



VAGUE LANGUAGE USED ON CNN.COM

JOURNAL ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

In news reporting, especially the news of natural disaster, sometimes the information obtained is not precise to the fact because in terrible situation, hence, vague language is the best choice to present the accurate information. Consequently, this study aims at explaining the types of vague language and its functions in news articles on CNN.com. The result of this study show that there are three types of vague languages found in news articles, they are vague reference by noun, vague additives by adjectives and approximations, and vague implicative by quantifier and exaggeration. While, the functions of vague language on CNN.com is making information about the number more informative when the absolute number is not clear enough. Since this news about natural disaster, therefore, the most of information is about the number of incidents. Hence, vague language is used to supply the number of information when exact number is lacking because of the big amount. In addition, vague language is used to fill gap for the information that the reporter does not exactly know. So that, vague language is used for hedging the reporter's statement when the informations that is reported not precise later.

Keyword: *CNN.com, information, news article, vague language*

Dalam penyampaian berita, khususnya berita bencana alam, terkadang, informasi yang didapat tidak persis dengan fakta karena dalam situasi yang buruk. sehingga bahasa vague merupakan pilihan terbaik untuk menyajikan informasi yang akurat. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan jenis-jenis bahasa vague dan fungsinya dalam artikel berita di CNN.com. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa tiga jenis bahasa vague ditemukan dalam artikel, mereka adalah vague referensi yaitu kata benda, vague aditif yaitu adjektif dan perkiraan, dan vague implicative yaitu quantifier dan ungkapan berlebihan. Sementara, fungsi bahasa vague pada CNN.com membuat informasi tentang angka lebih informatif ketika jumlah yang sebenarnya tidak cukup jelas. Karena berita ini tentang bencana alam, sehingga, informasi yang paling banyak adalah tentang angka-angka kejadian. Oleh karena itu bahasa vague digunakan untuk memasok informasi angka ketika angka yang tepat kurang didapat karena jumlah yang terlalu besar. Selain itu, bahasa vague digunakan untuk mengisi celah dalam memberikan informasi yang wartawan belum tahu kebenarannya. Sehingga, bahasa vague digunakan untuk melindungi pernyataan wartawan ketika informasi yang dilaporkan tidak tepat nantinya.

Kata kunci: CNN.com, informasi, artikel berita, bahasa vague

INTRODUCTION

In communication, it is an important to maintain good relations between the speaker and hearer. McCarthy and Carter (2007:159) propose the term “relational language” to refer the language that serves to “create and maintain a good relationship interaction between the speaker and hearer.” In the process of communication in society, news articles regarded as the media for interaction. It means that reporters are the speakers, while the readers are the addressees.

However, in writing news articles, sometimes reporters use vague language. “Vague language is ambiguity and uncertainty of truth, as indeterminacy and imprecision” as in Cutting (2007:22).

Vagueness can be a deliberate tool for politeness in some cultures or may used to sound more persuasive (especially when withholding specific information can help an argument) mostly; however, it is used when speaker is uncertain or lacks specific information (Channell, 1994:135). Channell lists vague expressions, such as ‘vague additives’ such as approximations (‘around ten’, ‘about 15,000 died’), vague implicature such as vague quantifiers (‘some’, ‘more’, ‘lot’), ‘vague placeholders’ (‘thing’ and ‘what’s name’), and ‘tags’ (‘or something’, ‘ kind of ‘and so on’).

Actually, the use of vague language flouts the maxims of Grice’s cooperative principl. However, it is in line with Grice’s conversational implicature if the hearer understands the implied meaning. Therefore, vague language is recommended to use for certain reason, especially in the news reporting. Some people prefer to use vague language for writing reports or news. It may enhance the precision of the original expression.

One of the reasons for using vague language is “sometimes speakers are tired or too much in hurry to find the right word. Sometimes they do not process words properly or as they would wish. It can also be the case that there are emotional reasons for non-processing” (Cutting, 2007:22). In addition, vague language has function in communication, Koester (2007:44) states that vague language can be used either for transactional or relational purposes:

1. Transactional uses involve serve the task goal, and involve such specific functions as supplying the appropriate amount of information, obtaining information, or communicating effectively when specific information is lacking.
2. Relational uses involve such functions as politeness, self-protection, or showing solidarity (see Channell 1994:165–95).

The functions of vague language are generally used in news reporting for the reporter must be report the news immediately. Therefore, in this study, the researcher chose news articles as data to prove that vague language is used in society. This study analysis the types of vague language and the functions of vague language in news articles on CNN.com.

METHOD

Research Desain

In this study, the researcher used qualitative descriptive method in analyzing the data. “Qualitative method is the strategy of choice in qualitative descriptive study; the analysis is dynamic form to analyze of verbal and visual data that is oriented of describing and summarizing the informational content of the data” (Morgan, 1993). This study was conducted based on theories of vague language by Channell (1994).

DATA

The data of this research were news articles of natural disaster taken from CNN.com. The data source of this research was taken from CNN.com. The data was news articles. The news articles were daily news published on September 24 and 25, 2013 and October 13, 2013.

SUBJECTS

The subject of news articles were news articles, the total of news articles is three as sample of natural disaster news, such as:

1. Landslide which occurred in the Philippines, downloaded from: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/09/24/world/asia/philippines-landslides/index.html?iref=allsearch>
2. Earthquake which occurred in Pakistan, downloaded from: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/09/24/world/asia/pakistan-earthquake/index.html?iref=allsearch>.
3. Phailin or Hurricane which occurred in India, downloaded from: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/12/world/asia/india-cyclone-phailin/index.html?iref=allsearch>.

The data above were downloaded by the researcher on 15 October 2013.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this research is every sentence, which contains vague language in news articles on CNN.com.

Data Collection

The data of this study was collected by Searching the news article at CNN.com on the internet. Then, the researcher selected three news articles. The news articles were categorized of natural disaster that occurred in some countries in Asia. The researcher downloaded the selected news articles from the website <http://www.cnn.com/news>.

Data Processing and Analysis

After the data being collected, the data were analyzed. First, it is done by reading news articles thoroughly, segmenting into sentence by giving the serial number in each sentence, then identifying the sentence which contains vague language. After that conducting the analysis the types of vague language and interpreting the functions of vague language. The last, it conducted by drawing conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In CNN.com news, there are three selected news articles and the total is 75 sentences. Based on data analysis, there are 52 (100%) sentences containing vague expressions. The types and the functions of vague language is presented in the following table, which are Table 4.1 and table 4.2. and as some functions of vague language are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.1 Frequency of Vague Language on CNN.com

No	Types	Vague expressions	Quantity	Percentage
1	Vague reference	Noun	1	2 %
2	Vague additives to number	Approximation	17	33 %
		Adjective	10	19 %
3	Vague implicative	By number	3	5,7%
		Quantifier	13	25 %
		Exaggeration	8	15,3 %
	Total			100 %

Table 4.2 Types of Vague Language on CNN.com

No	Types	Vague expressions	Realisazion	Quantity	News code /sentence number	
1	Vague refence	Noun	Things	1	P-EQ/ 12	
2	Vague additives to number	Adjective	More than	10	P-EQ/ 1,13 P-LS/ 10,11, 13, 17 I-CP/ 10,19, 31, 33	
			Approximation	At least	4	P-EQ/ 3 P-LS/ 1,5 I-CP/ 1
				Around	2	P-EQ/ 4 I-CP/ 5
				About	7	P-EQ/ 8,8,14 P-LS/ 21,21 I-CP/ 13,28
				Nearly As much as	2 2	I-CP/ 13, 21 P-LS/ 9, 20
3	Vague implicative	By number	20 to 30	1	P-EQ/ 5	
			12 or younger	1	P-LS/ 5	
			young	1	P-LS/ 7	
		Quantifier	More	1	P-EQ/ 4	
			Some	3	I-CP/ 29, 30, 4	
			Some of	1	4	
			Many	3	P-EQ/ 15 P-LS/ 2, 14	
			Most of	3	I-CP/ 20 P-LS/ 1,3	
			Several	1	I-CP/ 17	
			Half of	1	P-LS/ 16 P-LS/ 11	
		Exaggeration	Large	4	P-EQ/ 6, 7,11 I-CP/ 24	
Extensive	2		I-CP/ 23, 25			
Hundred of	1		P-EQ/ 18			
Thousand of	1		P-LS/ 15			
Total				52		

Table 4.2 Functions of Vague Language on CNN.com

No	Functions	Types	Vague expressions
1	Giving more informative reference	Quantifier	Most of
2	Supplying amount of information, when specific information is lacking	Adjective	More than
		Approximation	About Nearly As much as
		Quantifier	Many Some Some of As much of Several Half of Hundred of Thousand of
3	Filling gap of uncertainty	Quantifier	More
		By number	20 to 30 12 or younger young
		By noun	Things
		Exaggeration	Large Extensive
4	Headging the statement or self-protection	Approximation	At least Around

Discussion

In table 4.1, shows that there are 52 sentences containing vague language and three types of vague language are found in news article on CNN.com. While, Table 4.2 shows the types of vague language in detail, however Table 4.3 shows the function of vague language and the explanation of the types and the functions of vague language used on CNN.com is explained in the following discussion:

The types of vague language

There are three types of vague language used on CNN.com. the explanation can be seen in the following discussion:

Vague Reference

Vague reference refers to a thing, which is not completely reported such as:

Many things, such as the tide, could come into play regarding the rise of the island, he said. (P-EQ /12)

The sentence above contains vague expression “things”; the word “things” is type of noun; it can be categorized as vague reference, which deliberately refers to non- specific reference things or noun, such as the tide. Vague reference “things” is used since the reporter knows not all things in the island because in terrible situation, that reporter cannot get all information there. The reporter knows only the tide, in fact there is still something not being reported.

Vague Additives to number

There are ten expressions of vague additives to number by adjective “more than” and approximation “around” the examples are shown below:

More than 20 medical teams flew to the region. (I-CP/ 34)

The sentence above contains vague expression “more than.” The adjective of “more than” can be categorized as vague additives to number, since adjective “more than” here refers to number of 20 medical teams. A vague additive “more than 20” here indicates that there are not only 20 medical teams but it is up to 20, it can be 21, 22, and so forth the medical teams flew to the region. The reporter reports only 20 medical teams because he/she must report it immediately so that not all numbers of medical team were not completely reported.

In addition to the fatalities, around 350 people have been injured, he said, and more people are still trapped in rubble. (P-EQ / 4)

The sentence above contains vague expression “around.” The adverb of “around” can be categorized as vague additives to number because vague additives vaguely refer to number such approximation such “around.” Vague additive “around” here approximates to number of 350 people who have been injured. Vague additives “around 350” shows impreciseness, it can be more or less than 350 people. The reporter uses vague additive to number “around” because the information that the reporter got is imprecise, that’s why an approximation is used to avoid the responsibility in giving wrong information.

Vague Implicative

Vague implicative is vaguely referred to unspecified number or it can be plural number without strict accuracy amount. It is realized by number, quantifier, and exaggeration. The examples are shown in the following discussion:

Vague by Number

Vague implicative by number is vaguely referred to number without strict accuracy such as the number of “20 to 30” below:

The quake was strong enough to cause a mass 20 to 30 feet high to emerge from the Arabian Sea like a small mountain island off the coast of Gwadar.
(P-EQ / 5)

The sentence above contains vague expression “20 to 30.” That number considered as vague expression because it is round number that shows impreciseness. It is neither 20 nor 30. The number “20 to 30” can be categorized as vague implicative because the number “20 to 30 feet high” here indicates the number without certain to what number it referred, it can be number after 20 such as 21, 22...until 30, however it does not show the precise number.

Vague Quantifier

Vague quantifier indicates to uncertain of the plural number. Here shows one of quantifier “more.” It can be seen in the following example:

In addition to the fatalities, around 350 people have been injured, he said, and more people are still trapped in rubble. (P-EQ / 4)

The sentence above contains vague expression “more.” A quantifier of “more” can be categorized as vague implicative because vague implicative can be plural number to have vague meaning such as “more.” While, a quantifier of “more” here refers to plural number of people who are still trapped without the proper number. This vague quantifier is used because the reporter does not know the exact numbers of people who stil trapped in rubble. The reporter knows that there are still many people who are trapped in rubble but it is not sure how many people are there.

Vague Exaggeration

Vague exaggerations indicate the value that enlarged the incident, such as the adjective “thousand of” in the example below:

*People flocked out onto the streets of Quetta, the provincial capital. After shocks, it could be felt in Karachi, hundreds of miles to the southeast.
(P-EQ / 18)*

The sentence above contains vague expression of adjective “hundreds of.” The adjective “hundreds of” can be classified as vague expression since “hundred of” vaguely refer to scale of distance to the southeast. While, “hundreds of” can be categorized as vague implicative of exaggerations since this phrase such additional meaning that has value higher on the number. Vague exaggeration “hundred of” implies exaggerate to the number of distance to the southeast. Whereas, the number of scale not such it reported, it can be only one or two hundreds.

The functions of using vague language on CNN.com

Vague language is commonly used in news because there are some functions. The function of vague language can be seen in the following example:

Giving reference more informative

Vague quantifier “most of” is used to give the information about the number more informative when the absolute number of incident is not clear.

Heavy monsoon rains have left at least 19 people dead, Most of them are children, in the northern Philippines, state media reported. (P-LS / 1)

Vague implicative “most of” in the sentence above can function to give informative reference. It can be seen that vague implicative “most of them” here has implicit meaning that the number is more than other. It makes the readers easier understand than the absolute number. It means that, when the reporter says, “Most of them are children” more informative than the reporter says “twenty-two of them are children”, in fact there are still people who are not children. From that, the readers easier get the point that “most of” is the highest number. Hence vague implicative “most of” here is giving information about number of children more informative.

Supplying amount of information

Vague expressions mostly used to supply amount of information in the news articles. Since this news article, the most information is about big number or amount so the specific number is often lacking. For the reporter feels difficult to get the exact number of the incident, such as vague additives “about” in the example below:

The region, known as Metro Manila, has about 12 million residents. (P-LS/21)

Vague additive “about” in the sentence above can function to supply amount of information. It is supplying the number of the residents; it shows that the number of residents is uncertain it can more or less than 12 million. The reporter lacks adequate of exact number, hence he/she adds approximation “about 12 million” to supply the appropriate number of the residents.

Filling gap of uncertainty

There are vague expressions which can function to fill gap of uncertainty, because this news is broadcasted online, the information must be reported immediately, so that the information that reporter got sometime is not yet certain. It can be seen such vague implicative by number “20 to 30” in the following example:

The quake was strong enough to cause a mass 20 to 30 feet high to emerge from the Arabian Sea like a small mountain island off the coast of Gwadar. (P-EQ / 5)

Vague round number of “20 to 30” in the sentence above can function to fill gap of uncertainty. It shows that “20 to 30” is uncertain number but it fills the scale of the mass between 20 to 30 feet high. The reporter does not measure the exact number scale of the mass for his/her knows more than 20 and less than 30 feet that’s why vague implicative “20 to 30” is used to fill her/his statement when the exact number is missing.

Hedging the Statements

In news articles, there are some vague expressions that is appropriately used as hedging to the utterances from uncertainty, such as vague additive “at least”. This vagueness can use as self- protection from making wrong statement when the fact is uncertain or may be wrong. It can be seen in the following example:

At least 208 people were killed in the district of Awaran and the city of Turbut in Balochistan province, Asad Gilani, the provincial home secretary, said Wednesday. (P-EQ / 3)

Vague additives “at least” in the sentence above can function as hedges. Vague “at least 280” here is hedging the statement of the people who were killed when in fact there are more than 208 people. Vague additive “at least” here is used to protect the reporter statement from making mistake if the number of people is not precise to the fact. It also makes the readers not claim if the fact more than 208 people were killed, hence vague “at least” is used.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis above, there are 52 sentences containing vague expressions in news articles on CNN.com, they are vague reference, it refers to noun with only one (2 %) expression, the second is vague additive with 27 (52%) they are adjectives and approximations. Then, vague implicative with 24 (46 %) expressions realized by number, quantifier and exaggeration.

Vague additives to number are dominantly used in this news because almost the information in the news is about the number or amount of the incident in large number, so the specific number is lacking; hence, approximations are used to supply amounts of information. While, vague implicative is often used to make the information about number more informative when the detail information is complicated or not exactly known. While, vague implicative of exaggeration is used; it can be because it is influenced by the culture of American that likes to exaggerate the incident. Meanwhile, vague reference is rarely used. There is only one expression; it is because almost of the references about nouns or things are already described clearly.

It can be concluded that vague expressions are commonly used in CNN news because CNN is a 24-hours cable news channel online that presents the most up-dated information. Hence, the reporter must report the news immediately. Moreover, the news about natural disaster must be reported as soon as possible to the public. Therefore, the reporter does not wait until the information complete, so almost all information that the reporter got is not exactly precise. Hence, vague language is appropriately used. It functions to help the reporter supply the number of information when specific number is lacking. In addition, vague language can be used to hedging the statement which is uncertain, so that the readers do not claim if the information to be imprecise later.

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