



A Study of Vague Language in English News Reports

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Type of Work: Peer Reviewed.

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.21013/jems.v21.n1.p2>

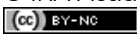
Review history: Submitted: Jan 04, 2025; Revised: Jan 29, 2025; Accepted: Feb 07, 2025

How to cite this paper:

Ye, J., & Liang, Y. (2025). A Study of Vague Language in English News Reports. *IRA-International Journal of Education & Multidisciplinary Studies* (ISSN 2455-2526), 21(1), 9-16.

<https://dx.doi.org/10.21013/jems.v21.n1.p2>

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This paper is peer-reviewed following IRA Academico Research's [Peer Review Program](#) .

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ABSTRACT

This paper elucidates and summarizes a selection of scholarly works dedicated to the exploration of vagueness within English news reports. Initially, it presents the foundational backdrop of this research domain, highlighting the imperative of conducting thorough investigations, the current state of research on this topic, and the principal findings derived from various theories within the international academic sphere. Furthermore, it meticulously examines the origins of the theoretical data and the underlying theoretical framework. The paper proceeds to enumerate, one by one, the essential terminology utilized in the discussion, elucidating their definitions and classification criteria. In the third chapter, a synthesis of research outcomes from a pragmatic perspective is offered, underlining the pivotal role and significance of fuzzy language in English news reporting. Additionally, it provides a balanced assessment and constructive suggestions. Lastly, the conclusion section concisely summarizes the entirety of the paper and proposes potential avenues for future research endeavors in this field.

Keywords: Fuzzy words, News Reports, Pragmatic.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to Vague Language

The notion of fuzzy language, a seminal concept in linguistic and mathematical discourse, was introduced by the American mathematician Lotfi A. Zadeh in his groundbreaking work titled "Fuzzy Sets," published in 1965. This pioneering theory significantly contributed to the formalization and partial digitization of fuzzy language theory, thereby establishing a foundational framework for understanding and analyzing the inherent ambiguity and vagueness embedded within natural language.

Vagueness in language, as a ubiquitous phenomenon, manifests objectively and pervasively across various facets of human existence. This linguistic attribute transcends temporal and geographical boundaries, spanning from ancient civilizations to contemporary societies and encompassing diverse linguistic landscapes, from foreign nations to China. The prevalence of vagueness underscores its fundamental role in shaping human communication and cognition. Within the vast lexicon of human languages, numerous words and expressions convey concepts that lack precise, well-defined boundaries or extensions. These concepts, characterized by their inherent indistinctness and openness to interpretation, are collectively referred to as "fuzzy concepts." As Wang Xuesen (2010) elucidates, fuzzy concepts challenge traditional notions of clarity and precision in semantics, revealing the complexity and richness of human language. They enable more flexible and nuanced communication, allowing speakers to convey a wide range of meanings and intentions without being confined to rigid, categorical definitions. The recognition and analysis of fuzzy language within linguistic theory have profound implications for various disciplines, including artificial intelligence, computational linguistics, and philosophy of language.

By acknowledging and incorporating the fuzzy nature of language, researchers can develop more sophisticated models and algorithms that better capture the nuances of human communication, ultimately enhancing the accuracy and effectiveness of language processing technologies. Furthermore, an understanding of fuzzy concepts enriches our comprehension of

how meaning is constructed and negotiated in social interactions, shedding light on the dynamic and context-dependent nature of language use.

1.2 Background Information

Fuzzy language is very common in human language and has its own unique communicative function. More and more researches have been made on vague language. So far, the study of fuzzy language has been extended to many fields, and there are many different theories about fuzzy language. As a kind of mass media, news plays a more and more important role in today's information age

The concept of fuzzy language was put forward by American mathematician Lofti A Zedeh in his book *Fuzzy Sets* in 1965. This theory makes fuzzy language theory formalized and digitized to a certain extent. As a common phenomenon, vagueness in language exists objectively and widely in all aspects of human life. It is very common from ancient times to modern times, from foreign countries to China. In human language, there are many words. The concept they express is the concept without definite extension. Such a concept is the so-called "fuzzy concept". (Wang, 2010) News reports are characterized by their ability to present recent, ongoing, or impending events with clarity and precision. This clarity is often achieved through the strategic use of vague language, which serves multiple pragmatic functions. It can enhance accuracy by allowing for a degree of flexibility in reporting, convey information efficiently by using less specific terms that cover a range of possibilities, and maintain politeness by avoiding directness in sensitive issues. The study of vague language in news reporting is not just about understanding its presence, but also about recognizing its pragmatic roles. It can help readers to quickly identify the theme of news reports and obtain information efficiently. Furthermore, it provides insights into the linguistic characteristics of English, particularly in the context of news media, where the use of vague language is not a sign of imprecision but a tool for effective communication.

The role of news is accentuated by the stylistic use of English, which often employs vague language to convey information. This linguistic choice is not a deviation, but a deliberate strategy that enhances the communicative power of news reports. The inclusion of fuzzy language is essential for capturing the essence of news themes and for the swift acquisition of information by readers. By examining the use of vague language in English news reports, we can unlock a deeper comprehension of both the linguistic nuances of English and the strategic deployment of vague language within news media.

As for the role of news, English is often vague because of its stylistic features, and news is an important channel for people to understand the world. News reports always present a recent or ongoing or impending event timely, accurately, objectively and effectively. The presentation of these characteristics of news cannot be separated from the use of vague language. The study of fuzzy language in English news reports can help readers to lock in the theme of news reports and obtain information quickly. It can help readers have a further understanding of the linguistic characteristics of English and have a deeper understanding of vague language in News English.

News report has a wide range. News content covers a wide range, generally including the economy, politics, society, culture and so forth. News report has timeliness. According to this, news can be divided into sudden news and delayed news, and according to the relationship between news and readers, news can be divided into hard news and soft news. Sudden news and

hard news both emphasize rapidity and have strict time requirements. And they also have requirements for clarity, they generally do not use vague language (Zhang, 2010). The news report is accurate and implicit. The news report is very clear about the exact information. The use of vague language in news reporting does not violate the principle of news reporting, which is in line with the habits of the audience. News report has tendentiousness, which is influenced by different political standpoints and values of different countries, and it will have its own tendency.

2. The Characteristic of English News Report

News report is a broad field, covering a wide range of content, including economy, politics, society, culture, etc. News report is timely, which can be divided into sudden news and delayed news according to the time relationship with the news; and according to the relationship between news and readers, news can be divided into hard news and soft news. Both sudden news and hard news emphasize rapidity and have strict time requirements. At the same time, they also have requirements for clarity and accuracy. Sudden news and hard news both emphasize rapidity and have strict time requirements. And they also have requirements for clarity they generally do not use vague language (Zhang, 2010). In general, they do not use vague language. News report is accurate and implicit. It provides clear and accurate information, and uses vague language in news reporting does not violate the principle of news reporting, which is in line with the audience's habits.

Hu (2015) noted that although news language demands accuracy and conciseness, vague language still plays a significant role in English news. The use of vague language varies across different parts of a news article, with the highest degree of vagueness found in headlines. Furthermore, Hu (2015) argued that the appropriate use of vague language does not compromise the accuracy of news reporting. Instead, it can complement precise language, enhancing the effectiveness of the report. Li and Hu (2016) further explored the application and pragmatic functions of vague language in English news reporting. Through the analysis of headlines, leads, and the body of news articles, they found that the use of vague language varies across these sections, with the most pronounced usage occurring in headlines.

News report has a tendency, which is influenced by different political standpoints and values of different countries. Therefore, it will have its own tendency in terms of language use and content selection. The use of vague language in news reporting can enhance accuracy by allowing for a degree of flexibility in reporting, convey information efficiently by using less specific terms that cover a range of possibilities, and maintain politeness by avoiding directness in sensitive issues. Furthermore, it provides insights into the linguistic characteristics of English, particularly in the context of news media, where the use of vague language is not a sign of imprecision but a tool for effective communication.

3. Theoretical Perspectives on News Fuzz Words

3.1 Relevance Theory

The relevance theory proposed by Sperber and Wilson revolutionizes Grice's conversational theory from the cognitive point of view, and proposes that language communication is a cognitive process, i.e. "ostensive

inferential" process. "According to this, human cognition is consistent with maximum relevance, namely cognitive relevance. Every apparent communicative act should be assumed to have the best relevance, that is, communicative relevance. The orientation of human cognition is maximum relevance, and the orientation of language communication is optimal relevance" (Zhao, 2015:13). The best relevance is to achieve the best contextual effect, so that readers can obtain the required information with the least effort. However, the application of fuzzy language in news headlines leads to the conciseness of news, so that readers can obtain information quickly.

Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory revolutionizes Grice's conversational theory from a cognitive perspective, proposing that language communication is a cognitive process, known as the "ostensive-inferential" process. According to this view, human cognition is consistent with maximum relevance, or cognitive relevance. Every apparent communicative act should be assumed to have the best relevance, which is known as communicative relevance. The orientation of human cognition is towards maximum relevance, and the orientation of language communication is towards optimal relevance. The best relevance aims to achieve optimal contextual effects, so that readers can obtain the required information with the least effort. The application of fuzzy language in news headlines allows for conciseness, which facilitates readers' ability to quickly access information. Therefore, the use of vague language in news reporting serves multiple pragmatic functions, including enhancing accuracy by allowing for flexibility in reporting, conveying information efficiently using less specific terms that cover a range of possibilities, and maintaining politeness by avoiding directness in sensitive issues. Such language use aligns with the basic criteria of journalism, such as avoiding absolute statements and achieving a balance between precision and flexibility. Additionally, the use of vague language can strengthen the credibility of news reporting by aligning with reader expectations for linguistic efficiency and simplicity.

3.2 Theory of Linguistic Adaptation

Jef Verschueren, a Belgian linguist, put forward the theory of adaptation in his book *Understanding Practice*, and explained pragmatics from a new perspective. In the process of language use, language users can make appropriate choices because of the three characteristics of language: variability, negotiability and adaptability. Among the three characteristics of language, adaptability is the core. After making language choices according to their communicative purposes, speakers and listeners should adapt to each other's physical world, social world and psychological world (Zhao, 2014:169).

The adaptation theory of vague language in English news includes: first, adaptation to the psychological world of the news audience. Nowadays, the competition and encouragement of news media, in order to attract readers and quickly attract readers' attention, is also adapted to the characteristics of news. Secondly, it adapts to the psychological world of the reporter. Without accurate information or other reasons, journalists usually use vague language to soften it subtly, which is easy for readers to accept. On the one hand, it avoided causing social unrest. On the other hand, it protected itself. Third, to conform to the social world, the use of language should not be separated from the constraints of the moral culture and customs of the society. To some extent, vague language can meet the requirements of the English-speaking countries. Fourth, conform to the physical world. This is because the physical world is mainly composed of

time and space. News reports are sudden, so journalists can't get accurate reports in limited time, so they can only use fuzzy language to report more objectively and reliably. (Zhao, 2014)

4. An Analysis of Vagueness in English News Reports from the Perspective of Pragmatics

4.1 Analysis on Pragmatic Function of Fuzzy Words in English News

Wang (2018) explored the pragmatic functions and pragmatic demands of vague language in English news reporting. Her research indicates that vague language not only enhances the flexibility and adaptability of information in news reports but also meets various pragmatic needs, such as avoiding overly absolute statements and increasing the credibility of information.

Vague language can report news more accurately, which can be understood as the superficiality of vague language. Especially for delayed news, fuzzy language is often used to avoid arbitrariness in order to follow the authenticity of news. From the above relevance theory, the pragmatic function of vague language is consistent with human cognitive habits. For example, when reporting for soft news, the use of vague language will reduce the cognitive difficulty. From the perspective of adaptation theory, it reflects the psychological adaptation of news reports to readers and reporters, as well as to the social world and physical world. In addition, the politeness principle of the country where the news happens is used to deal with the sensitive content or gray area content of the report, which not only protects the reporter but also protects the reporter.

Vague language is a kind of euphemistic expression, which has reached the balance of all parties' access to information in a more appropriate way. Finally, starting from the characteristics of news, fuzzy language meets the requirements of fast, convenient and concise news, and can increase the readability of soft news.

4.2 Research Function and Inspiration of the Study

The use of fuzzy language in news reporting is an art that enhances the credibility of news, improves timeliness, and makes the report more polite and vivid, thus realizing a successful communicative purpose. As a form of language expression, news reports usually require specificity, simplicity, conciseness, comprehensibility and vividness, and the appropriate use of fuzzy language can help realize this function.

The use of fuzzy language can enhance the expressive and communicative effect of language, make language expression more natural and appropriate, and can more effectively convey people's thoughts and feelings. In news communication, the use of fuzzy language is a common strategy, which can not only meet the specific needs of the audience, but also meet the audience's reading psychology. When the audience reads the news, they usually focus on the information that is related to them or of interest to them.

Zhang and Zhang (2003) conducted a pragmatic analysis of vague language in English news reporting, examining its functions and characteristics. They suggest that the use of vague language in news articles enhances the flexibility and adaptability of the content, allowing for a more accurate representation of complex or uncertain information. The use of fuzzy language indeed makes news reporting more flexible and free, thereby better capturing the audience's

attention. In addition, the use of fuzzy language reflects the rigor of foreign propaganda reporting, which is in line with the audience's reading psychology and provides a flexible and subtle way of conveying information. In news reporting, the classification of fuzzy language includes fuzzy additions, fuzzy words and fuzzy implication, which have important pragmatic functions in news reporting. Varying fuzzy constraints and moderating fuzzy constraints are widely used in news reporting, and they make the discourse more appropriate by increasing the flexibility of expression, reducing the responsibility of assertion, and making the discourse more appropriate.

Conclusion

Linguists at home and abroad have conducted research on this relatively new theory of fuzzy linguistics. Thanks to the continuous development of society and research topics, scholars have studied and expounded English news from different theories and perspectives, and have made fruitful research results.

According to the characteristics of news reports listed by scholars, the relationship between the characteristics and vague language, the adaptation of vague language and news reports should be noted. In today's society, information explosion, fierce competition in news reports, unprecedented popularity of electronic products, vague language seems to be more used in reports. We can grasp the pragmatic role of vague language in these research results. To a certain extent, the proper use of vague language can also be used as an inspiration for the diplomacy and daily communication of great powers.

Fuzzy linguistics, as an emerging discipline, has received extensive research both domestically and internationally. Especially in English news reporting, its unique pragmatic value has been demonstrated. The use of fuzzy language in journalism not only enhances the flexibility and appropriateness of information transmission, but also increases the credibility and politeness of the report, while avoiding potential negative impacts. This linguistic strategy not only serves as a protection for the news media itself, but also provides effective communication inspiration for great power diplomacy and daily social communication. It enriches our understanding of language adaptability, and guides journalists and readers to more effectively communicate information.

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