quantity maxim is vague implication which has occurred 54 times. Thus, the quantity maxim has been flouted 132 times in the eight news articles on the Iraqi security crisis analyzed. Vague implication has flouted the quantity maxim by providing more information than the required through giving precise numbers of logistic, military and geographical issues that the majority of readers cannot comprehend. Such details usually lead to vague interpretation because they could be misunderstood or wrongly estimated especially by unprofessional readers or those who have little knowledge of military, political and Iraqi geographical issues. The following are example extracts which have such vague implication instances:

Six months later, the militants launched an assault on the Iraqi second largest city, Mosul, to the north. Thirty-thousand soldiers dropped their weapons and fled when confronted by an estimated 800 gunmen. Emboldened, the militants advanced southwards, towards the capital (Williamson, 1994).

Sixty-nine hostages were rescued in the action, which targeted an Islamic State prison 7 kilometers north of the town of Hawija… (Rasheed and Hameed, 2015).

The phrases *six months, thirty thousand soldiers, 800 gunmen, sixty nine hostages,* and *7 kilometers* are exact numbers the absence of which does not affect the accuracy of the news. Such details lead to vagueness because the majority of the readers do not, for example, expect what a *six months* period of fighting and anticipation, *Thirty-thousand soldiers* to drop their weapons and flee, and *800 gunmen* might mean for, for example, an official military person or even a normal Iraqi citizen. Thus, they give more than the required information which leads to vagueness because the reader would so probably wonder what they represent and might even misunderstand such details.

3. Flouting the maxim of relevance. In many instances, the reporters have gone beyond the limited range of the relevant details that they need to provide the readers with. Consequently, they have flouted the maxim of relevance. The flouting occurred as a result of 54 instances of vague implication when the reporters have given exact strict statistics and details as indications to logistic, military, geographical and time issues (which have also led to flouting the quantity maxim as mentioned earlier). Many readers do not really understand these numbers and in many cases, especially the non- Iraqis who read news articles on the Iraqi security crisis for general awareness of what is going on in the world as a whole, and they go through them quickly without considerable attention. Careful reading of the news items makes clear that the omission of the details in the cases of vague implication does not really affect their informative feature. Thus, such details can be categorized as irrelevant, as in the following example extract:

American aircraft struck five targets within five hours Sunday, including armed vehicles and a mortar position, U.S. Central Command said.

Iraqi officials said U.S. airstrikes Saturday killed 16 ISIS fighters, and an Iraqi airstrike in Sinjar killed an additional 45 ISIS fighters, Iraq state media reported (Yan and Starr, 2014).

In the extract above, the phrases *five targets, five hours Sunday*, *armed vehicles, mortar position, Saturday, 16 ISIS fighters* and *45 ISIS fighters* could mean nothing for many or could have different implications and interpretations depending on the personality, background knowledge and interest of the readers. Thus, they become vague and, to some extent, irrelevant.

4. Flouting the maxim of manner. The maxim of manner requires the information to be brief and orderly in addition to avoiding obscurity and ambiguity. Flouting the manner maxim has occurred due to the existence of instances of three types of vagueness: shields (as a subdivision of hedges), vague words and vague implication. First, shields (plausibility and attribution shields) have occurred frequently, 23 times, creating a sort of obscurity which has caused the flouting of the manner maxim. The following is an example extract:

Security services are drowning in data, overwhelmed by the quantity of people and emails they are expected to track, and hampered by the inability to make pre-emptive arrests in democratic countries. Criticism had focused on the failure to more closely follow the two brothers …. One had been convicted on terrorism charges and the other was believed to have linked up with al-Qaida forces while in Yemen. Both were on the U.S. no-fly list, according to a senior U.S. official… (Abdul-Zahra, 2015).

Both *expected to* and *believed to* are instances of plausibility shields and *according to* is an attributive shield. This type of hedges gives the sense of ambiguity about the authenticity of the pieces of news. Thus, the maxim of manner is flouted.

Second, there have been 35 instances of vague words which are vague by themselves and add obscurity to the text and, therefore, have led to flouting the manner maxim. See the following example:

In their effort to create a caliphate across parts of Iraq and Syria, ISIS fighters have slaughtered civilians as they take over cities in both countries…. In another instance caught on camera, a man appears to be forced to his knees…. They force the man at gunpoint to "convert" to Islam… (Karadsheh, Barbara and Holly, 2014).

The words and phrases in the example above are vague since they create obscurity and confusion for the readers; for *parts of Iraq and Syria* the reader may ask him/ herself about these parts which the ISIS want to build their *caliphate* in, the word *civilians* does not give a clear indication about the kind of civilians slaughtered or why they have been slaughtered , *cities* is a too generic expression and does not give any idea about the names or, at least, the nature of

these cities, the verb *appear* is obscure by itself since it does not give a definite meaning and the phrases *a man* and *the man* are also generic giving no clue about the identity of that man or why he has been tortured.

Third, vague implications have occurred 54 times leading to flouting the maxim of manner because the reporters have not been brief and have given precise detailed information which many readers might mistakenly estimate or underestimate. For example:

American aircraft struck five targets within five hours Sunday, including armed vehicles and a mortar position, U.S. Central Command said.

Iraqi officials said U.S. airstrikes Saturday killed 16 ISIS fighters, and an Iraqi airstrike in Sinjar killed an additional 45 ISIS fighters, Iraq state media reported (From the Section Middle East, 2015).

The phrases *five targets*, *five hours*, *including armed vehicles and a mortar position, 16 ISIS fighters* and *45 ISIS fighters* give statistical and detailed military information which could be interpreted and captured differently by different readers. Thus, they have created vagueness and led to flouting the manner maxim.

Accordingly, the manner maxim has been flouted 112 times in the eight news articles on the Iraqi security crisis analyzed. The table below gives the number of times each maxim has been flouted:

TABLE III.
THE NUMBER OF TIMES EACH MAXIM HAS BEEN FLOUTED

Quality Maxim	Quantity Maxim	Relevance Maxim	Manner Maxim
58	132	54	112

The statistics in the table above, classify the four maxims into two categories. In the first category occur the maxims of quality and relevance since they are very close in their frequency of occurrence and in the second occur the maxims of quantity and manner for the same reason.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of vague language, from the view point of Grice's four maxims, in eight news articles on the Iraqi security crisis has revealed the following conclusions:

1. Concerning the three types of vague language, discussed earlier in the present paper, reporters of news articles on the Iraqi security crisis have used the three types with a considerable frequency of occurrence (as stated in table I). In many cases, reporters find it difficult to find the exact words to describe the events. Thus, they resort to vague language which has, consequently, caused the flouting of the four cooperative maxims without exception. After April, 2014, the events started rolling rapidly and the world in general, and the Iraqis in particular, were in a state of astonishment for the fast and easy fall of Mosul with the control of the ISIS. The majority, especially in Iraq, kept wondering how this happened in an overnight. People were also wondering about the role of the Iraqi army that was supposed to have been armed, equipped and trained at the direct supervision of the United Nations. It is worth saying here that the men of power in the Iraqi government started accusing each other for this catastrophe and some have accused foreign powers of conniving with some ISIS leaders. Thus, reporters may flout the maxims by the vague language so as to avoid the responsibility for the information about the situation which was, at that time, blur and in a continuous change.

One of the interesting pragmatic aspects of the types of vague language in news articles on the Iraqi security crisis is that each type of vague language has caused more than one maxim to be flouted. The use of hedges has caused the flouting of the quality, quantity and manner maxims. Vague words have led to the flouting of the quality and manner maxims. The instances of vague implication have led to the flouting of the quantity, relevance and manner maxims.

2. The most frequently used type of vague language is hedging which has caused the flouting of three maxims; namely the quality, quantity and manner maxims. Generally speaking, hedging is a rhetorical strategy the user of which can avoid commitment to the contents of a text. It is a common knowledge, for the world in general and the Iraqis in particular, that the security situation in Iraq has witnessed serious escalation after April, 2014. Thus, the reporters of news articles on the Iraqi security crisis have given news which is subject to inexactitude, inadequacy and incompleteness of information. In such a case, hedging is the linguistic safe haven to avoid inauthenticity in reporting events that were happening rapidly and unexpectedly. Because of its flexible nature (being able to fit its meaning according to the message conveyed), hedging has been used more frequently and caused three cooperative maxims to be flouted.

3. According to the statistical analysis (table II), the maxims of quantity and manner are the ones more frequently flouted (132 times for the former and 112 times for the latter). They can be put in the same category for their close frequency of occurrence. Concerning the quantity maxim, the details given should be neither more nor less than the informative amount. A reasonable explanation for this case is that, after April, 2014, the events in Iraq have been in a race like state to the extent that people have become almost obsessed with news reports because they have been sure to find new pieces of news every time they check out the media. Broadcasting corporations and news agencies, on their turn, have competed to be the earlier on their news and they have not had time to put into consideration the amount of details they provide the reader with. Thus, the details, whether more or less than the required, have not been of much concern for reporters. Their top priority, in this race, is the essence of the news with some details and it does not matter whether these details are more or less than the required.

As for the maxim of manner, one needs to be brief and orderly and avoid both obscurity and ambiguity. Obviously, reporters of news articles on the Iraqi security crisis could not always pay attention for being brief and orderly for the same reasons mentioned above which led to flouting the quantity maxim. The frequent use of vague language (190 times in eight news articles), has definitely created obscurity and vagueness in the text and, eventually, flouting the manner maxim.

4. Going back to table (II), it is apparent that the maxims of quality and relevance are less violated and they have close frequency of occurrence (58 for the former and 54 for the latter). After April, 2014, news about Iraq has become the focal point for broadcasting corporations and news agencies. The situation in Iraq has been extremely subtle and critical and the responsibility of the security crisis has been thrown upon different parties and, sometimes, countries. In such a case, truthfulness and accuracy is number one concern for reporters and any false or uncertain information has negative effects on the reporting source as well as on the general opinion of the readers. Thus, flouting the quality maxims is not that frequent because clarity rather than vagueness has been stuck to.

Another vital point in such a type of news articles is that the information should focus on the main general topic (the Iraqi security crisis) and readers, at that period of time, have been so eager to know about this topic. Any vague or irrelevant details might disturb such eager readers and, eventually, they could lose interest in following up the source of such news. Reporters seem to be quite aware of this and have done their best to avoid, as much as possible, the use of vague language which leads to flouting the relevance maxim.

5. Finally, from the pragmatic perspective, there seems to be a contradiction between vague language and Grice's cooperative principle. Some linguists believe that the vague language is considered to be a sort of violation of the Grice's cooperative principles, which sometimes leads to failure of communication while other linguists have opposite views in this respect (Pan, 2012, p. 2530). According to the present paper, though the instances of vague language are quite frequent in news articles on the Iraqi security crisis and have caused the four cooperative maxims to be flouted, the text has kept a considerable amount of precision, clarity, and informing nature. It has been apparent that flouting the four maxims through vague language seems to be first, part of the natural features of news articles on the Iraqi security crisis, second, has logical purposes (as mentioned above) which, eventually, have had positive effects on the communicative aspect of the text and, third, too much clarity in news articles on the Iraqi security crisis would cause the text to lose its spontaneity and acceptability by readers.

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