



**A Semantico- Pragmatic Analysis of Lexical and Non- Lexical
Vagueness in UN Reports on Human Trafficking**

تحليل دلالي-تداولي للإبهام اللفظي وغير اللفظي في تقارير الأمم المتحدة حول الاتجار بالبشر

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Abstract

Human trafficking is a heinous violation of fundamental human rights and freedoms. The United Nations (UN) plays a crucial role in establishing the global agenda, offering a framework for norms, directing international initiatives, and assisting member nations in combating the intricate and varied issue of human trafficking. The UN publishes reports on all its platforms, including YouTube, to address this issue. Like any other form of communication, these reports contain lexical and non-lexical vague expressions to achieve specific communicative functions. Therefore, this paper will look at the semantic and pragmatic aspects of the use of lexical and non-lexical vagueness in these reports to get a better sense of how vague language is used and how it serves specific communication functions in this sensitive setting. To achieve this aim, the researchers have adopted Walsh, O'Keeffe, and McCarthy's (2008) classification of vagueness on the semantic level and Levinson's (2000) Neo-Gricean approach on the pragmatic level. The analysis focused on three UN-spoken reports on human trafficking. The findings suggest that speakers strategically utilise both lexical and non-lexical vagueness to convey implicit meanings, such as communicating a general idea when specific information is lacking

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المخلص

الاتجار بالبشر هو انتهاك شنيع لحقوق الإنسان والحريات الأساسية. وتلعب الأمم المتحدة دوراً حاسماً في وضع جدول الأعمال العالمي، وتوفير إطار للمعايير، وتوجيه المبادرات الدولية، ومساعدة الدول الأعضاء في مكافحة قضية الاتجار بالبشر المعقدة والمتنوعة. وتنتشر الأمم المتحدة تقارير على جميع منصات، بما في ذلك يوتيوب، للتصدي لهذه القضية. وكأي شكل آخر من أشكال التواصل، تحتوي هذه التقارير على تعابير مبهمه لفظية وغير لفظية لتحقيق وظائف تواصلية محددة. ولذلك، ستنظر هذه الورقة في الجوانب الدلالية والتداولية لاستخدام الابهام اللفظي وغير اللفظي في هذه التقارير للحصول على فهم أفضل لكيفية استخدام اللغة المبهمه وكيف تخدم وظائف تواصلية محددة في هذا السياق الحساس. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، اعتمد الباحثون تصنيف الابهام الذي قدمه والش وأوكيف وماكارثي (2008) على المستوى الدلالي، ونهج نيو-جرايسمان الذي قدمه ليفينسون (2000) على المستوى التداولي. وركز التحليل على ثلاثة تقارير شفوية صادرة عن الأمم المتحدة بشأن الاتجار بالبشر. وتشير النتائج إلى أن المتحدثين يستخدمون الابهام اللفظي وغير اللفظي بشكل استراتيجي لنقل معان ضمنية، مثل نقل فكرة عامة عندما تكون المعلومات المحددة غير متوفرة

1. Introduction

The UN is the largest international organisation in the world, with 193 members. Its Charter outlines its core objectives, which encompass preserving world peace and stability, providing humanitarian assistance, safeguarding human rights, advancing sustainable development, and enforcing international legal norms (United Nations, n.d.).

The UN publishes several reports covering a broad range of topics. Human trafficking is one of the topics that the UN focuses on in its reports. According to Martin and Miller (2000, p. 969), the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime provides a definition that

trafficking in persons means the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons either by threat or use of abduction, force, fraud, deception or coercion, or by the giving or receiving of unlawful payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having the control over another person for the purpose of exploitation.

Human trafficking is a highly structured and organized criminal activity, as well as one of the fastest-growing criminal enterprises. Given the sensitivity and complexity of this issue, UN reports are not free of vagueness.

Since communication is the fundamental function of language, vague language, which is an intentionally imprecise language, accomplishes various communicative functions (Channell, 1994). Grygiel (2016) asserts that semantic content plays a specific role in deriving the interpretation of an expression. Pragmatics is the study of language from a functional perspective, focusing on interpreting what speakers intend to convey through their words in an utterance. This means that semantics provides the foundation, and pragmatics follows from where semantics ends (Younus, 2020). Discourse studies, in general, are characterized by multidisciplinary since they go beyond linguistics to many cognitive; literary; psychological; social; anthropological or other domains

(Khalil & Al-Zubaidi, 2023; Khalil & Al-Zubaidi, 2022). Hence, the present paper attempts mainly to answer the following questions:

1- What are lexical and non-lexical Vague expressions used in UN reports on human trafficking?

2- What are the speaker's implicature and the listener's interpretation of lexical and non-lexical vagueness used in UN reports on human trafficking?

3- What are the communicative functions of lexical and non-lexical vagueness used in UN reports on human trafficking?

The literature has not extensively explored the semantic and pragmatic perspectives of vagueness in spoken UN reports on the sensitive subject of human trafficking. The current paper's goal is to fill this gap. By examining how vague language functions, it is significant for linguists and researchers to understand language dynamics and its role in shaping societal discourse (Khalil, 2013). We hope this paper will assist researchers in understanding how vague language shapes public perception.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Vagueness

When something is vague, it can be interpreted in a variety of ways (Salman, 2013; Aajami, 2019). Cheng (2007, p. 19) says: "Studies of vague language look at language that is inherently and intentionally imprecise, describing lexical and grammatical surface features themselves that may refer either to specific entities or to nothing in particular." Vagueness carries a sense of indeterminacy in language. The decision to use a vague expression instead of a precise one for a specific reason is the speaker's or writer's decision in favour of vagueness (Channell, 1994). According to Cheng and Warren's (2001) definition, the purpose of vague language is to indicate to the audience that the speaker, or at least a portion of the speaker, should not be taken at face value.

According to Zhao (2010), it is traditionally considered undesirable to consider vagueness in language use. One of the weaknesses of vague language is that listeners may occasionally misunderstand speakers. However, this tradition contradicts the widespread use of vague language. Instead of being undesirable, it is often used and considered a useful communication tool. Vague expressions are "not just a poor substitute for precise expressions," as stated by Jucker et al. (2003). Instead, they often convey a meaning that is more relevant and distinct than an exact word.

Grice (1975) explains vagueness by saying that there are situations (actual or possible) in which one does not know whether to use or withhold the expression, and that its ignorance is not due to lack of facts. He points out that vagueness is used when the speaker is unsure whether a statement is true or whether it would be appropriate in the circumstances. According to Channell

(1994), a term or expression is vague when: 1) it can be compared to another term or expression that appears to convey the same meaning; 2) it is overtly and intentionally vague; or 3) the meaning results from an inherent uncertainty.

2.2 Vague Categories

Walsh et al. (2008) divide vague categories into lexical and non-lexical types.

Lexicalized categories, such as "*bird*," "*furniture*," and "*machinery*," provide prototypes or superordinate terms that are encoded as a single lexical item (Walsh et al., 2008). According to Clark (2016), people can use vague language when the context allows them to formulate the vague lexical items used with sufficient precision. In this way, a speaker can express themselves concisely when using placeholders or vague nouns rather than stating the full referent of the word or noun phrase, which can be time-consuming, repetitive, and unimportant. For example, the word "*women*" in "*women can refer to freedom*" is vague; it stems from the concept's inherent impreciseness (Jaafar & Jasim, 2022).

As Walsh et al. (2008) note, previous research on the nature of categories has mainly focused on lexicalized categories in the field of semantics. However, Rosch and her colleagues (Mervis and Rosch, 1981; Rosch, 1978; Rosch et al., 1976) demonstrated that the categories they studied had a graded structure. The central prototypes had the highest concentration of characteristic properties compared to the peripheral members, which had the fewest characteristic properties.

Boakye (2007) explores the use of vague language in a context where it lacks the necessary lexical items for clear expression. This vagueness is a strategy that speakers use when they have difficulty finding the right words or encounter a lexical deficiency. Speakers improvise non-lexical categories instead of using prototypical ones. This vagueness occurs when the impreciseness is not inherent in a single word but rather arises from the structure of a sentence or the overall meaning (Jaafar & Ganapathy, 2022; Khalil, 2014).

Non-lexical categories are also known as "vague category identifiers" or "vague category markers" (VCM). A lexical item (often a noun) is given a vague "tag" to denote that it is an example of a category, whether natural or not; examples of such tags are "*and things like that*," "*fish or something*," and "*lectures and so on*." While Cruse's (1986) work on 'lax hyponymy' (the non-institutionalized grouping of objects into immediate categories at the time of speaking) reveals connections, Walsh et al. (2008) attribute this notion to Barsalou's (1983, 1987) work. The following example illustrates the point:

...And I suppose my understanding of critical theory and critical aah critical studies I suppose as such emanate from or are the key social critiques of our time which have emanated from the work of the Frankfurt School. So at the moment its you know ahh critical theory is dominated by ideas of post-colonialism multi-culturalism structuralism feminism post-modernism and so on so forth.

In Walsh et al.'s (2008) example above, taken from a drama lecture in the Limerick Belfast Corpus of Academic Spoken English (LIBEL CASE), *post-colonialism multi-culturalism structuralism feminism postmodernism*, the tag that creates the vague category markers are: *and so on so forth*.

Spoken language typically comprises a large amount of "general, non-specific" vocabulary, as noted by Brown and Yule (1983). Overstreet and Yule (1997) propose that a spectrum ranging from lexicalized to non-lexicalized categories is determined by the extent to which these categories are: a) traditionally and linguistically established, and b) restricted by contextual circumstances.

2.3 Neo-Gricean Pragmatics

The Neo-Gricean theory is part of the pragmatics field, which studies how people use language in context and achieve communication goals. This theory builds on the work of H.P. Grice (Sbisà, 2006). According to Grice (1975), speakers should communicate with each other in a cooperative and mutually supportive way during a conversation. This is known as the cooperative principle. Grice distinguishes four maxims—the maxims of quality, quantity, relevance, and manner—that serve as the foundation for this idea. Grice asserts that individuals may intentionally violate one or more of these rules to convey meanings beyond the literal meaning of their words. Implicatures are these additional meanings.

Neo-Gricean theory expands and develops upon Grice's paradigm in several directions. It emphasises how context influences implicatures and meaning in general. Neo-Griceans claim that implicatures are influenced by several contextual elements, such as the prior available to the discourse participants, and are not only derived from the broken maxims. The classical Gricean paradigm has spawned numerous refinements, reinterpretations, and reconstructions that have led to the emergence of many neo-Gricean endeavours. Two of the most prominent proponents of neo-Gricean pragmatics—Laurence Horn and Stephen Levinson— have held some of the most significant views in the pragmatic field (Huang, 2017).

Huang (2007) asserts that Levinson argues for a distinct division between the pragmatic principles that determine the information content of an utterance and its surface form. Levinson (2000) introduced the Quantity, Informativeness,

and Manner principles as three neo-Gricean pragmatic principles to replace the original Gricean programme. Each of these principles comprises two parts: a speaker's maxim, which specifies what the principle requires the speaker to say, and a recipient's corollary, which specifies what the addressee can deduce from the principle. Levinson (2000) suggests three heuristics, as follows:

1. The Q-Heuristic: "What isn't said, isn't"
 2. The I-Heuristic: "What is expressed simply is stereotypically exemplified"

3. The M-Heuristic: "What is said in an abnormal way isn't normal"

These heuristics have become the basis for three Neo-Gricean principles:

1. The Q-principle: speaker's maxim "Do not provide a statement that is informationally weaker than your knowledge of the world allows, unless providing a stronger statement would contravene the I-principle," and listener's corollary "Take it that the speaker made the strongest statement consistent with what he knows."

2. The I-Principle: speaker's maxim "the maxim of Minimization. Say as little as necessary; that is, produce the minimal linguistic information sufficient to achieve your communicational ends (bearing Q in mind)," and listener's corollary "the Enrichment Rule. Amplify the informational content of the speaker's utterance, by finding the most *specific* interpretation, up to what you judge to be the speaker's m-intended point, unless the addresser has broken the maxim of Minimization by using a marked or prolix expression."

3. The M-Principle: speaker's maxim "Indicate an abnormal, nonstereotypical situation by using marked expressions that contrast with those you would use to describe the corresponding normal, stereotypical situation," and listener's corollary "What is said in an abnormal way indicates an abnormal situation, or marked messages indicate marked situations."

3. The Analytical Part

3.1 Methodology

Although the present study is qualitative in nature, statistics support it to provide more precise and adequate results. The paper is an analysis of eighteen sentences extracted from three UN spoken reports on human trafficking sourced from YouTube. The three chosen reports are sufficient to answer the study's aims because no further communicative functions can be found in the context of UN reports on human trafficking. Furthermore, these reports align with the type and format of data intended for the study, as they directly address human trafficking. The paper operates on two levels to explore the communicative functions fulfilled by the use of vague language in UN reports. The first level is the semantic level, aimed at identifying instances of lexical and non-lexical vagueness based on Walsh et al.'s (2008) classification. On the pragmatic level,

Levinson's (2000) revisionist Neo-Gricean approach is employed to comprehend the speaker's implicature and the listener's perception. The first step is to identify the specific vague expressions and categorise them as either lexical or non-lexical. After identifying the types of vagueness, the next step involves analysing the speaker's intended meaning and the listener's perception of this meaning. Finally, extract the communicative functions that result from understanding the speaker's underlying intentions and the listener's interpretation of the vague language.

3.2 Data Analysis

Report 1

On World Day Against Trafficking in Persons (30 July) UNODC Executive Director, Ghada Waly, calls on all sectors of society, from healthcare to social services to law enforcement to join forces and commit to reaching every trafficking victim and survivor, to give them hope and support on their journey towards justice and recovery.

Sentence 1: *"Around the world today, millions of victims of human trafficking are going unnoticed".*

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
	millions of victims

The M-Heuristic is achieved in this sentence. The use of vague category markers like "millions of victims" could be considered anomalous as it represents an exceptionally large number of victims. The speaker does not provide an exact number of victims of human trafficking. Instead, the speaker emphasises the severity and prevalence of the issue, drawing attention to its urgency.

The listener understands that the speaker is pointing out an abnormal or problematic situation and emphasising the widespread, systemic nature of the human trafficking issue. The listener realises that the speaker is trying to shock him and evoke stronger emotions to communicate the urgent need for greater awareness, intervention, and action against this widespread exploitation of vulnerable populations worldwide.

The pragmatic function identified is that vague language **enables the creation of a more impactful and thought-provoking message.**

Sentence 2: *"Many of them walk among us in everyday life, on street corners and construction sites, or in factories and public venues"*

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
street corners	Many of them walk
construction sites	
factories	
public venues	

The I-Heuristic is achieved here. The speaker has chosen to convey the idea that trafficking victims are present in everyday life by using concise, simple wording rather than providing more detailed or nuanced information. By using simple, stereotypical examples of locations where trafficking victims can be, such as "street corners," "construction sites," "factories," and "public venues," these terms are very broad and can encompass a variety of specific locations. The statement evokes a mental image that is easily recognisable and consistent with common perceptions of where one might find trafficking victims.

The listener is compelled to expand the informational content by interpreting the statement as concretely and vividly as possible. In this case, the listener is likely to visualise certain scenarios and imagine the trafficking victims "walking among us" in these everyday settings. For example, envision workers on a construction site, some of whom may be victims of labour trafficking. The listener's mind naturally processes the minimal information provided to arrive at the most specific and impactful interpretation of the statement.

The pragmatic function identified is that vague language **serves as a hearer-involvement device.**

Sentence 3: *"Human trafficking is a crime that hides not just in the shadows but in plain sight"*

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
	hides not just in the shadows but in plain sight

The M-Heuristic is achieved in this sentence. **The** speaker deliberately uses language that deviates from the expected, stereotypical way of describing the nature of this crime. Normally, one would expect human trafficking to be described as a crime that happens "in the shadows," away from public view. However, the speaker has chosen to use the marked expression "in plain sight" to directly contrast with and undermine this expectation. She implies that the crime occurs both in plain sight and in secret, but she does not clarify the relative frequency or the specific places where this occurs.

In turn, the listener realises that the situation described is indeed abnormal and atypical—that human trafficking takes place in a way that is visible and exposed rather than hidden and concealed. This realisation forces the listener to think more deeply about the nature of human trafficking and how it works in our society.

The pragmatic function identified is that vague language **enables the creation of a more impactful and thought-provoking message.**

Sentence 4: *"Yet our responses are falling short, leaving many unprotected"*

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
responses	leaving many unprotected
short	

The I-Heuristic is achieved here. The speaker does not specify the exact nature or type of response he is referring to, such as legal, social, political, or other forms of response to the issue. He does not quantify or give a clear measure of what would be an appropriate or successful response. He does not provide an exact number or proportion of people who are left unprotected. The nature of the harm or risks faced by those who remain unprotected is not specified. The speaker succeeds in efficiently communicating the key point that the current responses to human trafficking are inadequate and fail to protect many victims.

By applying the Enrichment Rule, the listener can extract a more nuanced and contextualised understanding of the situation that goes beyond the simple, direct wording of the statement itself. The listener understands that there is an urgent need to re-evaluate and strengthen responses to human trafficking to better protect and support those affected by this crime.

The pragmatic function identified is that vague language **serves as a hearer-involvement device.**

Sentence 5: *"According to the 2022 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, published by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), more than 50 % of cases of human trafficking are brought forward by victims or their families."*

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
victims	more than 50 % of cases

The M-Heuristic is achieved here. The speaker uses marked, non-stereotypical expressions to describe a situation, signalling that the situation itself is abnormal or non-stereotypical. In the given statement, the speaker is using a marked expression—"more"than 50% of cases of human trafficking are brought forward by victims or their families"—to describe the situation. The statement does not provide any context about the overall number of human trafficking cases or the total number of victims, making it difficult to fully understand the significance of the 50% figure. This contrasts with the more stereotypical or normal expectation that such cases would be brought forward by law enforcement, government agencies, or other third-party entities. Applying the listener's corollary, one can infer that in typical or stereotypical situations, human trafficking cases are brought forward by authorities, law enforcement, or other third-party entities, rather than by the victims themselves or their families. The pragmatic function identified is that vague language **enables to create a more impactful and thought-provoking message.**

Sentence 6: "Meanwhile, convictions of traffickers are falling, allowing them to act with greater impunity, and more structured criminal organisations are exploiting a higher number of victims for extended periods of time".

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
	convictions of traffickers
	more structured criminal organisations
	greater impunity
	a higher number of victims

The I-Heuristic can be detected in the sentence above. In the given statement, the speaker uses simple, straightforward expressions to describe the situation related to human trafficking convictions and the activities of criminal organisations. She does not: 1) specify the extent or rate of decline in convictions of traffickers; 2) quantify or define the extent of increased impunity that traffickers are experiencing; 3) provide a clear definition or criteria for what constitutes a "more structured" criminal organisation; 4) specify the exact or approximate increase in the number of victims being exploited. Her statement implies a correlation between the decrease in convictions and increased impunity and exploitation. She highlights the gravity and urgency of the situation being described: that convictions of traffickers are falling, allowing them to act with greater impunity, and that more structured criminal organisations are exploiting a higher number of victims for extended periods.

The listener engages in deeper cognitive processing and considers the broader implications and systemic failures that have led to this stereotypical scenario, such as the inadequacies of the justice system, the resilience and adaptability of criminal organisations, and the ongoing exploitation of vulnerable populations.

The pragmatic function identified is that vague language **serves as a hearer-involvement device.**

Sentence 7: "In search of a better life, victims become shackled by the false promises of traffickers."

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
life	shackled by the false promises
traffickers	

The Q-Heuristic is achieved in this sentence. In order to avoid making a statement that is less informative than the speaker's knowledge, he does not provide a clear or specific definition of what constitutes a "better life" from the perspective of the victims. The speaker does not explicitly describe the nature or extent of the constraints or control exerted over the victims by the traffickers' false promises. The statement does not mention any demographic or other identifying information about the traffickers. However, he succeeds in conveying that the traffickers deliberately made false promises to the victims,

luring them with the prospect of a better life. Therefore, the victims became "shackled" or trapped in the trafficking situation, unable to escape or exercise their own agency. The listener interprets the speaker's statement as the most informative and compelling claim that the speaker is able to make, given their knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. He understands that the speaker has a deep, nuanced understanding of the dynamics of human trafficking and the experiences of victims.

The pragmatic function identified is that vague language helps to **covering lack of specific information.**

Sentence 8: *"women and girls, who account for around 60% of detected victims, are more likely to suffer sexual exploitation and higher levels of violence at the hands of their captors, while men and boys are being increasingly exploited for forced labour and criminal activities."*

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
women	around 60% of detected victims
girls	being increasingly exploited for forced labour and criminal activities
higher	
captors	
men	
boys	

The I-Heuristic is indicated in this sentence. These stereotypical interpretations are reinforced by the speaker's use of the maxim of Minimization, where the statement is crafted to convey the key information with minimal linguistic elaboration. She does not provide a precise percentage or range of the detected victims, who are women and girls. She does not quantify or specify the degree of increased likelihood or the magnitude of the higher levels of violence experienced by women and girls. She implies that women and girls are the primary victims of sexual exploitation, reinforcing the stereotype of female vulnerability and victimisation, while men and boys are more frequently subjected to forced labour and criminal activities, aligning with the stereotype of men as perpetrators or participants in illicit economic activities. By applying the Enrichment Rule, the listener can extract a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the speaker's message. This approach encourages the listener to delve deeper into the specific details and implications of the information provided, rather than relying on broad generalisations or stereotypical interpretations.

The pragmatic function identified is that vague language **serves as a hearer-involvement device.**

Sentence 9: *"We also need to proactively identify, assist, and support survivors of this crime, to truly leave no one behind."*

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
proactively	assist, and support survivors
	leave no one behind

The I-Heuristic is indicated in this sentence. Applying the speaker maxim of Minimization, the speaker has likely chosen to present the information in a concise, minimalist manner, providing only the essential elements necessary to convey the core message. She does not provide a clear definition or specific actions that would constitute a "proactive" approach to identifying survivors. She does not specify the types or scope of assistance and support that would be provided to the survivors. She offers a straightforward, generalised call to action.

By applying the Enrichment Rule, the listener can delve deeper into the speaker's statement. The listener realises the needs of survivors, such as access to medical care, mental health services, legal aid, housing, education, and employment opportunities, among others. The listener understands the commitment to ensuring that all survivors of human trafficking, regardless of their circumstances or demographics, are provided with the necessary support and resources.

The pragmatic function identified is that vague language **serves as a hearer-involvement device.**

Sentence 10: *"The general public can help too, by reporting suspicious activities and services that may exploit trafficking victims, while the voice of civil society is crucial in raising awareness, as well as mobilizing and providing support to those in need"*

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
activities	may exploit trafficking victims
services	
crucial	

The Heuristic achieved here is the Q-Heuristic. This principle indicates that the speaker has not included any information that they do not intend to convey. She does not provide a clear definition or specific examples of what would be considered suspicious or exploitative. She indicates the degree or likelihood of the exploitation of trafficking victims. However, she succeeds in suggesting that there are various ways in which the general public and civil society can contribute to anti-trafficking efforts.

The listener understands that the speaker has made the strongest statement consistent with his or her knowledge. He assumed that the speaker succeeded in conveying the importance of public assistance and coming together to raise a voice on this issue. The pragmatic function identified is that vague language helps to **cover a lack of specific information.**

Report 2

This video explains key issues related to human rights in the context of migrant smuggling and human trafficking. It has been published in Jul 24, 2019. **Sentence 11:** *"over 70 years ago when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Paris, the international community proclaimed the inalienable rights of all human beings and vowed never to allow atrocities like those of the Second World War to happen again".*

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
	over 70 years ago
	atrocities like those of the Second World War

The M-Heuristic is applied here. The speaker does not provide a specific date or year when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This omission is deliberate to emphasise the enduring importance of the international community's recognition of the inherent rights of all individuals from a long time ago. By not elaborating on the specific atrocities of the Second World War, the speaker underscores the global commitment to averting similar atrocities in the future. The listener understands that this is not a normal, routine historical event but rather a pivotal moment that had profound implications and requires special emphasis.

The pragmatic function identified is that vague language **enables to create a more impactful and thought-provoking message.**

Sentence 12: *"By doing so, states committed to protect the rights of every person on their territory, including foreigners, smuggled migrants or victims of trafficking".*

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
states	the rights of every person on their territory
foreigners	
migrants	
victims	

The I-Heuristic is achieved here. The statement conveys a significant amount of information succinctly and compactly, without using unnecessary or redundant language. The speaker: 1) does not mention specific states or groups of states; 2) does not clearly define the geographical boundaries or jurisdiction of the states being referred to; and 3) does not specify the legal or immigration

status of these individuals, or the circumstances under which they were smuggled, nor clarify the type of trafficking being referred to (e.g., human trafficking, sex trafficking, labour trafficking). This stereotypically exemplifies the concept of universal human rights, suggesting that states commit to protecting the rights of all individuals within their borders, regardless of their legal status or citizenship.

The listener understands the inclusion of "foreigners, smuggled migrants, or victims of trafficking" as highlighting particularly vulnerable groups that may face heightened risks of human rights violations, exploitation, or discrimination. Therefore, they require specific protection measures from the states.

The pragmatic function identified is that vague language **serves as a hearer-involvement device.**

Sentence 13: *"Smuggled migrants and victims of trafficking are more vulnerable to human rights violations because of the particular situation they are in".*

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
migrants	more vulnerable
victims	the particular situation they are in

The heuristic applied here is the Q-Heuristic. The speaker refrains from sharing information that is weaker than his knowledge. Consequently, he does not provide a precise and detailed definition of who precisely qualifies as migrants and victims. His statement suggests that smuggled migrants and trafficking victims are "more vulnerable" to human rights violations, but it lacks quantification or specification of the extent of this increased vulnerability. The statement lacks clarity regarding the specific factors within the "particular situation" that render smuggled migrants and trafficking victims more prone to human rights violations. Nonetheless, he effectively conveys the vulnerability of smuggled migrants and trafficking victims.

The listener interprets the statement as representing the strongest claim that the speaker can make based on their knowledge and understanding of the topic.

The pragmatic function identified is that vague language helps to **cover a lack of specific information.**

Sentence 14: *"They may be subjected to serious abuse and exploitation by the smugglers or traffickers who control their situation".*

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
smugglers	serious abuse and exploitation
traffickers	control their situation

The Q-Heuristic, "What isn't said, isn't," suggests that the statement implies or suggests something beyond what is explicitly stated. The speaker does not provide a clear definition or examples of the types of abuse and exploitation. The degree of seriousness is also not clearly defined. He does not provide specific details about the smugglers or traffickers, nor does he specify the exact nature of the control or the specific elements of the "situation" that are being controlled by the smugglers or traffickers. He succeeds in highlighting the general vulnerability of smuggled migrants and trafficking victims to abuse and exploitation and in avoiding the potential risks or consequences of providing a more detailed or explicit statement on this sensitive and potentially controversial issue. The listener assumes that the speaker is making the strongest possible claim about the nature and extent of the abuse and exploitation experienced by this population, considering their knowledge and expertise on the topic.

The pragmatic function identified is that vague language helps to **cover a lack of specific information.**

Sentence 15: *"Trafficking in persons is recognized by all as a serious crime that constitutes a grave violation of human rights to victims of this crime states are therefore obliged to provide adequate assistance and protection".*

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
victims	violation of human rights
states	adequate assistance and protection

The I-Heuristic is achieved here. The speaker has chosen to convey key ideas about the recognition of trafficking as a serious crime and the obligations of states concisely and economically, without providing additional details or context. The terms "*adequate assistance and protection*" are lexically vague, as they do not specify the precise nature, scope, or standards of the assistance and protection that states are obliged to provide. This minimalist approach suggests that the speaker is seeking to communicate these points effectively and efficiently, without burdening the audience with unnecessary information.

The listener enriches the information provided and arrives at the interpretation that governments have a legal and moral duty to take concrete

actions to support and safeguard victims of human trafficking. This includes providing comprehensive services, resources, and protective measures.

The pragmatic function identified is that vague language **serves as a hearer-involvement device**.

Sentence 16: *"Migrants who have smuggled across borders are not considered as victims per se. Nevertheless, thousands of migrants die every year during smuggling activities".*

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
Migrants	across borders
	thousands of migrants

The heuristic achieved here is the M-Heuristic. By withholding some information, the speaker is making a deliberate rhetorical choice to indicate the situation in an abnormal, non-stereotypical way. He does not provide a clear definition or details about migrants. He does not clearly distinguish between different types of irregular border crossings or the degree of exploitation or coercion involved. He does not provide any specific data or statistics to quantify the scale and frequency of these deaths. The speaker is purposefully crafting a message that highlights the expected framing of smuggled migrants not as victims, emphasising the more tragic reality of migrants dying during these smuggling activities.

The listener understands that the situation provided, specifically the typical framing of smuggled migrants, is being subverted or questioned in some way.

The pragmatic function identified is that vague language **enables the creation of a more impactful and thought-provoking message**.

Report 3

Pre-recorded video submissions for the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly for the Appraisal of the UN Global Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking, 22-23 November 2021 This video is part of a compilation of videos submitted by accredited civil society organizations and other stakeholders to contribute to the Panel Discussions as part of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly for the Appraisal of the UN Global Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking held on 22-23 November 2021. The videos are published in the original language in which they were received. The views contained in the videos are those of the submitters, and do not represent the views of the United Nations.

Sentence 17: *"In the past two years we have seen refugees and migrants be disproportionately impact by the economic and political disruption of the pandemic, which have in return have made them more vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking in particularly refugees and migrants in immigration detention centers or facilities".*

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
refugees	disproportionately impact
migrants	more vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking

The Q-Heuristic is achieved here. The speaker does not delve into details that may be beyond his knowledge. He does not elaborate further on refugees and migrants, nor does he specify the nature or extent of the impact of the economic and political disruptions caused by the pandemic on refugees and migrants compared to the general population. Additionally, he does not elaborate on the extent of the vulnerability of refugees and migrants to exploitation and trafficking. However, he effectively implies the heightened risks faced by refugees and migrants in these specific institutional settings.

The listener interprets the sentence by assuming that the speaker has provided the most substantive and informed claim they can make given their knowledge constraints.

The pragmatic function identified is that vague language helps to **covering lack of specific information.**

Sentence 18: *"And other incarcerated settings continue to face an increased risk of contracting COVID-19 while enduring legal prosecution and separations from their families".*

Lexical Vagueness	Non-Lexical Vagueness
	other incarcerated settings
	increased risk of contracting COVID-19
	legal prosecution

The heuristic applied here is the Q-Heuristic. By giving general vague information recognition of the migrants as victims, the speaker is making a deliberate rhetorical choice to present a statement that is informationally stronger than their full knowledge. He does not clearly specify the types of incarcerated settings nor quantify the degree of "increased risk of contracting COVID-19". He does not clearly define the specific types of disruptions. the speaker implies that the details he has omitted are not relevant or necessary to convey the key message.

The listener assumes that the speaker is making the statement in a way that is consistent with his knowledge.

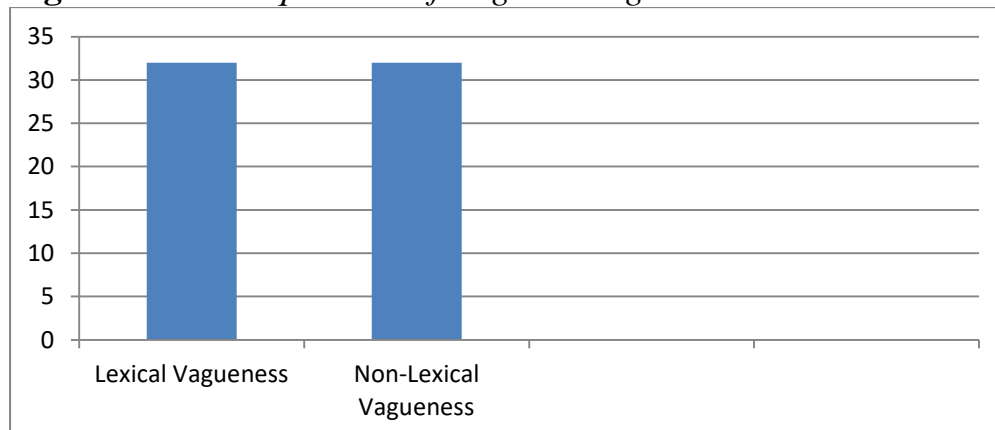
The pragmatic function identified is that vague language helps to **cover a lack of specific information.**

3.3 Discussion of Findings

The analysis of lexical and non-lexical vagueness in UN reports revealed significant findings. This section advances and tabulates the analysis's findings for maximum illustration.

The analysis of three spoken UN reports on the sensitive and complex issue of human trafficking revealed that a balanced use of lexical and non-lexical vagueness, with 32 lexical vague expressions and 32 non-lexical vague expressions, is an effective strategy in UN reports on human trafficking. This strategy allows for clear and concise communication of the severity and urgency of the problem, while maintaining the listener's interest and engagement. In this way, the most important messages on human trafficking can be communicated concisely without getting lost in details that could complicate the message.

Figure 1 *The Frequencies of Vague Categories*



Regarding the heuristics, the total frequency of heuristics achieved is 18, as shown in Table 1 below. The I-Heuristic scored the highest frequency, which is 7 times. The speaker uses vague, minimalist language to convey information about the issue of human trafficking and effectively communicate the seriousness of the situation. This allows the reader to "enrich" the information content by inferring more specific interpretations, by going beyond the literal meaning of the statement, and uncovering a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the trafficking crisis. As a result, the I-Heuristic allows the speaker to actively engage the listener in constructing the full meaning and gravity of the human trafficking crisis described in these reports.

The M-Heuristic had the lowest frequency, which is 5 times. The speaker intentionally uses a marked expression that contrasts with the stereotypical view

of trafficking and draws attention to the severity and prevalence of the issue. The use of vague, marked expressions forces the listener to think more deeply about the nature of human trafficking and elicits a stronger emotional or cognitive response from the listener.

With a frequency of 6, the Q-Heuristic has positioned itself in the middle of the heuristic hierarchy. The speaker intentionally avoids providing explicit information due to a lack of knowledge, but he still conveys the severity of the harm and danger to human life caused by human trafficking activities. This approach allows the listener to interpret the sentences in such a manner that the speaker has provided enough information to achieve the communication goal.

Table 1 *The Frequencies of Heuristic*

Q-Heuristic	I-Heuristic	M-Heuristic
6	7	5
Total frequency of heuristics		
18		

After understanding the implicatures, it is easier to explain what communicative functions that vague language in the UN reports on human trafficking fulfils. The analysis suggests that the speaker's use of vague language, whether lexical or non-lexical, serves specific communicative functions as shown in Figure 2.

1. Hearer-Involvement Device

This function occurred most frequently. It occurs when the speaker wants to avoid being too direct on a sensitive topic, such as human trafficking. For the listener, the perception of vagueness in UN reports on human trafficking can be influenced by factors such as the listener's own background knowledge, the context of the report, and the listener's interpretation of the speaker's communicative intentions. Therefore, vagueness facilitates the formulation of ideas when the context allows the interlocutor to infer the meaning with sufficient accuracy.

2. Cover a Lack of Specific Information

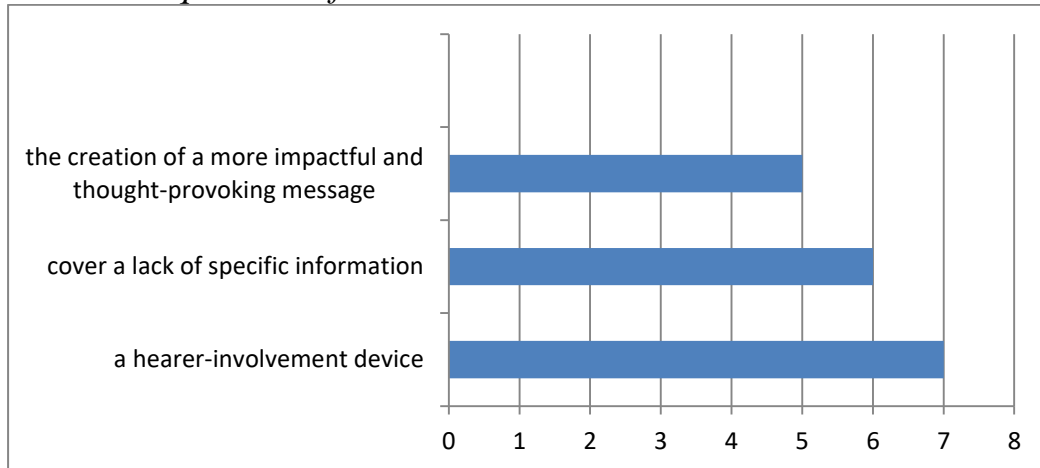
This function was the second communicative function in relation to occurrence. When the speaker is unsure about the exact facts, he may resort to vagueness to hide the absence of specific details. Vagueness enables speakers to retain some impreciseness and avoid being overly specific when the information is uncertain or sensitive.

3. Creation of a More Impactful and Thought-Provoking Message

This function had the lowest communicative function occurrence of vague language, which enables the creation of a more impactful and thought-provoking message. The use of vagueness, especially non-lexical vagueness,

creates a more impactful and thought-provoking message by deviating from the normal way of describing the situation. Vagueness enables the speaker to present the information in a more compelling and open-ended way through the creation of a more impactful and thought-provoking message.

Figure 2 *The Frequencies of the Communicative Functions*



Conclusion

The two-level (semantico- pragmatic) analysis of UN spoken reports on human trafficking has come up with the following concluding points:

1. The analysis demonstrates a balanced use of lexical and non-lexical use of vague expressions in UN reports. UN reports on human trafficking strategically employ both lexical and non-lexical vagueness to effectively convey information.
2. The speaker aims to be concise and convey information without the need for lengthy explanations. The listener interprets the vague categories based on the context and his understanding of prototypes, superordinate terms, and vague markers. Moreover, vague expressions enable the speaker to improvise and communicate a general idea on human trafficking when specific information is lacking. The listener perceives these vague categories as a means for the speaker to sustain the communication flow and convey the main idea, even in the absence of specific details. Additionally, the speaker diverges from the standard way of describing something to highlight to the listener something unusual or unexpected in a situation. The listener comprehends the use of vague language as the speaker's effort to convey a human trafficking case without being able to specify the precise terminology.
3. The communicative functions of lexical and non-lexical vagueness in UN reports on human trafficking serve to balance the need for conciseness, transparency, and inclusiveness. Vagueness facilitates communication because the speaker does not make definitive claims and leaves room for

further exploration or interpretation of the topic. These dedicated functions are: vague language helps cover a lack of specific information, vague language enables the creation of a more impactful and thought-provoking message, and vague language serves as a hearer-involvement device.

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