

## 摘要

模糊性是自然语言的属性。自从上世纪六十年代模糊理论提出之后,学者们从语义角度对模糊语言进行了系统的描述性研究。但是近年来,语用学理论在描述和解析复杂的模糊现象方面取得长足进步。通常人们认为外交活动所运用的语言必须具体简洁、明确清楚,不能含糊其辞,所以对于语言模糊性在外交语言方面的系统性研究一直处于被忽视的情况。事实上,模糊语言在外交活动中的应用是很广泛的。

本文尝试从语用学的角度,对外交活动中的模糊语言及其功能进行语用分析。除了引言和结论部分,全文分四章进行论述:

第一章侧重于阐述模糊语言学的理论基础。列举前人对模糊语言的研究成果,界定语言模糊性的基本概念并分析模糊产生的根源。

第二章研究分析模糊语言在外交活动中的实现。探讨外交语言的定义及特征。本章从词汇、句法和语境三个层面对外交活动中模糊语言的普遍性运用举例分析。

第三章是从语用学的角度运用实例分析外交语言的模糊性。从语用模糊的含义和分类出发,并用合作原则和礼貌原则对模糊语言进行分析和解释。

第四章在前三章的基础上进一步分析模糊语言在外交活动中的六种语用功能。但是模糊语言使用不当也会带来负面影响。提出要两分地对待模糊语言的运用,既不可忽略也不可夸大。

本论文有一定的实用价值,有助于外交官更好地理解对方的意图,以达到成功外交的目的。对于主修外交学的学生也有一定的指导作用。

**关键词:** 语言模糊, 外交语言, 语用功能, 合作原则, 礼貌原则

# **A Study of Pragmatic Vagueness in Diplomatic Language**

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## **Abstract**

Vagueness of language is a universal phenomenon. Since the concept and theory of fuzzy linguistics was proposed in the 1960's, researchers have made much systematic descriptive study on vague language, especially on the aspects of semantics. However, in recent years, the various theories and principles of pragmatics have made considerable progress in describing and explaining complex phenomena in vague language. Most people hold the opinion that diplomatic activities have always been requiring clear and concrete language, so the systematic study of vagueness in diplomatic language has been neglected. In fact, vague language is widely used in worldwide diplomatic occasions.

The present thesis is a pragmatic analysis of vagueness in diplomatic language. By introducing different aspects of vague terms and the existence of vagueness, this thesis is to expound vagueness in diplomatic language based on Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle. This thesis is composed of four chapters except for introduction and conclusion:

This paper begins with a brief introduction of the theoretical background of present study, methodology of this thesis and the significance of the study, and then shows the outline of the whole thesis.

Chapter 1 dwells on the subject matter of this study—vagueness. It presents the review of fuzzy linguistics, provides the diversity of the definitions, offers the previous study of vagueness at home and abroad, and gives the reasons of existence of vagueness from objective and subjective aspects.

Chapter 2 focuses upon vagueness phenomena in diplomatic language. The definition of diplomacy and diplomatic language, the general features of diplomatic language are illustrated. Linguistic realization of vagueness in diplomatic language is analyzed from lexical level, syntactical level and contextual level.

Chapter 3 is the theoretical basis of this thesis, which illustrates vagueness in diplomatic language from the angle of pragmatics. It gives the definition and classification of pragmatic

vagueness. Great efforts have been made to analyze the vague expressions in diplomatic language mainly by Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle.

Chapter 4 aims at explicating the pragmatic functions of vagueness in diplomatic language. Vagueness in diplomatic language can achieve the following effects: achieving politeness, declaring one's position, protecting oneself, withholding information, breaking the deadlock and creating harmonious atmosphere. However, pragmatic vagueness may not work well if it is not used appropriately. By introducing some negative aspects of exaggerating vagueness of language, it cautions people to treat vagueness of language scientifically: not to ignore and not to exaggerate or abuse.

Although some limitations can be found in the present study, it necessarily has its important implications. The diplomats who are aware of vagueness strategy and make use of it appropriately are more likely to communicate more accurately and effectively in diplomatic language. This thesis would do a favor to students who major in diplomacy to better realize the communicative intentions or better understand the implied meaning of vague language.

**Key words:** Vagueness, Diplomatic language, Pragmatic function, Cooperative principle, Politeness principle

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## Introduction

Vagueness is an inherent property of natural language. It is universal and inevitable in communication. Since Eubulides in ancient Greek proposed the sorties paradox, which contained the idea of vagueness, vagueness of language has attracted more and more attention. After the publication of Fuzzy Sets by L. A. Zadeh in 1965, the ideas in fuzzy mathematics are applied to the study of vague language. This deepened people's knowledge of vague language enormously and inspired multi-dimensional researches on vague language.

### Research Orientation

People have many beliefs about the accuracy of language. But in fact, language is more often than not deceptive. In human language, many words with apparently precise meaning or definition often express uncertain concept which suggests an inherent linguistic characteristic of language---vagueness. Let's take "cheap" for example: 100 yuan for one pencil is not cheap, while for an Mp3 is cheap. We have no definite idea that at which precise level we could say whether something is cheap or not and whether someone is young or not. So "cheap" is a vague word in this sense.

Against what we think, the skillful use of vague language sometimes helps bring about special functions in communication. According to Dr. Channell (Joanna Channell), ordinary language leaves room for people to be vague to avoid precision. The art of being vague is a neglected concern for the linguists, and yet an important part of the protection of every speaker and writer. If people did not have access to it, their range of communication would be severely restricted, that is to say, the abundant semantic properties of vague language have rendered it various pragmatic functions which cannot be replaced by other forms of language.

Vagueness has been found to occur widely in language use. Not only in the field of literature, interest in vagueness in language use and meaning has arisen in a number of disciplines, such as literary criticism, psychology, philosophy, mathematics as well as economics. With the ever-increasing diplomatic activities between countries, especially the continuous popping of conflicts and disputes, the language adopted by diplomats seems more and more important.

My study aims at introducing the theory of vagueness, analyzing its linguistic realizations from the angle of pragmatics and identifying the motives behind the employment of vagueness in diplomatic language. Emphasis will be laid on elaborating the linguistic realizations of vagueness in diplomatic language by using fuzzy linguistics, with a good number of case studies.

## **Data Collection and Methodology**

Diplomatic language has been chosen as the main topic, on which the systematic study of vagueness is based. It is expected to answer the research questions of the thesis, and to find out the pragmatic functions of the vague language in diplomatic activities. On the whole, a “principle and instances” approach is adopted in the present study. The author means that the main aim of this study is to construct a theoretical framework for pragmatic vagueness. Meanwhile, it is also necessary to investigate real instances of vagueness in diplomatic language to testify the principles employed in this thesis. As the study of vagueness in diplomatic language, a variety of theories like fuzzy linguistics, semantics and pragmatics are touched to varying degrees, and the main theories are cooperative principle and politeness principle.

This thesis is a descriptive and interpretive study of vagueness. In the beginning stage of the research, the focus is to give a detailed description and analysis of vagueness in order to reclassify its pragmatic functions into a few major types on the basis of Channell’s (2000) study of the use of vague language. Then it lays focus on linguistic realization of vagueness used in diplomatic language from lexical level, syntactical level and contextual level. The following part is the reclassification of pragmatic functions of vagueness in diplomatic language.

Since the study is genre-oriented to diplomatic language, the target data draws heavily upon relevantly recent and typical cases. Generally the data discussed in the present study derive from the following main sources:

- (1) Some of the data are taken from the books with the topic of diplomatic language, wherever and whatever example is cited, a brief reference is given at the bibliography section listed in the last part of the thesis.
- (2) Others are taken from the Internet including [www.baidu.com](http://www.baidu.com), [www.msn.com](http://www.msn.com) etc.
- (3) The data also includes a large amount of examples quoted from other authors relevant to the present study. The information of these examples is given at the bibliography section listed in the last part of the thesis.

## **The Specific Questions to Be Investigated**

Linguists have made a lot of investigations on vagueness from different angles, whether the term “vague language” has been used or not. Different from the other’s research on vagueness of language, this paper focuses on vagueness in diplomatic language aiming to

introduce the definition of vague language, analyze its linguistic realization in diplomatic language and identify the motives behind the employment of vague language. But the related research reveals that some problems still remain unsolved. Little descriptive and interpretive study on the same topic has been conducted. We set out to use principles in pragmatics to analyze the characteristics and functions of vague language, and work towards exploring the following questions:

1. Why is vague language employed in daily life communication?
2. What are the characteristics of vagueness in diplomatic language?
3. Why, when and where is vagueness in diplomatic language?
4. What are the pragmatic functions performed by using vagueness in diplomatic language?

### **The Significance of the Present Study**

The increasing pace of globalization has resulted in an unprecedented growth of diplomatic activities among different countries of the world. As we may note, there is an interesting phenomenon in diplomatic language use. That is, in order to maintain their respective positions, diplomats and statesmen sometimes cannot avoid mentioning some sharp disputes. However, as they represent as well the image of their countries, they are supposed to remark and behave in a decent manner. Consequently, they usually resort to some reserved phrases that enable them to make unpleasant things sound pleasant, or at least less unpleasant. Therefore, the author intends to achieve the following three points through the analysis:

(1) The research may assist people to understand the implied meaning of diplomats. It is well-known that diplomats resort to roundabout expressions to avoid some touchy topics or difficulties in order to leave some room to negotiate. If one side can get the implied meaning of the other side, they can adjust their diplomatic policies and make reasonable decisions. Therefore, vagueness is crucial for both countries' interests.

(2) The research may help people understand vagueness in another language variety. There must be some overlap and discrepancy between the vagueness of one language and the vagueness of another. If we can grasp the implied meaning of the vagueness in one language, we will have a better understanding of the language itself including its pronunciation, sentence structure and the connotation of the cultural words.

(3) Finally, the research may give some insights to teaching. If the teacher teaches relevant vague strategies used in diplomatic language and the methods of catching the implied

meaning of the vagueness, students will accumulate communicative skills and do better in cross-cultural communication.

## **Outline of the Thesis**

The thesis is intended to cover four chapters except for Introduction and Conclusion. It begins with a brief introduction to the whole research. It points out the significance of the study, offers the research orientation and presents the methodology and organization of the thesis. The thesis is generally organized in this sequence. Chapter 1 reviews the related study of fuzzy linguistics, offers the previous study of vagueness home and abroad and provides various definitions of vagueness and gives the reasons for existence of vague language.. Chapter 2 studies the features of vagueness in diplomatic language and linguistic realization of vagueness is also referred to. Chapter 3 is a theoretical framework which presents a detailed introduction to Cooperative Principle, Politeness Principle and Speech Act Theory in order to provide a theoretical support for the explanation of the mechanism of pragmatic vagueness in diplomatic language. Chapter 4 aims at explicating the pragmatic functions of vagueness in diplomatic language. Vagueness phenomena are abundant in diplomatic language and play a critical role in it. The positive and negative roles of vague language will be elaborated. Vagueness in language is neither “bad” nor “good”. What matters is that vague language is used appropriately. The last part is the concluding part summarizing the major findings of the present study, the implication and limitation of the present study. Some suggestions are also provided for further research on vagueness in diplomatic language.



## Chapter 1 Literature Review

### 1.1 Definition of Vagueness

As to the definition of vagueness, different scholars hold different opinions. If one wants to get a unanimous definition of vagueness, he will find it impossible. But one thing is certain: the distinction between some terms may do a great favor to our understanding of vagueness.

#### 1.1.1 Distinction of Some Terms

Before we give definition to vague language, we often feel confused in distinguishing vagueness and other terms, such as fuzziness, generality and ambiguity.

##### (1) Vagueness vs. Ambiguity

Vagueness refers to an expression which has more than one possible interpretation (i.e. is polysemous). For example, *good* has a range of interpretations: *good (fine) weather*, *good (hard-working) student*, *good (warm-hearted) people*, *good (beautiful) legs*, etc. Similarly, the sentence *John has my book* could mean 'John has a book written by me'; 'John has a book borrowed by me', etc.

Besides, vagueness also denotes the meaning expressed by '*either...or*'. For example, the sentence *I either watch TV or surf the internet* has at least two possible interpretations: 'I watch TV' Vs. 'I surf the internet'.

Ambiguity is defined as "expressions which have more than one semantically unrelated meaning". In other words, "an expression is ambiguous if it has several paraphrases, which are not paraphrases of each other." (Zhang Qiao, 1998:17) Different from ambiguity, vagueness is characterized by a single meaning that has borderline cases. So, homonymy and polysemy cause ambiguity but not vagueness. For example, "Flying planes can be dangerous" is ambiguous because of two unrelated meanings of "flying planes", and "We saw her duck" is ambiguous because of the homonymic meaning of "duck". (These two examples are quoted by many linguists to explain ambiguity). Another two examples can also explain *vagueness* and *ambiguity* clearly. "It is good weather" is vague because of the one meaning of "*good*", and we don't know how good it is. "She has a good leg" is ambiguous because of the several meanings of "*good*". Does it mean "healthy", or "athletic" or "beautiful"?

Ambiguities are rare in actual texts, because contextual clues generally make clear which meaning is appropriate, but vagueness is possible in many cases because it expresses one meaning which is not clear or distinct.

Every natural language is both vague and ambiguous. An ambiguous expression has more than one meaning, and they are semantically unrelated. Consequently, ambiguous words tend to have separate dictionary entries. A vague expression has one meaning but more than one interpretation, and the interpretations are semantically related. Thus, a vague word tends to have a single dictionary entry.

## (2) Vagueness vs. Generality

Generality is a matter of unspecification: the meaning of an expression is general in the sense that it does not specify certain details. For example: the meaning of *city* is general because it does not specify whether or not a city is big or small, modern or ancient. *My friend* is general, as it could mean *a female friend*, *a male friend*, or *a friend from New Zealand*. For example,

- a. Mary saw John.
- b. Mary changes a baby.
- c. Mary receives a degree.

The meaning of (a) is general because it does not specify whether or not Mary saw John in a shop, or in a school, or any other place. In (b), Mary could be changing her own baby, or a baby belonging to her husband's ex-wife, or a baby she has kidnapped. It is hard to guess whose baby it is. In (c), Mary could have an art degree, a BA degree or a PhD. Again, the sentence does not say specifically what kind of degree Mary received.

Vagueness differs from generality and ambiguity because it is not simply a product of one-to-many relationship; it is just a single meaning that has borderline cases. When mentioning an ambiguous word, take "bank" for example, we are referring to two distinct meanings the word "bank" can denote. For a vague word, e.g. good, several possible interpretations would be listed. Generality can be presented in a general word, e.g. person, is unspecified in terms of its sense, not as to its referential boundary. Opposed to generality and ambiguity, which may be contextually eliminated, vagueness is somewhat intrinsic because it has no clear-cut referential boundaries, and is not closely related to linguistic context.

As for vagueness and generality, Israel Scheffler holds: "Vagueness...is independent of generality. A general term may be clearly decidable in its application to every object within the domain of our consideration. That one term, e.g. 'animal', is more general than another, e.g. 'kangaroo', in applying to everything. Denoted by the latter and to other things besides, does not argue that it is vaguer; both terms may be clearly decidable, within, the domain in question." (Scheffler, 1979)

### (3)Vagueness vs. Fuzziness

The term *fuzzy* is derived from the fuzzy mathematics developed by Zadeh who suggests that fuzziness can be formally handled in terms of a *fuzzy set*, a class of entities with a continuum of grades of membership. Other scholars like Lakoff and McCawley also use *fuzzy* to show there is a certain degree of fuzziness around componential boundaries. If we consider "bird-likeness", it appears that "robin" is a central member which belongs to "bird-likeness" completely while "bat" is a peripheral member which hardly belongs to "bird-likeness".

But before and after Zadeh, linguists like Black, Russell, Fillmore, Binnich, Ullmann, Desse, Burns, Channell, Crystal and Davy, etc. use the term *vagueness* instead of *fuzziness*. In fact, the vagueness in their mind includes the meaning of fuzziness. Based on their reasoning, we attempt to classify vagueness into three types here. The first type of vagueness is fuzziness in which the categories of independent items have no clear-cut boundaries. For examples, we do not have definite criteria to distinguish the referential boundary of expressions like "city" or "town"; "mountain" or "hill"; "forest" or "wood"; "house" or "cottage"; "girl" or "woman". This type of vagueness is represented when more than two categories are compared. The second type of vagueness is borderline case vagueness in language, in which the uncertainty concerns the fringes of application of a word. For example, how tall is "tall"? How big is "big"? How good is "good"? What is "blue"? What is "cold"? The borderlines of these words are not clear, which can not be determined in the same context and varies in different contexts. For instance: Is 170cm tall for a female model? The third type of vagueness is the indeterminate meaning arisen from uncertainty or indefiniteness in a phrase or proposition. For example, parent: where are you going? Offspring: out. (Channell: 13) No definite answer can be found by the word "out". "John's train" is indeterminate because it can be used to

describe the train John designed, the train he owns, the train he drives, or the train he goes to work on, or the train he is going to catch, etc.

In summary, although these concepts have been given respective illustrations and many linguists have been trying to make clear distinction among “fuzziness”, “vagueness”, “generality”, “ambiguity”, etc, it is inevitable that there exist overlaps among these categories in natural language. Furthermore, this thesis aims to make analysis on people’s adoption of the vague language instead of a precise or more precise expression; that is to say, the vague language taken here has its corresponding precise form, but is still used by people rather than the precise form.

### **1.1.2 Different Definitions of Vagueness**

The study of vagueness in language has a long history. However, concerning the definition of vagueness, there is no exact answer. Most of the answers are related to “not clearly expressed or perceived” or “imprecise, indistinct and uncertain” etc.

Peirce who wrote an article “*Vagueness*” collected in Baldwin’s 1902 book “*Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*” is considered as the originator of the notion of vagueness in language (Channell, 2000). She was perhaps the first to try to formulate the notion of vagueness in linguistics as follows:

A proposition is vague where there are possible states of things concerning which it is intrinsically uncertain whether, had they been contemplated by the speaker, he would have regarded them as excluded or allowed by the proposition. By intrinsically uncertain we mean not uncertain in consequence of any ignorance of the interpreter, but because the speaker’s habits of language were indeterminate; so that one day he would regard the proposition as excluding, another as admitting, those states of things. Yet this must be understood to have reference to what might be deduced from a perfect knowledge of his state of mind; for it is precisely because these questions never did, or did not frequently, present themselves that his habit remained indeterminate. (Channell, 2000:7).

In the remainder of the passage Peirce explains that by “an indeterminacy of habits” she means the hypothetical variation by the speaker in the application of the proposition, “so that one day he would regard the proposition as excluding, another as admitting, those states of a

perfect knowledge of this state of mind; for it's precisely because these questions never did, or did not frequently, present themselves, that his habit remained indeterminate".

For example whether "a 1.62-meter-high girl" is excluded or allowed by the proposition "She is a tall girl" is difficult to judge for there are many different states of things. Compared with a 5-year-old girl, she is certainly tall while among the female basketball players she is too short. This is caused by the vague upper and bottom limitations of the word.

That is to say, the language system permits speakers to produce utterances without having decided whether certain facts are excluded or allowed by them. The later study of vagueness mainly circles around the definition and classification of it. Besides Peirce, many other linguists have done the research on it.

German linguist Anton Marty, in his work *Untersuchungen zur rammatik und Sprachphilosophie*(1908:52), gave a profound understanding of the vagueness of language by saying, "vagueness is such a kind of phenomenon, that is , the field of application of certain names is not strictly outlined".

In 1923, Russell wrote a famous paper *Vagueness*, in which he pointed out, "All language is more or less vague". He defines vagueness as "a representation is vague when the relation of the representing system to the represented system is not one-one, but one-many". It is obvious that he includes polysemy and ambiguity into the study of vagueness.

In American linguist Israel Scheffler's famous work *Beyond the Letter: Philosophical Inquiry into Ambiguity, Vagueness and Metaphor in Language*, he pointed out, "... vagueness is a universal feature of descriptive words".

English linguist S. Ullmann once pointed out the vagueness of language by saying, "There is not enough perfect language to express all of our concepts and feelings. The subtle differences among these concepts and feelings are too many to distinguish... such as, people have to use two generalized words 'love' and 'hate' to express various, even thousands of love and hate." (1962)

Kempson thinks the scope of vagueness is bigger than fuzziness. She divides vagueness into four types: a) referential vagueness, where the meaning of the lexical item is in principle clear enough, but it may be hard to decide whether or not the item can be applied to certain objects; For example, we do not have definite criteria to distinguish the referential boundary

of expressions like “mountain” or “hill”; “girl” or “woman”; b) indeterminacy of meaning, where the meaning itself of an item seems indeterminate; For example, How tall is “tall”? How big is “big”? c) lack of specification in the meaning of an item, where the meaning is clear but is only generally specified; d) disjunction in the specification of the meaning of an item, where the meaning involves an either-or statement of different interpretation possibilities (Kempson, 1977:128). In her division of the four types of vagueness, the first one is widely accepted. The fourth refers to vagueness of function words, while the second and the third types refer to “generality”.

Dr Joanna Channell defined vague language in his *Vague Language* (1994:20) as following: An expression or word is vague if:

- a. it can be contrasted with another word or expression which appears to render the same proposition;
- b. it is “purposely and unabashedly vague”(Sadock’s 1977);
- c. Its meaning arises from the “intrinsic uncertainty” referred to by Peirce. (Channell 1994:20)

Linda Claire Burns (1991) defines vagueness from its opposite side: a non-vague term is one which is sharply defined in the sense that it nearly divides objects into those contained in the term’s extension and those contained in the extensions of its negation. A vague term is one whose correct definition permits the possibility of borderline cases. The attention of linguistic semanticists has been drawn to vague language because of the problems its existence appears to pose for semantic models of meaning. Truth-conditional semantics, which aims to describe the meaning of sentences in terms of the conditions which must pertain for them to be “true”, classically operates with three truth values: true, false, and lacking a truth value.

The American linguist Lakoff attacked the tripartite division of sentences into true, false and lacking a truth value:

“Clearly any attempt to limit truth conditions for natural languages to be true, false, and ‘nonsense’ will distort the natural language concepts by portraying them as having sharply defined rather than fuzzily defined boundaries. “(Lakoff, 1972:183)

Another approach to vagueness is found in the more psychologically oriented work of Deese (1974). He holds that vagueness of communication is inherent in the structure of our ideas, rather than the language system:

“I have been arguing for some years now (.....) that the correspondence between the ideas possessed by two individuals who are in communication on a common topic is rather poor, a condition which we ordinarily do not notice because we seldom make explicit attempts to validate a communicated idea against the original. When we do, as in the case of giving directions to someone about how to do something, we are suddenly made aware of the discrepancy that exists between ‘the same’ idea in the minds of two different people. Ordinary situations demand that we place only the loosest of interpretations upon some linguistic utterance we hear.” (Deese, 1974:72)

Through all the definitions given above, we would like to give a summarized definition, which is “Vagueness is a kind of expression which has more than one possible interpretation, in different contexts and for different purposes.”

## **1.2 Relevant Researches on Vagueness**

It has become a public view that vagueness is present in a great deal of language use. The vague phenomenon has been a great concern for the linguists and many scholars both at home and abroad.

### **1.2.1 Relevant Researches on Vagueness Abroad**

Ever since the ancient Greek times, interests in vagueness of language use and meaning have arisen in many disciplines, just like literary criticism, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, etc. People have taken great efforts to research on the phenomena of vagueness, which are universal in life. This can be traced back to the logician Eubulides of Milet, a contemporary of Aristotle and one of the representatives of eristic school. He has been very famous for his sorties paradox, which is now known as “the Heap Paradox”. About the questions of whether one grain makes a heap, whether two grains make a heap, whether three grains make a heap....and then whether ten thousand grains make it, this paradox gives rise to the statement that if one admits one grain of wheat is not a heap and is not unwilling to make a fuss about the addition of any single grain, eventually it must be accepted that ten thousand grains do not make a heap either. Just because heap expresses a vague concept, it is

impossible to use precise numerals to explain it. The paradox just makes use of the vagueness of heap and its relation with numerals that is vaguely expressed in human mind, to make such a falsity seemingly reasonable.

From above, we can see that vagueness is present in a great deal of language use, and that therefore a complete theory of language must have vagueness as an integral component. It has been approached from different perspectives and for different purposes. The following is a brief survey of the related studies on vague language. After having made a careful review, four major approaches in accounting for vague language are mentioned, i.e. philosophical perspective, semantic perspective, psychological perspective and pragmatic perspective.

### (1) Philosophical Perspective

From the aspect of philosophy, it was Plato who laid the foundation for what later became fuzzy logic, indicating that there was a third region (beyond truth and falsehood). In the early 1900's, Lukasiewicz described a three-valued logic, along with the mathematics to accompany it, the third value he proposed could best be translated as the term "possible" and he assigned it a numeric value between truth and falseness. Later, he explored four-valued logic, five-valued logic, and declared that in principle there was nothing to prevent the derivation of an infinite-valued logic.

With the linguistic turn of philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century, some attention is drawn to the phenomenon of vagueness of natural language in the philosophical circle (Ballmer & Pinkal, 1983:2). Philosophers have concentrated on the origin of vagueness, and they have worked hard to solve the problems of "why natural language has such a property as 'vagueness' and how this property is handled".

Peirce (1902) is often considered as the originator of the notion of vagueness in language. His definition has been mentioned above.

Russell (1923) in his article *Vagueness* illuminates vagueness by using the principles of symbolism. He states that vagueness and precision alike are characteristics of a representation in a language. Accordingly, a representation is vague when the relation of the representing system to the represented system is not one-to-one, but one-to-many in a proposition. A certain degree of vagueness exists in every proposition that can be framed in practice; that is to say, "there is not one definite fact necessary and sufficient for its truth, but a certain region of possible facts, any one of which would make it true". Therefore, natural language has the characteristic of being vague, which has nothing to do with the nature of the objective world (Ballmer & Pinkal, 1983).



There are several schools of thoughts concerning how to deal with this property of natural language. Some philosophers, with Wittgenstein being a representative, regard this property as a troublesome demerit of natural language, thus they work to find out or construct a kind of precise scientific language with mathematics and logic as the remedy for this demerit. On the contrary, some philosophers realize that it is impossible to be absolutely precise in empirical sciences, and vagueness of natural language is inevitable and necessary for the sake of being efficient when natural language is used to express various thoughts (Ballmer & Pinkal, 1983; Burns, 1991). They hold on to the property of vagueness. There are still some other scholars who consider vagueness of natural language as people's ignorance of how to define the vague words or expressions (Keefe & Smith, 1997). Among these philosophers, Ullmann (1962) provides a somewhat comprehensive explanation about the sources of vagueness in natural language. He attributes vagueness to four factors:

a. Generic character of words. The "words" are frequently used to refer to classes of things or events bound together by some common elements. To illustrate, the word "bird" often includes some typically birdlike animals such as robins or sparrows as well as some such as penguins which lack the central features of "birdiness" like flying and perching in trees. This is in some way regrettable but the vagueness can well facilitate our communication.

b. Context-bound meaning. Meaning is never homogenous. It is universally true that any communication would become meaningless without a context.

c. Lack of clear-cut boundaries in the non-linguistic world. For example, we cannot answer when a hill becomes large enough to qualify as a mountain or at what precise age a girl could be called a woman.

d. Lack of familiarity with what the words stand for.

From Ullmann's point of view, an expression or word is vague if 1) it can be contrasted with another word or expression which appears to render the same proposition; 2) it is 'purposely and unabashedly vague', and 3) its meaning arises from the 'intrinsic uncertainty' referred to by Peirce (Channell, 2000:20).

So far as the present study is concerned, it does not matter what the sources of vagueness in natural language are. What matters is how to use vague language appropriately. In other words, we agree with Channell that "Vagueness in language is neither all 'bad' nor all 'good'. What matters is that vague language is used appropriately." (Channell, 2000)

## (2) Semantic Perspective

Vagueness has been a fascinating subject for many philosophers who believe that one important task for philosophical study is to investigate language itself, especially semantics. That is why many philosophers, such as Peirce (1902), Frege (1903/1970), Russell (1923/2004), Wittgenstein (1953), Scheffler (1979), etc. involve themselves in the study of semantic vagueness. Basically, they assume that there are no sharp boundaries to the application of vague words, and there are always some borderline cases where it is uncertain whether a vague term applies or not. Influenced by these philosophers, some linguists, Kempson (1977) and Fine (1975) for example, also conduct researches into semantic vagueness.

Peirce, the founder of semantics, is often considered the originator of the notion of vagueness in language. She gives a definition of vagueness “which can still be taken as an appropriate characterization of this concept, without modification” (Ballmaer & Pinkal, 1983:1). That is to say, the language system permits speakers to produce utterances without having determined whether certain cases are excluded or admitted by them.

Wittgenstein (1953) maintains that vagueness is a constituent of language and it is important for the effective use of natural language. He suggests that words are like blurred photographs: It is not always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one and the indistinct one is often exactly what we need. He agrees with many philosophers that there are no rigid boundaries to ordinary concepts such as that of Christianity, or a game, or greenness and no answers to what counts as within the extension of a term and what no longer qualifies.

The word “fuzziness” comes from Zadeh (1965: 338-353), who first put forward fuzzy as a scientific term suggesting that fuzziness can be formally handled in terms of a fuzzy set, a class of entities with a continuum of grades of membership.

This thesis contends that Zadeh’s fuzziness is just one kind of vagueness—the borderline cases of vagueness in Peirce and Wittgenstein’s sense. Therefore, in this research, the author adopts “vagueness”, a common and popular word, to cover varieties of vague use of language in a broad sense.

### (3) Psychological Perspective

The vagueness has also been approached from the viewpoint of psycholinguistics. Russell considered vagueness of psychological phenomena, thinking "A memory is vague when it is appropriate to many different occurrences." Freud, from the psychological point of view, took vagueness as a significant quality in dreams. Some experiments have been carried out by Deese (1974). He holds that vagueness of communication is inherent in the structure of our ideas, rather than in the language system. This is one way to explain why vagueness is a part of language. His argument is that vagueness is not a concept that applies to language, but rather to the ideas which language expresses. It is obviously difficult to separate our language from the ideas it expresses, but it seems that it is our ideas which are vague, rather than our language, is another way of attempting to make the analysis of language less complicated, by shifting the problem away from linguistics and into psychology (Channell, 2000:18). But discussing the structure of ideas goes beyond the proper principle of this thesis, which is to explain how it is that vagueness is part of language.

D. Crystal and D. Davy (1975:111) think vagueness is imprecision. When talking about the reasons for vagueness, they mention "memory loss" to mean the speaker forgets the right words, and "the language has no suitable exact word, or the speaker does not know it." To combine psychology with linguistics, we can see that what is noticed, perceived or remembered of a situation often glosses over the specific details which distinguish that situation from others. The result of this is called vagueness.

Oden claims that people use the relative sensibleness of the several interpretations of an ambiguous sentence in making judgment as to which reading is likely. More precisely, another research maintains that shared knowledge will affect the interpretation of multiple-reading sentences, and applications of such knowledge may be varied. "The detection of linguistic ambiguity is not solely a product of linguistic competence but rather also involves nonlinguistic cognitive factors such as the ability to change mental set and to internalize and use rules."

For the reason that only few researches on vagueness have been made from the psychological approach, in present study, we just give a brief introduction here. We will focus on the following pragmatic perspective.

#### (4) Pragmatic Perspective

Fuzzy linguistics is a new yet quickly developing discipline, which needs more detailed studies from different perspectives. Because the above-perspective research is inadequate and inefficient, pragmatic perspective is tentatively adopted to interpret the employment of vague language. Pragmatic perspective might be the most promising one for explaining why vague language is widely employed.

Fredsted (1998) holds the opinion that such a pragmatic device of vagueness in communication is motivated by the speaker's intention to leave more room or options for the addressee to make their own interpretation. There are two contradictory points of view toward vagueness: if words are used imprecisely, in vague meaning or with blurred edges, then it is a bad thing, and if precisely, a good thing. Investigation of pragmatic value of vagueness suggests that vagueness should be taken as an integral component in language study and verbal communication.

In her monograph of *Vague Language*, Channell suggests that vagueness "cannot be handled except by looking both semantics and pragmatics" seem to be more inherently 'pragmatic' in nature than many others-indeed, it has been suggested that some of the expressions are almost semantically empty and that their interpretation has to be handled entirely within pragmatics" (Channel, 2000:20). In her study, Channell shows how English provides its speakers with a great variety of ways of being vague. Channell (2000:32-33) holds the view that there are two areas of word in theoretical pragmatics which are of particular relevance to the description and explanation of vague language use. The first of these is the theory of conversational implicature first promulgated by Grice and since refined and developed by many others, like Levinson (1983). One way in which the maxims of Co-operative principle are relevant to vague language that vague expressions may be used to enable speakers to follow the maxims. Vague expressions are often used when one of the maxims is flouted. The second important area of pragmatics is within the theory of implicature, and the analysis of what have come to be known as scalar implicatures. Channell's contribution lies in that: she looks in detail at the structure and meaning of several types of vague expressions, describes and discusses the way in which speakers and writers use vague expressions; in particular, she examines what communicative effects arise from using vague expressions, what goals speakers use them to achieve.

### 1.2.2 Relevant Researches on Vagueness at Home

Chinese linguistic scholars have also paid much attention to the study of vagueness including the study of pragmatic vagueness like their foreign counterparts, such as Wu Tieping(1997;1999), He Ziran(1990;2000), Yu Dongming(1997), Chen Zhi'an(1995;1996), Ran Yongping(1995), Hou Guojin(2005), Wu Yaxin(2001;2002;2005), Li Qiumei(2003) and so on. Some of their achievements will be simply introduced.

With the birth and development of fuzzy linguistics, in China, the real and serious study of fuzzy linguistics began in the late 1970s. Linguists of China have taken great efforts to make research on Chinese with the fuzzy theory. It is commonly acknowledged that Wu Tieping's *A Tentative Analysis of Fuzzy Language* is the first article using fuzzy theories to analyze linguistic fuzziness, which symbolizes the birth of fuzzy linguistics in China. His study on fuzzy linguistics involves a wide range, including fuzzy words, fuzzy concepts, facts that affect fuzziness, the mutual conversions of fuzzy words and precise words, the history of fuzzy theories, the quantitative study of fuzzy language, and the relationship between fuzzy theories and lexicology, terminology, rhetoric, etymology, etc.

Wu Tieping points out that research scope of fuzzy linguistics should not be over-enlarged and the study in this field should adopt scientific attitudes and methods. His study of fuzzy linguistics mainly focused on the fuzziness of words, indicating his idea that words denote concepts whose extensions cannot be clearly cut, while sentences can only be ambiguous or vague rather than fuzzy.

And he also distinguishes the concepts of “fuzziness” and “ambiguity”, and points out that language use should try to avoid ambiguity because it tends to make misunderstanding. However, the use of fuzzy language is sometimes quite necessary. But there is a point to be noticed that sometimes ambiguity can be removed in the context of communication.

Furthermore, Wu Tieping states that fuzzy words are not restricted by language difference, that is to say, because words denote concepts, if a certain word is fuzzy in a language, its corresponding word in another language is also fuzzy, as the term “a tall man” carrying fuzziness both in Chinese and English because the concept it denotes is almost same in every language. But ambiguity is a different case. It can be restricted by different languages, as the example given by Professor Wu shows: in Chinese *Yao Si Lie Ren De Gou* (咬死猎人

的狗) can be considered having two different meanings, while in English they are just two different terms *the dog which bit the hunter to death* and *to bite the hunter's dog to death*.

The book *Fuzzy Linguistics* is a collection of his articles that he wrote to study fuzziness. In this book, he gave us three main points. First, fuzziness is a common phenomenon in real life. He gave a lot of examples about the different expressions of fuzziness. Second, it is about the history of fuzziness. Last, fuzzy linguistics has close relations to other disciplines.

Zhang Qiao, who has been dealing with the study on fuzzy linguistics since 1970s when she was a postgraduate, later adopted "The Semantics of Fuzzy Quantifiers" as the topic of her dissertation for doctor's degree in Edinburgh University, focusing her study on fuzzy semantics through Zadeh's fuzzy sets theory. She adopts Chinese and English as main language materials to discuss fuzzy semantics from aspects of natural language and formal language.

From the semantic perspective, she has proven the existence of compositionality of fuzzy words by study on fuzzy quantifiers, which reflects a rule that fuzzy words of the same type have same effect on the parts they modify. That is to say, fuzzy words do not have idiomatic characteristic. She uses subordinate functions to indicate the regularity of fuzzy words, and states that the change of subordinate function is limited in a range although it varies with the changes of context.

From the logical perspective, she agrees that the statement that a proposition is either true or false is very limited, because proposition with fuzzy words may carry a degree of truth and the traditional way cannot correctly reflect complex language phenomena represented by fuzzy terms. So Zhang Qiao tries to make a formal language frame through the use of degree of truth, core meaning of words, and inferential model. She also states that fuzzy word is an objective form of natural language, the fuzziness of whose meaning is a necessary characteristic and theoretically cannot be weakened by context. She further distinguishes the concept of fuzziness from the concept of vagueness, ambiguity and generality by taking semantic tests, syntactic tests, and pragmatic tests.

Through her study, she holds that most expressions have a fuzzy referential boundary and if an expression has a characteristic of referential opacity, it is fuzzy. She uses fuzziness as a technical term, which could be replaced by "continuous", as Zadeh suggests that "fuzzy

logic” could be called “continuous logic”. Fuzziness, in her opinion, is inherent in the sense that it is not resolvable even with resort to context, while vagueness, ambiguity and generality may be contextually resolved. And she also points out the important role of fuzziness in language communication and the necessity of an integral investigation of meaning study, combining semantics, pragmatics and psychology.

He Ziran (2003) in his two books *Notes on Pragmatics* and *A Survey of Pragmatics* and some of his published articles carries out comprehensive exploration of vagueness. He states that “Be precise while preciseness is needed and be vague while vagueness is required; under preciseness there is vagueness, and on vagueness preciseness depends-this is the starting point of the issue, and the end-result of the issue”. He Ziran can be considered as the linguist who has begun to study pragmatic vagueness in China. Presenting his own understanding of pragmatic vagueness in his articles, he further classifies pragmatic vagueness into four types: 1) fuzzy continuum; 2) taxonomic category; 3) nomenclative evaluation including nominal concepts, abstract concepts, relative concepts, approximative concepts, metalanguage and quoting devices; 4) hedging in discourse. According to him, vagueness in pragmatics includes the notion of fuzziness, indeterminacy, probability, ambiguity and generality manifested in practical use of language.

Yu Dongming considers that pragmatic ambivalence (his word for vagueness) is a kind of illocutionary force that the speaker intends to express to the hearer by using indeterminate, fuzzy and indirect words in a particular context or in the co-text. He classifies it into four forms including pragmatic multivalence, pragmatic bivalence/plurivalence, conditional bivalent illocutionary act and discoursal ambivalence. He thinks that pragmatic ambivalence is context-dependent and is complicated illocutionary act where the speaker passes more than two illocutionary forces to the hearer in verbal communication. And pragmatic ambivalence is used consciously by the speaker to make the illocutionary force implicit to serve the common interests of the two sides.

### **1.3 The Reasons for the Existence of Vagueness**

The intrinsic nature of vagueness which exists in our language system can be explained both objectively and subjectively.

### **1.3.1 The Objective Reason for Its Existence**

First let's see an example:

Physicians consider spectrum as a continuum of different wavelengths, in which there are no clear boundaries between the neighbor colors. Among red, orange, yellow, green, cyan, blue and purple, all languages use words arbitrarily to divide every part of the spectrum continuum. People cannot compartmentalize the exact boundary between red and orange, nor orange and yellow, etc. Since colors of nature are phenomena of vagueness, words in languages describing them should accordingly be vague as well.

Here is another example, if 24 hours in a day could be seen as a time continuum, people can approximately divide them into several periods: morning, noon, afternoon, dusk, evening, night, midnight, early midnight and late midnight. When people are dividing these periods, there are still "transitional areas" which cause the indeterminacy of the neighbor boundaries.

Since the world is complicated and ever-changing, human language is unable to express all the items in the world. Vocabulary of any human language is limited in expressing the objective world. Usually it takes more time for people to find the exact words or expressions to describe what has happened or is happening in the world. During this process, vagueness is inevitable and even plays an important role in communication.

### **1.3.2 The Subjective Reason for Its Existence**

Human beings habitually base their cognition on the classification of the objective world. Jackendoff (1983:77) once pointed out that "one of the indispensable aspects of human cognition is the ability to classify the objective world, that is, the ability of judging whether one object belongs to certain category or not."

Different nations have their own classifications about the objective world, which has something to do with the characteristics of the thing as well as communicating requirements of different nations. Each nation might have its own way of cognition and classification towards the same objective world, such as the field of colors and relatives.

The book Hypothesis of Berlin & Kay by American linguistics Berlin&Kay in 1969 concerned about the basic words for colors. Based on large amount of investigation, they stated that there are 11 basic categories of colors, that is white, black red, green, yellow, blue,



brown, purple, pink, orange and gray. Every language picks some or all of the categories. Offered by the same color category, different nations choose their respective color words to fulfill their requirements of communication. Another example is the kindred of human beings. There exists similar kindred, but the classification is different in different nations. Both examples show that vagueness and indeterminacy exist when people are making classifications about the objective world.

As to the individuals, human brain cannot respond to the reflection as the mirror to the objective world. Instead, the process of reflection is dynamic and full of subjective elements. The cognition of human beings towards the objective world is actually a process to seek the perfect state, although the goal can never be reached. That is why every individual has his/her own evaluation of young or old, rich or poor, ugly or beautiful, etc. To be more exact, vagueness occurs in the process of cognition and communication because of the gap between subjective and objective cognition; between thought and expression; between expression and interpretation.

## Chapter 2 Vagueness in Diplomatic Language

### 2.1 Definition of Diplomacy and Diplomatic Language

Diplomacy has always played a great role in adjusting international policies. It is evident that very few problems in international relations can be erased completely. The majority of them have to be adjusted or settled through compromise. This can be done through diplomacy. Diplomatic language is regarded as an effective weapon in diplomatic situation. First let's see the definitions of diplomacy and diplomatic language.

#### 2.1.1 Definition of Diplomacy

The word "diplomacy" originates from the ancient Greek word "diploma" which means a folded document used for identification and request for favor or privilege. Concerning the definition of diplomacy, scholars, diplomats and dictionaries of different countries have attempted to give an explanation.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines diplomacy as "the art or practice of conducting international relations, as in negotiating alliances, treaties, and agreements; tact and skill in dealing with people."

According to Webster's Dictionary (Encyclopedic Edition), diplomacy is "the conducting of relations between nations, by their heads directly, or through accredited representatives; the art of managing international negotiations; skill in conducting such negotiations (quoted from Huang Jinqi, 2004, P. 203)."

The Oxford Dictionary gives its definition as follows: diplomacy is the management of international relations by negotiation; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys; the business or art of a diplomat.

The New Oxford Dictionary of English gives its definition as follows: Diplomacy is the profession, activity, or skill of managing international relations, typically by a country's representatives abroad.

In China, the most prestigious dictionary Cihai (The 1979 revised edition) offers the following explanation: "diplomacy is the conduct of such activities in foreign relations as visits, negotiations, representations, issuance of diplomatic documents, conclusion of treaties,

participation in international conferences and international organizations, by the heads of any states and governments, foreign ministers and diplomatic missions of a state in order to implement the foreign policy. Diplomacy is an important means for a state to implement its foreign policy (quoted from Huang Jinqi, 2004, P. 203)."

Premier Zhou Enlai once said "diplomacy is a 'peaceful warfare'". He also pointed out in the same speech that "diplomacy embraces two aspects: alliance and struggle (quoted from Huang Jinqi, 2004, P. 378)." Therefore, diplomacy engages in alliance and struggle by peaceful means in international relations. And the primary weapon or tool employed in that "peaceful warfare" is language.

Huang Jinqi, summarized the definitions and explanations given by different diplomats and theorists as follows:

Diplomacy is the exercise of sovereignty by a sovereign state in external affairs through official activities; and important means for a state to protect its interests and implement its foreign policy by peaceful methods, mainly by negotiation and dialogue in different forms, including the participation in international conferences and organizations; a business not only transacted by diplomatists and diplomatic organs but also involving the direct participation in different ways by heads of state and government; the science, art and skill of peaceful management of state relations.

To study diplomatic language from pragmatic perspective, we would like to quote Halliday's words: "(Man is) social man ... This implies not simply man in relation to some abstract entity such as 'society as a whole' but man in relation to other men; it is a particular facet of man in relation to his environment, only it shifts the emphasis from the physical on to the human environment, on to man in the environment of men. The individual is seen as the focus of a complex of human relationships which collectively define the content of its social behavior." (Guo Hong, Peng Xiaodong, 1999:9) From Halliday's words, we know that all men live with each other in the world, and language is the bridge in establishing and keeping the relationship in the society. As a special activity in human relationship, the substance of diplomacy is to adjust the relations between countries through negotiations, which have to be conducted in language.

### 2.1.2 The Definition of Diplomatic Language

According to what Guo Hong& Peng Xiaodong wrote: diplomatic language is what a diplomat can say, can mean and can do verbally; it is a part of the social system and has grown up in a certain culture; it is a meaning potential associated with a particular type of social context which determines the general features of diplomatic language.

The expression “diplomatic language” is used to denote three different things. In its first sense, it refers to the actual language (whether it is Latin, French or English), which is used by diplomats in their conversations or correspondence with each other. In its second sense, it means those technical phrases, which, in the course of centuries, have become diplomatic parlance. (Guo Hong& Peng Xiaodong 1999:7) And in its third and the most related meaning to my dissertation, it is used to describe the guarded understatement. In this way diplomats and statesmen say sharp things to each other without becoming provocative or impolite.

Sidelights on *Diplomatic Language*, a paper from People’s Daily (03/02/2002), also pointed out that diplomatic language in a way is deviated from the normal style. Its major characteristics are gentleness, connotation and comprise. Besides, the “gray area”, which refers to ambiguity of diplomatic language, is mentioned.

## 2.2 General Features of Diplomatic Language

As a language used in the field of diplomacy, the language itself is obviously affected by the activities carried out in diplomacy.

### 2.2.1 Diplomatic Language as a Formal and Conservative Language

As we know, the relations between diplomats from different countries are least intimate with their distinction in social status, or rather diplomatic rank. As a result, the language used among them is generally formal and conservative. The formality and conservativeness are shown in the following ways:

1. Out-of-date expressions such as Majesty, Royal Highness, Excellency and other addresses remain in current use in diplomatic language. Besides, Latin and French words and expressions and those of Latin and French origins are widely used in diplomatic language.
2. Diplomatic documents of various countries more or less follow the same formula. For

example, a Formal Note is written in first person. Its component parts, usually expressed in traditional French terms, are: L' Appel (such as "Your Excellency" for a minister, vice-minister or an ambassador; "Mr. X" for a charge d'affaires etc.).

Legal diplomatic documents such as treaties, agreements and protocols are generally composed of the following parts: preamble, substantive articles, final clauses, a clause stating "In witness whereof... the respective plenipotentiaries have affixed their signatures and seals", locality and date, and seals and signatures.

3. Rigid hierarchy also manifests itself in diplomatic language. For instance, in notes and letters, ministers, vice ministers and ambassadors are usually addressed as "Excellency", while charge d'affaires and below are addressed as "Mr." If the note or letter is addressed to a person equal or higher in diplomatic rank than the addresser, it concludes with "Please accept the assurances of my *highest consideration*". If addressed to a person in a lower rank, it ends in "Please accept the assurances of my *high consideration*".

### **2.2.2 Diplomatic Language as a Persuasive Language**

As is stated previously, diplomacy is a synonym of negotiation, in which language serves as a principal tool. Consequently, it is safe to say that great importance should be attached to the use of language in diplomatic practice. In order to maintain the stands of their own and seek cooperation and understanding between one another, diplomats try to combine principles with flexibility in diplomatic dialogues. The following is an example of President Bush in persuading American people to support his idea of evading Iraq:

[1] "They would then use Iraq as a base from which to launch attacks against America, overthrow moderate governments in the Middle East, and try to establish a totalitarian Islamic empire that reaches from Indonesia to Spain...If we're not fighting and destroying the enemy in Iraq, they would not be leading the quiet lives of good citizens...They would be plotting and killing our citizens across the world and within our own border...Withdrawing on an artificial deadline would endanger the American people, would harm our military, and make the Middle East less stable. It would give the terrorists exactly what they want." (President Bush's Speech: President Discusses War on Terror and Rebuilding Iraq on December 7, 2005)

As we can see it, diplomatic language is really a persuasive language. In order to seek

support, the diplomats may try every means, including the diplomatic language to make themselves understood and accepted.

### **2.2.3 Diplomatic Language as a Cautious and Precise Language**

When diplomats and statesmen make an announcement or declaration, they often represent the actual stand or position held by their own country. What they have said cannot be retrieved. They have to use the language very cautiously and precisely. For example,

[2] In 1950's, when the U. S. invaded Korean, China used to employ such warnings as "China will not stand by with folded arms"; and "China will not remain indifferent". When the U. S. aggressive troops were about to cross the 38 Parallel in Korea in 1950, China issued such warnings but the American authorities turned a deaf ear to these warnings. As a result, the Chinese Volunteers were sent to fight side by side with the Korean People's Army. From then on, the world has realized that the Chinese mean what they say. And this is the case in the international diplomatic arena.

The careless use of diplomatic language will sometimes cause disaster for a nation. The most striking example is that, on the eve of the Second World War, Neville Chamberlain, British Prime Minister (1937-40), who was notorious for following a policy of appeasement towards the Fascist and Nazi dictators of Germany, in 1938 described Czechoslovakia as "a faraway country about which we know nothing". These words turned out to be disastrous for they made Hitler's invasion and seizure of the country in March 1939.

### **2.2.4 Guarded Understatements**

It is known that international conflicts are usually rather acute. For instance, the conflicts between Israel and Palestine, the Iraqi question, and the Taiwan question. In diplomatic dialogues, in order to maintain their respective positions, diplomats and statesmen sometimes cannot avoid saying and mentioning sharp things. However, as diplomatic activities are characterized by politeness and tactfulness, diplomats are not supposed to appear rude or provocative. These phrases are what Nicholson (1950) terms as "Guarded Understatements".

*"Guarded Understatements are actually euphemisms used in diplomacy".* (Guo Hong, 1999:23).

Guarded understatements enable diplomats and statesmen to mention sharp things,

diplomatic disputes, for instance, in a less unpleasant manner.

The politeness and tactfulness manifest itself in the Guarded Understatements used in diplomatic discourses. It is easy for us to understand that when some acute conflicts have to be mentioned, diplomats and statesmen have to make their language polite and sharp.

It is known to all that Iran and the United States were not happy with each other in the terms of the nuclear issues. But this year, the Obama government wants to change the nervous situation with Iran and the following statement is made by the Secretary of the State Hilary Clinton:

[3] "Well, we're obviously concerned about Iranian behavior on a very broad base. It's not limited to any one event or activity. And as you know, we're undergoing a comprehensive review of how to best approach Iran and how to influence its behavior going forward. And I think you'll find that there is increasing commonality among United States, our European allies, friends in the Gulf and Middle East, that we need a more effective and united approach toward Iran." (Clinton: we are concerned about Iranian behavior, Feb, 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009)

From this statement, the Guarded Understatement is very obvious.

## **2.3 Linguistic Realization of Vagueness**

Diplomatic vagueness is widely used at lexical, syntactic and contextual level. It often takes the forms of words, phrases or even sentences sometimes.

### **2.3.1 Vagueness at Lexical Level**

Vagueness of a sentence can be realized by various ways. Among them, vague words are the most useful means which lead to the effect of vagueness. Vagueness at lexical level can be realized as follows:

#### **(1) Nouns**

To show characteristic: warmth, generosity, peace, friendship...

To show attitude: effort, appreciation, desire, understanding...

#### **(2) Numerals**

Hundreds, thousands, millions, a number of, a variety of, a wide range of, more and more...

#### **(3) Adjectives**

To show degree: large, small, big, a little, further, more, firm, unrelenting...

To show characteristic: serious, good, bad, great, important, friendly, candid, frank, warm, cordial, peaceful, political...

To show condition: clear, fast, common, necessary, other...

To describe the result of the negotiation: effective, positive, forward-looking, constructive, extensive, earnest...

#### (4) Adverbs

To show degree: broadly, greatly, considerably, extremely, fully, thoroughly, constructively, positively, deeply, firmly, categorically...

To show time: soon, quickly, recently, in recent years, occasionally, sometimes, in no time, a bit too early...

To show possibility: perhaps, probably, maybe...

#### (5) Verbs

To show change: improve, change, develop, strengthen, exchange...

To show psychological movement: love, hate, like, be happy to, be fond of, be anxious about, be unhappy with, be angry about...

To show attitude: understand, respect, believe, place the highest value on, support, recognize, respect, note, pay attention to, want, wish, hope, agree, be in harmony with, be opposed to, warn...

To show suggestion: demand, ought to, should...

To soften the tone: can, may, might...

The following examples are some of the best examples which can illustrate the vague phenomenon at lexical level.

[4] The almost unanimous *proposition* among the detailing agencies is that host agencies still restrict access to information and limit the databases that can be queried by detailed from other agencies on grounds of personnel or information security, and intelligence policies. (FBI'S Anti-terrorist Report to U.S. Congress, April 2, 2002)

The hedging noun 'proposition' here is applied to convey an uncertain degree of tentativeness in voicing FBI's agencies' opinions towards the security affairs, resulting in non-subjectiveness and making its report more credible.



Another example,

[5] Given the difficulty of making any absolute judgment on *likely* war outcomes, it is useful to determine at least the direction of any change in the situation: are China's or Taiwan's relative capabilities for these various scenarios getting better or worse?...For the United States, we would need to consider trends in forward deployment and basing patterns, airlift and sealift capabilities. And *more or less likely* in the P.R.C.'s perception. (Pentagon's Report on Implementation of Taiwan Relations Act on December 19, 2000)

As we know, Taiwan issue is an acute and sensitive part in Sino-US relations. However, it is very difficult for the U.S. government to make any resolute judgment on the tendency of the Taiwan Strait. Consequently, in the report, Pentagon employs the hedged *likely* and *more or less likely* to imply their uncertainty on the current situation and the future tendency to share less responsibility.

### 2.3.2 Vagueness at Syntactical Level

Syntactic hedging is grammatical or structural vagueness, because this type of hedging actually rests on the syntactical relations within a sentence, or between sentences. Sometimes a sentence contains a number of specifications, and what they specify is multiple, making the sentence open to different interpretations. Some frequently adopted structures in diplomatic discourse to show vagueness are summarized below.

#### A. Plural Forms or Omissions of Definite Articles

If diplomats do not want to specify a thing or a person, they can use plural forms or omit the definite article to generalize it. For example, world leaders, governments and streets are used when there is no need or the speaker does not want to specify them.

The definite article is often purposefully omitted for indeterminate interpretations. For example,

[6] After the crushing defeat that Israel inflicted on joint Arab forces during the six day war in 1967, the UN Security Council agreed on the famous Resolution 242. The provision of the resolution was the one immediately following the preamble of the text, reading: "Establishment for just and lasting peace in the Middle East should include ... the following principles: withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from *territories* occupied in recent *conflict*;

termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for territorial integrity.” ([www.diplomacy-e-books.com/language-and-diplomacy](http://www.diplomacy-e-books.com/language-and-diplomacy)) This resolution uses a somewhat strange English construction “territories occupied in recent conflict”, from which the definite article “the” has been omitted. That is why it is possible to raise the question as to whether Israel was actually asked to withdraw from all the territories occupied in the recent conflict, or to withdraw from some, but not all, territories.

#### B. Subject with Unclear Referents

Most of the time in foreign affairs, the subject is abstract, which makes the situation complicated, such as, “some people”, “the parties concerned”, “other countries”, “relevant parties”, etc. Sometimes, the subject refers to no one in particular, such as: “It is said that...” Sometimes, the speaker uses indirect speech to lessen the responsibility of his own, such as: “He said that...”, “They told us that...”, “...according to...” etc.

[7] When asked by a journalist whether she thought China and Russia would vote “aye” to refer Iran to the Security Council. American Secretary Rice said “I think it’s very clear that everybody believes that a very important threshold has been crossed here, but I don’t want to speak for *other countries*.”

In the American interest, Rice would certainly hope that both China and Russia could stand at the same side with the U.S. However, any of her intentional speech might cause the change of international consensus. She was also restricted to speak on behalf of China and Russia. She used “*other countries*” instead of directly mentioning China and Russia to lessen the responsibility of her own, hoping her intention would be accomplished as well.

[8] “Obviously Chen Shui-bian’s trick on this issue reveals his ulterior political motive. *The relevant parties* should fully understand the seriousness of the issue and handle it properly”.

As we all know, Taiwan issue is a very important and sensitive one in the international diplomatic field. It is reported that Chen Shui-bian decided to send Speaker of Legislative Yuan on his behalf to attend the APEC Summit Meeting. Here Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Kong Quan used “the relevant parties” referring to many groups of countries: the group of countries which support Taiwan’s attendance of the APEC Summit Meeting; the group of countries which have the right to decide whether Taiwan is permitted to attend the

meeting; maybe even Taiwan authority itself. By using “the relevant parties”, Kong Quan expressed China’s great concern on this issue without damaging the international diplomatic relations.

[9] “...there is no doubt that there are *a couple of* states in the Middle East that are outside of the direction that the Middle East is generally going....”

This remark is made by the U.S. spokesperson concerning Middle East situations, mainly about Iran and Iraq. Here, the spokesperson used “a couple of states” without mentioning Iran and Iraq specifically, leaving countries involved to consider the implication themselves. As we know that “the direction that the Middle East is generally going” is perhaps that the Iran government stops any oppositional actions against American government, the direction under American control.

[10] “We also hope that *the few countries* will no longer instigate conflicts or affect the cross-Straits cooperation, nor interfere in China’s internal affairs.”

This remark is made by Chinese spokesperson concerning Taiwan issue as well. “The few countries” are countries led by the U.S. that often interfere in China’s internal affairs, especially Taiwan issue. The spokesperson used “the” referring to specified countries, “few” means not many, only a small quantity, implicating that the inimical countries are minority, not representations of all the countries in the world. The spokesperson used “the few countries” without mentioning specific countries but gave a quite strong warning to the countries involved.

### C. Use of Negative Sentence

There are a number of alternative ways in which negative sentences can be said to be true (Kempson: 119). In other words, there is no single condition which guarantees the truth of a negative sentence, but a number of conditions the satisfaction of any of which will guarantee its truth. For example,

[11] America said it “does not support the independence of Taiwan” on several occasions. The negative structure “does not support the independence of Taiwan” is true if, it supports another situation of Taiwan, or if it opposes the independence, or if it does not oppose the independence. So, “not support” is not surely to mean “oppose”.

[12] It is the same with the issue of Iraq crisis, when the Japanese spokesman said his

party “will not support the use of force without such a resolution” ([www.asahi.com/english.html](http://www.asahi.com/english.html):February17, 2003), he could not mean he opposed it. When Japan wanted to find an excuse to use force in Iraq, Ambassador Koichi Haraguchi said Iraq “is not fully and proactively cooperating with the resumed inspections” (NYT: February, 20). The negative expression “not fully” here does not mean “totally not” or “completely”, so, in this way, the information the audience get is more than the words express.

Moreover, using negative forms can make the proposition indirect so as to save face.

[13] When America passed TRA (Taiwan Relations Act), China’s reaction was “not happy with it”, which was in fact to say the Chinese government was angry about it or opposed it. Using “not happy with” lessens emotion. Therefore, diplomats choose “not right” instead of “wrong”, “may not like” instead of “hate”, “would serve no good purpose” instead of “serve bad purpose”, etc.

#### D. Repetition in Sentences

Vagueness is also realized by the same or similar kind of words in sentences. This structure usually facilitates the emphatic tone of the speaker because of the vagueness, i.e., it leaves much room for the hearer to decode. For example:

[14] “...*We urge the US Congress and relevant authorities focus more on the affairs of their own country and contribute more to mutual understanding and cooperation between China and the United States instead of doing the opposite...*”

The background information of this sentence is that the United States Congressional-Executive Commission on China released an annual report, which turned a blind eye to China’s achievements in human rights protection and legislation, distorting facts and continuing to attack China on the issues of human rights, religion, Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong and women’s rights. In this sentence, we notice that “more” is repeated to form kind of vagueness. By using this kind of repetitive vagueness, the spokesman intended to express that we China has gained many achievements during these years. Great changes have been witnessed over the past 56 years since the founding of People’s Republic of China, especially since the adoption of reform and opening-up policy. China has maintained sustained, rapid and healthy economic development and people of all ethnic groups enjoy their full legal rights and basic freedoms. Hong Kong continues to enjoy stability and prosperity with the full

implementation of the policy of “one country, two systems”, “high degree of autonomy”, “Hong Kong People administering Hong Kong”. China is now retaining rapid developments in all the above fields, which is obvious to all, but the U.S. side ignored and turned a blind eye to these achievements. By using “more” repetitively, the spokesman expressed the strong dissatisfaction and protest against the American issued document.

#### E. Subordinate Clause to Cancel Presupposition

He Ziran(1999:72) holds that if we add some words or clauses to the original sentence, the presupposition of it can be cancelled. This happens in diplomatic language to make audience hardly hold the real thread. One example can illustrate this point very well.

[15] When interviewed by American journalist as “*do you agree or disagree, in principle, with the attacks of 11 September?*” President Saddam Hussein did not say “yes” or “no”. He made the remarks like this: “*...that there must be a law governing the conduct of humanity, a law which does not allow an aggressor to commit aggression while others remain silent, a killer to perpetrate murder while other applaud his deed, or an invader to occupy other countries while others make no move.*”(www.asahi.com/politics:February 24, 2003)

That is to say the law does not allow the aggression while others remain silent or takes no move. Then, how about the condition “while others are not silent or take some moves”? It is the “while” clause here that makes the original presupposition cancelled and has a new pragmatic presupposition: America had the attack of “11 September” because it was not silent or it had taken some moves firstly, and it was America’s own deeds that brought the catastrophe. By answering the question vaguely, President Hussein satirized America bitterly.

#### 2.3.3 Vagueness at Contextual Level

Contextual vagueness describes the characteristics of vagueness in diplomatic language at discourse level. The contextual vagueness lies in the vague tone of the whole discourse, i.e. in a larger body of a text comprising many sentences. The integrative vagueness is realized in several aspects.

Firstly, the vagueness is caused by the repetition of the same or similar vague words, phrases or structures. The repetition not only makes the discourse cohesive but gives an impression of vagueness. For example,

[16] “...*Your reforms have lifted millions from poverty, offering better housing and better schools. The Chinese people enjoy today a better standard of living than at any time in China’s history. China is playing a stronger role in the community of nations...*” (Remarks by President Clinton at arrival ceremony, October 29, 1997)

In this utterance, we notice there are repetitive uses of comparative degree, like better and stronger. By using comparative degree, the speaker tends to affirm the achievements on the one hand, and show dissatisfaction on the other hand. The repetition of the comparative degree makes the whole utterance bear the feeling that although there are achievements, they are not good enough.

Secondly, the vagueness is caused by implications of the discourse, which is to find the relationship between the text as object, and the reader’s processing of that object. Grice (1967) points out that conversational implicatures can have indeterminacy. When A says something to B, B will have to figure out what A means. If what A says has implicature, then what B processes has indeterminacy. That’s the aim of the diplomatic way of speaking. The speaker says something, but what is interpreted is indeterminate.

## **Chapter 3 Pragmatic Vagueness and Related Theories in Diplomatic Language**

To better understand the pragmatic theories adopted in diplomatic language, first we need to take a look at the definition and classification of pragmatic vagueness.

### **3.1 Definition and Classification of Pragmatic Vagueness**

#### **3.1.1 Definition of Pragmatic Vagueness**

As to the notion of pragmatic vagueness, different scholars have different interpretations. Prof. Yu Dongming, another Chinese linguist, gives a definition of pragmatic vagueness. He holds that pragmatic vagueness refers to the phenomenon that the speaker makes use of indefinite, vague or indirect utterances, to express several illocutionary acts or forces simultaneously to the hearer in special context. For example,

“Would you like to come in and sit down?” can perform the function of “invitation”, “request” or “order”, or these three kinds of illocutionary acts at the same time. The boundary between them is vague.

Prof. He Ziran (2000) gives a descriptive definition about pragmatic vagueness: “Vagueness in pragmatics includes the notions of fuzziness, indeterminacy, probability, ambiguity and generality manifested in practical use of language.” All these conceptually vague linguistic phenomena are too elusive or too ill-defined to be susceptible of solution to “two-valued” logic. Linguistic phenomena between truth and falsity are universal. This is what is termed here pragmatic vagueness. In his book “Notes on Pragmatics” (He Ziran, 2003), he gives further explanation about pragmatic vagueness. He treats ambiguity as a kind of pragmatic vagueness, which we think is implausible.

Though ambiguity and vagueness are properties of natural language, they are different. Ambiguity is characterized by two or more distinct denotations, whereas vagueness is usually associated with one. A word or a sentence is ambiguous if it can be understood or interpreted in more than one way. For example, the sentence “She cannot bear children.” may be

understood to mean: “She is unable to give birth to children.” or “She cannot tolerate children.” The ambiguity stems from the fact that the word “bear” has two different meanings.

Vagueness has been considered to be an inherent property of language, and has been characterized as an uncertainty in deciding the applicability of a term to an object or referent. The senses of an ambiguous word or sentence are multiple but distinct, but vagueness does not enjoy such distinctness in its meaning. According to Prof. He, the study of pragmatic vagueness should concern the indeterminacy of an utterance in the light of language use and understanding. So we think that since “pragmatic ambivalence (pragmatic vagueness) stems from an utterance corresponding to more than one illocutionary force.” (Yu Dongming, 1997), it can be characterized as an uncertainty in choosing one meaning or force over another in a given context. Ambiguity involves a definite number of distinct possible meanings. Chomsky argues that ambiguity is rarely a factor in real communication, because readers read off a meaning without even realizing that there could have been another one. But vagueness (semantic vagueness or pragmatics vagueness) is seen where distinct meanings cannot be identified. Therefore, it invites the reader to project an interpretation. Thus both semantic vagueness and pragmatic vagueness share a common characteristic of “openness”, which ambiguity does not enjoy. Therefore, ambiguity and vagueness are separate matters. The discussion of pragmatic vagueness in this thesis should exclude ambiguity.

So how can pragmatic vagueness be employed in diplomatic language? Which pragmatic theories can explain the pragmatic vagueness in this genre? Before dealing with this issue, we’ve got to have a look at the classification of pragmatic vagueness.

### **3.1.2 Classification of Vagueness in Pragmatics**

Basically speaking, there are two ways of classification. Here we only want to mention the classification of pragmatic vagueness made by Professor He Ziran. He thinks that in the real use of language, the topic of a speech is non-discrete, which means the phenomenon that it is hard to judge a true topic from the false one can be found everywhere in the study of language. In 1990, according to different approaches to analyzing a topic, he divided pragmatic vagueness into four types:



### (1) Fuzzy continuum

Continuum here refers to an extension of a vague bound between the presentation of true and false topic. Therefore, in pragmatics, we could only give a general description to a topic in the field of continuum. This is typically characterized by the fuzziness of words denoting colors.

The famous philosopher Russell once (1940) stipulated the procedure of identifying colors. According to his argument, Color S, which is indistinguishable from Color x, y, or z, may be observed to be identical with one of them. For example, given the following shades of color: zSyz, xySz, S may be observed identical with y, or if xyz always implies xSz, when we can say that  $S=y$ , and vice versa.

To quote Russell, this is a device for passing from indistinguishability to identity. We must say that Russell had to make that decision because of the difficulty in precisely identifying the specific shades of color. That Russell did imply the existence of pragmatic vagueness.

### (2) Taxonomic category

Vagueness with the taxonomic category mainly refers to elusive alternatives of hyponymy. Objects possess the relationship which obtains between specific and general lexical items. Such that the former is "included" in the latter (i.e. is a hyponym of the latter). The set of terms which share the same superordinate term (sometimes called a "hyponym") are co-hyponyms. Co-hyponyms may differ either in degree or in physique; however, they are classified under the same taxonomic category so long as they share the same superordinate term.

Thus, pragmatically, under a superordinate term there must exist a cluster of indefinite yet related hyponyms, which may lead to speech vagueness. Now let's examine the following:

[1] I have a dog.

Different hearers may have different association pertaining to this proposition. "Dog" is a superordinate term, which may be associated with a lot of co-hyponyms such as "bulldog", "spitz", "terrier" or "shepherd".

Vagueness with the taxonomic category differs from that with the fuzzy continuum in that the latter is a vague notion between truth and falsity while the former is observed as vague associations derived from hyponymy.

### (3) Nomenclative evaluation

Vagueness with the nomenclative evaluation implies the uncertainty of the speaker in his/her subjective evaluation of a proposition. Such vagueness can be further divided into six types:

#### 1) Vagueness of nominal concepts

[2] The young singer is a real *talent*.

[3] She's a *beauty*.

[4] Mr. Cui was a *hero*.

The propositions given above reflect the speaker's subjective evaluation. What is the criterion of a "talent"? To what extent is a girl considered a "beauty"? And how could one be worthy of the title of a "hero"? The answers to these questions are subject to various interpretations.

#### 2) Vagueness of abstract concepts

Pragmatically, concepts such as human right, freedom, democracy, and so on are often vague. The understanding of these concepts differs greatly in the speaker's political stand and viewpoint. Even the language used in daily life such as "lie" and "truth" also constitutes vague propositions. Let's take "lie" for example and see whether each case below can be considered as "telling a lie":

[5] Bill knows that the candy store is the place he will pass by on his way to the casino, while he is wrong in that the store has been moved. Bill's mother doesn't allow him to gamble, so when he left for the casino this time, his mother asked him,

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going by the candy store." He answered.

Was he lying?

It is easy to notice that Bill's passing by the store is true, but irrelevant to the question his mother has asked.

[6] Joe was invited by his boss to join a family party but they both thought the party was boring. Later, he said to the wife of the boss:

“Thanks, it was a terrific party.”

Surely, he didn't enjoy himself in the party and he didn't intend to let others believe him. But he thought he should say some flattering words to Mrs. Boss. Then was he lying about that? According to Professor He, Coleman & Kay (1981) had a survey among 67 persons, and due to the vagueness of the concept “lie”, people who had been surveyed just could not reach an agreement.

### 3) Vagueness of relative concepts

Relative concepts refer to those concepts of modifiers such as “big”, “small”, denoting relativity. Pragmatically, such modifiers usually convey vague ideas. For example, what is the notion of weakness in “a weak student” and “a weak boy”? And what is the notion of smallness in “a small mouse” and a “small elephant”? How much work is “a mountain of work”? And how much blood are “seas of blood”? Only through comparison and association could the intended meaning be roughly deduced.

### 4) Vagueness of approximate concepts

By approximate concepts, we mean those expressions of direction, location, shape, such as “front”, “back”, “left”, “right”, “east”, “west”, “triangle”, “hexagon”, “straight line”, “oblique line”, and so on. Let's take Austin's example to illustrate the point:

[7] France is *hexagonal*.

We can only understand that France, in some way, geographically, looks like a hexagon, but by no means a geometric figure with six 60-degree angles.

### 5) Vagueness of metalanguage

Linguistics, like other sciences, uses the term “metalanguage” in the sense of a high-level language for describing an object or field of study or reference. The vagueness caused by metalanguage for describing an object may result in pragmatic uncertainty. The following example may illustrate the idea.

[8] He is more a *politician* than a *statesman*.

Here both *politician* and *statesman* may refer to the same person; however, the metalanguage reflects the political stand and viewpoint of the speaker, or his social stratum

and education level. This demonstrates how vague is the intention and extension of metalanguage used for evaluating the same person.

#### 6) Vagueness of quoting devices

Quoting devices are words or expressions used in a reporting clause to report either directly or indirectly what the original speaker says. Recently, in pragmatic study, some research work has been focused on so-called *metapragmatic choice* dealing with the option of quoting verbs in reporting clauses (Verschueren, 1985). For example, instead of using the neutral device “X said”, the speaker chooses “X optimistically put forward”, or “X declared solemnly”, “X picked fault and criticized”, “X retorted bluntly”, “X exposed”, “X flatly denied”, etc. The use of these options depends on the speaker’s attitude towards the content of reporting clauses. Different speakers may use different devices for the same reporting content, and this is precisely where vagueness lies.

#### (4) Hedging in discourse

Pragmatic vagueness caused by hedges is categorized under this subtitle. This has been discussed in Chapter 2. Hedges can be classified into two types: 1) hedges used to revise the degree of truth value or to alter the related scope of an utterance, such as *sort of, kind of, somewhat, really, almost, quite, a little bit*, etc.; and 2) hedges used by the speaker to judge subjectively what is said or to access indirectly what is said according to some objective evidence, such as *I think (wonder, believe, assume, suppose), I’m afraid, as far as I can tell, according to one’s estimates*, etc. For example,

[9] He is a *gourmet*. (He is sort of gourmet.)

[10] He is an *idiot*. (He is an idiot, I think.)

As He Ziran(2000) concludes: The existence of pragmatic vagueness reveals a pragmatic feature, that is, an objective topic has a central meaning while surrounding the central meaning, there may be various edge meanings and understandings which in pragmatics are called vagueness.

### 3.2 Pragmatic Vagueness and Cooperative Principle

In a series of lectures at Harvard University in 1967, the English philosopher of language H.P Grice (1975) outlined an approach to what he termed Conversational Implicature – how

hearers manage to work out the complete message when speakers mean more than what they say. An example of what Grice means by Conversational Implicature is the utterance: "Have you got any cash on you?" where the speaker really wants the hearer to understand the meaning: "Can you lend me some money? I don't have much on me." The Conversational Implicature is a message that is not found in the plain sense of the sentence. Rather, the speaker implies it. The hearer is to work out this message in the utterance with the help of the rules governing successful conversational interactions.

The conversation means that the both sides and multi-sides speak to each other in turn. The word "speak", either in Chinese or in English, means the action to "express meaning with language". The meaning expressed by the language can generally be divided into two kinds: one indicates the literal meaning of a word or a sentence uttered by the speaker; the other, the intention expressed indirectly by the addresser. In this way, it can be seen that the meaning is either the direct meaning or the indirect meaning. There is normally a distance between what we have said and what we intend to mean. The intention is regarded as the "Conversational Implicature", which is an important manifestation of indirectness.

If we pay enough attention, the "Conversational Implicature" can be found everywhere in people's daily life. The meaning or intention between the line, behind the line and beyond the line is not so explicable in terms of the general semantic theory. However, the pragmatics can do us a great favor. In the process of understanding or interpretation, the common knowledge, and the inference ability of both the addressor and the addressee are playing significant roles. However, one important premise is that both the addressor and the addressee or those who participate in the talk exchange should have the willingness to carry the conversation on, that is to say, the cooperative attitude of them in the conversation is a necessity.

In this case, what every participant speaks should be related to the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which they are engaged, but literally it seems that it is not always true. Only under this major premise can the addressee infer the relation between words or utterances that are seemingly irrelevant utterances of the addressor. Therefore, it can be seen that Cooperative Principle is one of the important principles in conversation, which is defined by Grice as:

Make your 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. The following are the maxims of CP:

(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 Relation

Make your contribution relevant.

(4) The Maxim of Manner

Be perspicuous.

(a) Avoid obscurity.

(b) Avoid ambiguity.

(c) Be brief.

(d) Be orderly. (Grice, 1975: 45-46)

In short, these maxims specify what participants have to do in order to converse in a maximally efficient, rational, cooperative way: they should speak sincerely, relevantly and clearly, while providing sufficient information.

The relevance of the four maxims to our discussion is that they may license vagueness. One way in which the maxims are relevant to vague language is that vague expressions may be used to enable speakers to follow the maxims. For example,

[11] If I'm asked what time I expect to be home from work, and if I genuinely do not know, because I cannot anticipate workload or traffic, then my most truthful reply, that for which I have evidence, could be "about six O'clock". From this, the hearer would infer that I am unable to say exactly.

The other in which the CP is of interest for the study of vague language is that they are often used when one of the maxims is flouted. Grice explained that in conversation speakers very often break rather than follow one or more maxims. A special case of not following the CP is flouting one of the maxims. In this case, one violates a maxim, but does so openly and salvages the commitment to the CP by following another maxim. For example,

[12] If two students meet outside of class and one asks “What time is it?” And the other answers “The bell hasn’t rung yet.”

On the surface it may seem as if he/she is not answering in the given context (outside of a classroom), the second student knows that the first one knows that the ringing of the bell is to signal the beginning or the end of class, and that this information is enough for him/her to figure out roughly what time it is. This phenomenon derived from flouting is called a conversational implicature.

Assuming the speaker is cooperative in the conversation, whenever there is a violation of a maxim, the addressee will use the following to understand the implicature, that is, to infer the meaning: (a) conventional meaning of the words, or other particular referents involved; (b) the cooperative principle and its maxims; (c) the context of the utterance; (d) background knowledge; and (e) assumed or shared knowledge. For instance, the utterance “He is made of iron” is literally false—no man is made of iron. But the hearer still assumes that the speaker is cooperative and knows that he is trying to say something distinct from the literal meaning. He can then work out that “He has some properties similar to those of iron” and get the conclusion that “he is hard, determined, or cruel”.

### **3.2.1 Violation of the Maxim of Quantity**

Two typical examples are given here for violation of the maxim. The maxim of quantity requires we make our contribution as informative as is required for the current purpose of the exchange and do not make our contribution more informative than is required. Let’s see how the maxim of quantity is flouted in the following examples.

[13] Once a Japanese journalist asked Chinese foreign minister Chen Yi: “*when will China explode the third atom bomb?*” It is really a difficult question to tackle, because the answer should be neither a truth nor a lie. Chen Yi answered in this way: “*China has*

*exploded the atom bomb. You know it as I know it. The third atom bomb will possibly explode. When will it explode? Please wait to see the announcement.*" (See Wen Hao, 2000: 8)

The answer is literally a tautology. The question is obviously in need of a definite answer, which is to be exactly informative. However, so far as Chinese interests are concerned, an explicit answer would give rise to a series of troubles, hence, face threatening. However, Chen Y avoided the explicit answer to avoid either bringing about face threatening to "self" or breaching the maxim of quality. The former part of the answer, *China has exploded the atom bomb. You know it as I know it* is redundant information that has been already known to all while the later part "when will it explode? Please wait to see the announcement" is by no means as informative as required so far as the question is concerned.

[14] Once in a dancing ball, dancing with an American reporter, Chinese diplomat Gu Weijun was asked "*which lady do you appreciate, Chinese lady or American lady?*" Apparently the optional question is really a dilemma. If the answer is "Chinese lady", it will bring the positive face threatening to "other", i.e. the American reporter; if the answer is "American lady", it will bring the positive face threatening to "self"; if the answer is "both", it will also bring face threatening either to "self" or "other" regardless of positive or negative face threatening. However, the brilliant ambassador found a way out in the twinkling of an eye. He answered a wonderful answer: "*I appreciate those ladies who appreciate me.*" In this way, though the diplomat flouted the maxim of quantity, being not just informative, he did no harm to the "face" of the American lady whereas simultaneously maintained the face of "self" in a dignified way. (See Wen Hao, 2000: 13)

### 3.2.2 Violation of the Maxim of Quality

Two examples are given for the strategy. The language in the second example is also regarded as the diplomatic language strategy, because everyone can be regarded as sort of representation of his/her own country. The maxim of quality requires we do not say what we believe to be false and we do not say that for which we lack adequate evidence. The following shows how the maxim is breached.

[15] During his first presidential visit to Canada, many anti-America protesters interrupted U.S president Regan's speech several times, which made Canadian Prime Minister



Pierre worried and embarrassed. Regan smiled to Canadian Prime Minister and said: "Such things often happen in America. I guess these people must have hurried a long way from America to Canada specially to make me feel at home." The Canadian Prime Minister's face, with eyebrows locked tightly all the time, was all smiles now. (See Zhu Xiao Yang & Ltl Jtlmei, 2003: 105)

Regan intentionally said what was not the truth, i.e., he willfully breaches the maxim of quality, and the Canadian Prime Minister knew this too. The Conversational Implicature here from arose, which was possibly "Don't worry, I don't care." Thus, both the faces of "self" and "other" are reserved in a humorous way.

[16] In an Arabic country, a Chinese interpreter was alone on her way downstairs to meet her friends in the lobby waiting for her. Unexpectedly, at the dim corner of the stairway, she found herself in front of a huge black man who grinned at her, stretching out his hands with warm utterance: "Ah, friend, friend..." The interpreter was not sure whether the behavior of the black man was really friendly or not, so she also smiled and said clearly: "Oh, sorry, I'm a Muslim." The black man was taken aback and she left quickly. According to the Muslim religious doctrines, a lady Muslim is not supposed to shake hands with a man, let alone with a strange man. As a matter of fact, she was not religious at all, yet in this way she turned the stranger down without harming the face of both.

The maxim of quality requires us not to say what we believe to be false and not to say that for which we lack adequate evidence. In the above examples, through intentional violation of the maxim of quality, the face of both the speaker and the hearer, or the face of both "self" and "other" are preserved, no matter whether it is the negative face threatening or positive face threatening, and no matter whether it is face threatening to "self" or "other" or "both".

### **3.2.3 Violation of the Maxim of Relevance**

The maxim of relevance requires we make our contributions relevant, yet the following examples illustrate the violation of the maxim.

[17] To keep silent or just speak "I can't answer" is obsolete so far as the present diplomacy is concerned and violation of the maxim of relevance can find a way out in

diplomacy. Once in a press conference held by a journalist raised a question concerning the military newly inaugurating president, a budget. The new president at that time did not know the matter in detail. No matter whether he confessed that he did not know exactly or just kept silence would be a great embarrassment and the question would turn out to be a severe face threatening to him. In a flash, the new president thought up a good idea. He asked back: "could you keep secret?" The journalist answered affirmatively. To everyone's surprise, the president said finally: "So could I. I can keep secret too." Obviously the president violated the maxim of relevance, because his response was irrelevant to the question demanding an exact answer. He ingeniously steered the question away by flouting the maxim of relevance. However, with his wits, the president protected "self" face with least cost to "other".

[18] In 1957 at Moscow, Mao Zedong introduced Zhou Enlai to the leader of the Soviet Union: "Zhou Enlai is a talent. In dealing with relations between multi-sides, he is much better than me. He is able to solve problems flexibly." Zhou Enlai's talent in flexibility in solving problem left precious treasures for Chinese diplomacy. His salient diplomatic language art deserves study and learning for his successors.

At one press conference, a westerner asked a malicious question to Zhou Enlai: "*Excuse me, how much money does China People's Bank have?*" Zhou Enlai answered: "Well, the money in China People's Bank is eighteen yuan eight jiao eight fen." All the news reporters in the conference are astonished at the answer. A short moment later, Zhou Enlai explained calmly: "China People's Bank issued RMB with ten face values, which are respectively ten yuan, five yuan, two yuan, one yuan, five jiao, two jiao, one jiao, five fen, two fen, one fen, totally eighteen yuan eight jiao eight fen. China People's Bank is the financial infrastructure hosted by Chinese people, which is of strong backbone and reliable credibility. The money issued by China People's Bank is the one with the highest credibility, enjoying international reputation..." The following was the deafening applause rocking the whole hall of conference. (See Wen Hao, 2000: 6)

On the surface the answer was concerning money, and it was seemingly relevant. However, this money is not that money that the journalist wanted to know, that the question was in need of. Therefore this answer could be regarded as strategy of violation of maxim of relevance. Zhou Enlai tactfully changed the approaching face threatening to "self" to be a

“self” face “rising” in the end without cost or with least cost of “other”. He’s really an incomparable diplomat.

The above examples are typical violations of maxim of relevance. In this way, the face threatening to either side or both sides is reduced whereas the face of either side or both sides is preserved miraculously.

### **3.2.4 Violation of the Maxim of Manner**

The maxim of manner requires us to avoid obscurity of expression, to avoid ambiguity, to be brief or to avoid unnecessary prolixity and to be orderly. As much has been discussed, pragmatic vagueness is a common linguistic phenomenon in diplomatic speech. Hence, violation of this maxim frequents the diplomatic language. Under considerable conditions, diplomatic speech is not always accurate and direct in the literal sense; on the contrary, it would sometimes be vague owing to the speaker’s position and diplomatic strategies. Reasons for this are as follows:

1) The cognition and evaluation of certain international affairs could not be completely spoken out accurately; sometimes, vague language in a diplomatic case is more expressive and acceptable.

2) In certain circumstances, especially in a diplomatic one, it is not convenient to present one’s opinion directly in accurate words. To avoid some negative effects, the spokesman has to resort to some seemingly vague expressions. Therefore, these seemingly vague expressions are in fact well-chosen and well-organized expressions flexible enough to assure the “face-saving” as well as the harmonious relationship between countries.

No matter what expressions are used or what strategy is taken, the diplomatic language is to manifest the foreign policy of the country and maintain or ensure the interests of the country that the diplomat is on behalf of. The diplomacy requires special talent in dealing with various conditions. As a diplomat, he/she should see not only what is open and frank, he/she should also see what is implied. Moreover, he should be endowed with the capability to foresee the potential factors. Therefore, a diplomat will often take the strategy of ambiguity so as to leave room for flexibility or for keeping away from the language trap to solve the difficulties.

The following is a typical example showing the purposive ambiguity, which manifest the violation of the maxim of manner.

[19] In April, 2001, in the negotiation regarding Sino-America aircraft collision, China required that America should be fully responsible for the whole incident, be accountable for what happened and apologize to Chinese people. Under the pressure of the international public opinion, on April 11, American ambassador Joseph Prueher hands in the “very sorry letter” to the Chinese Foreign Affair Minister, Tang Jiaxuan, which writes: “Both President Bush and Secretary of State Powell have expressed their sincere regret over your missing pilot and aircraft. Please convey to the Chinese people and to the family of pilot Wang Wei that we are sorry for their loss.” In the letter, “sorry” is apparently an ambiguous word. In accordance with Webster’s New World Dictionary (1976), the word “sorry” has two levels of meanings: 1. full of sorrow or sympathy; 2. also used as an expression of apology or mild regret. Normally, “sorry” expresses mild regret for the trivial things happening in daily life and it lacks solemnness and seriousness in formal letter of regret. Though for the “very sorry letter”, “very” is added in front of it, it will not change the ambiguous quality of the word “sorry”. In this way, America lessens the face threatening to “self” disregarding the cost to “other”. (See Guo liqiu&Wang Hongli, 2002: 83).

From the above example it can be seen that: the maxim of manner under the Cooperative Principle is violated; the Politeness Principle is not observed either. Hence, the Politeness Principle can only solve part of the problems unsolved by the Cooperative Principle.

### 3.2.5 Simultaneous Violations of the Maxims under Cooperative Principle

As we know, the possibility of violating more than one maxim is very common. The following examples are some of the best illustrations.

[20] On March 21, 1991, in the routine press conference in Beijing international club, the 9<sup>th</sup> spokesperson of the Foreign Affairs Ministry of the People’s Republic of China, Mr. Wu Jianmin, showed his first appearance. From then on, he held more than 170 domestic or international press conferences, manifesting his skillfulness in diplomatic language art, and he has become one of the influential spokespersons both domestically and internationally.

At one press conference, a journalist asked: "I heard that at the peaceful liberation anniversary of 40 years, Tibetan's firework for the celebration was as high as 100 thousand RMB. I'd like to ask Mr. Wu, do you think it is appropriate to spend 100 thousand RMB on celebration firework in an underdeveloped region as Tibet?"

Wu Jianmin answered: "May 23rd is a day of significance in Tibetan history. For 40 years, Tibetan has achieved considerable progress and the people's life standard has been greatly improved, which is unmatched by any time in Tibetan history. It is natural for the people to celebrate the important day in their history. In 1976 when American people celebrated their 200 anniversary of independent day, I happened to be in America, witnessing the American people's celebration scenario. You could ask the American government how much they have spent. In 1989, France celebrated the 200 anniversary of Great Revolution. I watched TV to see the live broadcasting in Europe. You might also go to ask the French government how much they have spent. If we regard the question according to your logic, do you think both the American and the French government should have saved the money to give those homeless vagrants wandering in the street in the coldness?" (See Yang Jun, 1995: 10-2)

Though superficially, it is a simple question of "Yes" or "No", it can be inferred that the journalist is to satirize China for "false pride" or it is apparent that the question is face-threatening to the addressee Mr. Wu Jianmin, regardless of positive or negative face or both. However, Wu Jianmin first elaborates the significance of 40 years of Tibetan liberation, introducing the point of "it is natural for people to celebrate the significant day in their history", which is of a common or general rule. On the one hand, he expresses his stance reasonably; on the other hand, he refutes the question in an indirect and intellectual way, maintaining "self-positive face whereas returning by means of a rhetoric question the face threatening back to the addresser who transmits the threatening first. The answer seems so long-winded and oblique that it violates the maxim of manner, which requires the contribution to be brief. In addition, his mentioning of some other parties, his winding-up question, seem irrelevant to the question; hence the maxim of relevance is violated. At the same time, the information provided seems excessive regarding the retrospection of Tibetan history as well as the mentioning of activities of other countries; hence the maxim of quantity is not observed. However, if we infer his contribution carefully, we can see how skillful he is in using

language force in defense of the interests of China. Step by step, the statement by Wu Jianmin holds the water. Though the maxim of quantity, the maximum of relation and the maxim of manner are breached simultaneously, the face threatening to “self” is reduced to its minimum whereas the face of “self” is maintained to its maximum.

[21] The example is concerning Japan’s dream of becoming the permanent member of the UN Security Council. From 1993 to the 59th UN general assembly, the Japanese dream of achieving the permanent member of the UN Security Council has been incubating for more than ten years. Some experts say that the issue of Japanese becoming the permanent member of the UN Security Council will undoubtedly form a menace to China-Japan relationship. If handled inappropriately, it will affect seriously the relation between two countries; hence the state interests of China will also be jeopardized. Japan knows clearly that if it wants to become the permanent member of the UN Security Council, it is irrational to make a detour because a veto from China will smash its dream in no time. However, because of the present state of China-Japan relation, Japan also feels that it is difficult to acquire the support from China. So Japan has to implement the strategic diversion, focusing on the peripheral efforts outside China. It has spread words that four of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council have expressed affirmation or approving, and most members support Japan as well, which implies that if China does not support or approve, China is isolated or shut off from the international community.

Theoretically, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China can make all the efforts made by Japan in vain by a sheer veto, yet the result will most possibly damage the China-Japan relation, and the basis of trust between peoples of two nations will vanish all of a sudden. Japan, initiated the invasion war, brought about destruction to the world peace. Moreover, it does not show sincerity to solve the historical problems. For the above reasons, Japan’s becoming the permanent member of the UN Security Council is by all means unacceptable to the Chinese people. Even if China supports Japan, Japan may think that it is under the international pressure that China has to do so. Therefore to explicitly express affirmation or negation, i.e. to answer the question definitely, will harm the state interests of China. The issue turns out to be an examination of the diplomatic faculty to China.

On Sep.9, 2004, at the routine press conference, Kong Quan, the spokesperson from the Foreign Affairs Ministry expressed for the first time the China response to the issue: 1) With the variation of the situation, the UN Security Council is to take necessary steps for reform; 2) The developing countries are to have priority so far as the expansion of the representation is concerned, because in the present world, the developing countries are becoming more and more influential, which is not yet fully reflected in the UN Security Council; 3) The reform of UN Security Council is an important issue and broad consensus from various sides are necessary. We understand the willingness of Japan to bring more efforts into play in the international affairs. (《文摘周报》2004年10月4日4版“日本‘常任梦’，考验中国外交智慧”)

The above speech expresses neither approval nor objection. Instead, it restates our stance on principles of UN reform, which is not as informative, relevant, brief and explicit as required by the question. And these principles are commonly accepted by the international community. Were these principles accepted by the UN Security Council, Japan would therefore be rejected as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

Indisputably the issue is a difficult problem to tackle. However, in defense of the state's interests, Chinese spokesperson avoids the explicit answer. The maxim of manner is violated in this sense. For 1), 2) or 3), each of them looks irrelevant to the Japan's issue except the last one which relates little to the issue, hence, the maxim of relevance is breached. For 1), 2) and 3), either separately or as a whole, it seems that they relate more to the reform of UN than to the Japan's issue, therefore the answer is not as informative as required and the maxim of quantity is not observed. However, the attitude of China towards this issue can be derived through such an oblique but masterly contribution. A diplomatist is to be endowed with sensitivity to the possible threatening not only in the question raised to him/her, but also in the possible reply or response of him/herself. He/she is supposed to foresee all the possible threatening so as to ingeniously avoid them timely. Language strategy weights a lot in this significance. The issue is handled in such a way that the face threatening of either side is reduced to its minimum, and the interests of state are maintained solemnly.

### 3.3 Pragmatic Vagueness and Politeness Principle

#### 3.3.1 Lakoff's Politeness Model

Politeness is a social cultural phenomenon, which can roughly be defined as showing or appearing to show consideration of others. "The goal of politeness can then be described as reflecting or realizing the social or interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange." (Lakoff, 1990:34)

Lakoff, in her paper "The Logic of Politeness" (Lakoff, 1973) first employs Grice's Cooperative Principle to account for politeness. She summarizes the Gricean Maxims into a single conversational maxim: Be clear. Later concerning the conflict between clarity and politeness, she states that politeness usually substitutes for clarity. It is considered more important in a conversation to avoid offense than to achieve clarity. She proposes the two rules of pragmatic competence, namely, being clear and being polite, that is designed to take into account "the speaker's assumptions about his relation with his address, his real-world situation as he speaks, and the extent to which he wishes to change either or both, or reinforce them". The two rules are not always compatible, Lakoff argues. In fact it is the tension between them that determines the shape of a given utterance. She formulates her politeness maxims from the speakers' perspectives:

1. Formality: Don't impose or remain aloof. (used when Formal/impersonal Politeness is required)
2. Hesitancy: Allow the addressee his option. (used when Informal Politeness is required)
3. Equality or Camaraderie: Act as though you and the addressee were equal or make him feel good. (used when Intimate Politeness is required)

These three maxims of politeness are applicable depending on the type of politeness situation as understood by the speaker. The above three rules can be simplified: (1) don't impose; (2) give options; (3) be friendly. The rule of "don't impose" gives the feeling of being distant. The rule of "give options" show deference to the hearer and the rule of "be friendly" create camaraderie between the speaker and the hearer. For example, if a speaker assesses the situation as requiring Intimate Politeness, such as between husbands and wives. Salt passing



might be requested by “Pass me the salt”, while Informal Politeness might be met with “Please pass me the salt.”

Lakoff appeals to the importance of context and situation. She also argues that “unlike the rules of conversation, they are to some extent mutually exclusive: different ones are applicable in different real-world situations and applying the wrong one at the wrong time may cause as much friction as not applying any. Speakers must assess their relationship with their addressees, as well as their communicative goals and intentions, in order to determine which of the rules should take precedence in the formation of a given utterance. Her writings contain many acute observations about the relationship between language usage and context but they do not contain theoretical proposals about how this relationship might be explained.

### **3.3.2 Leech's Politeness Principle**

Leech distinguishes relative politeness from absolute politeness. In his book *Principle of Pragmatics* (1983), Leech divides pragmatic principles into two categories: interpersonal rhetoric and textual rhetoric. Here, “rhetoric”, in Leech's sense, means “the effective use of language in communication” (Leech 1983:15), and it is composed of principles and maxims which the two parties in communication should follow. Leech's politeness principle belongs to interpersonal rhetoric. Leech primarily focuses on the study of absolute politeness. This brings out the global statement of PP (the politeness principle) “Maximize the expression of polite beliefs” which is elaborated into six maxims and some scales.

In Leech's PP, politeness concerns a relationship between two parties or sides whom we may call self and other, or we may say that the relationship of these two parties or sides is the concern of the politeness. The maxims of the PP tend to go in pairs as follows:

- (1) Tact maxim: try to reduce the opinions causing others' cost.
  - a. Minimize cost to other;
  - b. Maximize benefit to other.
- (2) Generosity maxim: try to reduce the opinion expression benefiting self.
  - a. Minimize benefit to self;
  - b. Maximize cost to self.
- (3) Approbation maxim: reduce derogatory expressions to others.

- a. Minimize dispraise of other;
  - b. Maximize praise of other.
- (4) Modesty maxim: reduce to praise self.
- a. Minimize praise of self;
  - b. Maximize dispraise of self.
- (5) Agreement maxim: reduce disagreement with others.
- a. Minimize disagreement between self and other;
  - b. Maximize agreement between self and other.
- (6) Sympathy maxim: reduce the feeling antithesis with others.
- a. Minimize antipathy between self and other;
  - b. Maximize sympathy between self and other.

We can see the first four maxims go in pairs because they deal with bipolar scales: the cost-benefit and praise-dispraise scales. The other two maxims deal with unipolar scales: the scales of agreement and sympathy. Leech further proposes that each of the six maxims of the PP has an associated set of scales which help establish the requisite degree of tact, generosity, etc, in a given speech situation. Thus for the tact maxim, the following scales are relevant:

- a) Authority scale: indicating the status relationship between the speaker and hearer.
- b) Social distance scale: representing the degree of familiarity between the speaker and the hearer.
- c) Cost-benefit scale: representing the cost or benefit of an act to the speaker and the hearer.
- d) Optionality scale: representing the relevant illocutions, ordered by the amount of choice which the speaker permits the hearer.
- e) Indirectness scale: indicating the amount of inferencing required of the hearer in order to establish the intended speaker meaning.

Although there are various connecting links between the scales, each maxim is distinct in that it refers to an evaluative scale that is distinct from the scales referred to by the others. Whereas (1) and (2) respectively concern the cost and benefit of future action to other and to self, (3) and (4) respectively concern the degree to which speaker's example, remarks convey some good or bad evaluation of other and of self. The Approbation Maxim is exemplified in

the intrinsic courtesy congratulations, and the Modesty Maxim in that of apologies. These maxims and scales are used based on the participant's assumption and evaluation.

Leech suggests that not all of the maxims and sub-maxims are equally important, i.e., certain maxims are stressed in some contexts and not in others. This reflects a more general law that politeness is focused more strongly on other than on self. Moreover, within each maxim, sub-maxim (b) seems to be less important than sub-maxim (a), and this again illustrates the more general law that negative politeness (avoidance of discord) is a more weighty consideration than positive politeness (seeking concord).

### **3.3.3 Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory**

In Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, politeness is viewed as face saving management which includes positive and negative faces of both the speaker and the hearer. By applying strategies, the faces are maintained and strengthened.

#### **(1) Face-Management Politeness**

In 1970s, Goffman, a sociologist, was the pioneer of academic study of conversational interaction, which he simply called talk. It is in this face-to-face domain that the features and powers of social reality are put into operation. Talk exchange is not merely a vehicle for expression and understanding of thoughts but a form of personal interaction in which communicators play more weight on their public self-image, which Goffman called face: an image of self delineated in terms of approval social attributes. There is a kind of trade-off in face-work: in return for the right of each participant to present and protect his or her own face, they must help their co-participant do the same for their faces.

Advanced by Brown and Levinson, "face" is an individual's publicly manifest self-image including both speaker and hearer. Face is one's feeling, pride, dignity and self-respect. Every social member is endowed with two kinds of face: positive and negative. According to Brown and Levinson, politeness is concerned with face, which is either an individual's self-image or the public self-image that every member wants to claim for him/herself. In their everyday social interaction, people generally behave as if their expectations concerning their public self-image, or their face wants, will be respected. If a person says something that represents a threat to another individual's expectations regarding self-image, it is described as a

face-threatening act (FTA). Alternatively, if some action is interpreted as a threat to another's face, the speaker can say something to lessen the possible threat. This is called a face-saving act. Positive face refers to a desire to be appreciated and valued by others. Negative face refers to the concern for certain rights and freedoms, such as autonomy to choose actions, claims on territory, and so on.

Brown and Levinson's concept of politeness, in essence, is strategic, that is attaining the goal of saving face for both sides in communication through language strategies. "The strategies of face redress" (or politeness strategies) are those that indicate non-FTA intentions. Brown and Levinson put forward five politeness strategies which are listed below: 1) non-FTAs; 2) off-record FTAs; 3) negative politeness; 4) positive politeness; 5) on-record FTAs. Those five strategies can be classified into the following three: 1) Bald on-record: These provide no effort by the speaker to reduce the impact of the FTA's. The speaker will most likely shock the person spoken to, embarrass them, or make them feel a bit uncomfortable. However, this type of strategy is commonly found with people who know each other very well, and are very comfortable in their environment, such as close friends and family. 2) Positive Politeness: For example: Give me that. Put your coat away. It is usually seen in groups of friends, or where people in the given social situation know each other fairly well. It usually tries to minimize the distance between them by expressing friendliness and solid interest in the hearer's need to be respected (minimize the FTA). 3) Negative Politeness (off-record/indirect): The main focus for using this strategy is to assume that you may be imposing on the hearer, and intruding on their space. Therefore, these automatically assume that there might be some social distance or awkwardness in the situation.

#### (2) Positive Politeness and Negative Politeness

Associating with positive and negative faces, we come to the notion of positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive politeness is the politeness shown for the addressee's positive face to let him or her know that he or she is liked and approved of. It means that while expressing face threatening acts which pose a threat to either the positive face or the negative face of the addressee, we take compensating action to protect the addressee's positive face, such as praising, agreeing, intimating, complimenting the addressee on his or her accomplishments, capabilities, attribute, appearance, and possessions; showing

the addressee that he or she is looked upon as a friend or a member of the speaker's "in-group", showing similarity in viewpoint, affirming the addressee's words and ideas and so forth.

Negative politeness is the politeness shown for the addressee's negative face. It means when stating face-threatening act, we should take compensating action to protect the participants' negative face, showing concern for the participants' face want, such as apologizing, minimizing the imposition, impersonalizing, indirectness in making requests, using interrogative sentences, the past tense, the subjunctive mood, plural form pronouns, words of thanks, and so on. "In most English-speaking contexts, a face-saving act is more commonly performed via negative politeness strategies .... The tendency to use negative politeness forms, emphasizing the hearer's right to freedom, can be seen as a deference strategy" (Yule, 1999:64,66). "Negative politeness is the most elaborate and most conventionalized set of linguistic strategies for FTA redress" (Brown and Levinson,1987:130). A deference strategy, formal politeness, emphasizes the speaker's and the hearer's independence and can be found in more formal setting.

### (3) The Politeness Principle—a Premise for Successful Conversation

To achieve the intended goal of the conversation, the observance of the Politeness Principle is the basic requirement, and the breach of this principle often leads to undesirable consequences. Once people find that the strict observance of the Cooperative Principle does harm to their intended goal of the conversation, they will resort to the Politeness Principle. Furthermore, the observation of the Politeness Principle is also a premise for people's being cooperative in the Cooperative Principle.

From the illustration above, we may find that the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle may complement each other in pragmatic analysis. So just like what Leech (1983) has said, the Politeness Principle can "rescue" the Cooperative Principle to some extent.

## 3.4 Pragmatic Vagueness and Speech Act Theory

This is the first major theory in the study of language in use, which originated with the Oxford philosopher John Langshaw Austin.(Hu Zhuanglin, Jiang Wangqi, 2002:444)

According to his opinion, a speaker might be performing three acts simultaneously when speaking: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act.

A locutionary act is the act of uttering words, phrases, and clauses. It is the act of conveying literal meaning by means of syntax, lexicon and phonology. An illocutionary act is the act of expressing the speaker's intention; it is the act performed in saying something. A perlocutionary act is the act performed by or resulting from saying something; it is the consequence of, or the change brought about by the utterance; it is the act performed by saying something. Of the three speech acts, linguists are most interested in the illocutionary act because this kind of speech act is identical with the speaker's intention, and in their study of language communication, linguists are most interested in how a speaker expresses his intention and also how his intention is recognized by the hearer. (Dai Weidong, He Zhaoxiong, 2002:9)

What should be pointed out here is that the speech act succeeds in having certain functions in diplomacy if only certain felicity conditions are fulfilled. For example, the speeches must be made by diplomats with the necessary authority, in such a situation in which negotiation is carried on or the relationship is maintained, to a counterpart or group of people whose identities are almost the same; they must be spoken or written at the right time and in the right place.

## **Chapter 4 Pragmatic Functions of Vagueness in Diplomatic Language**

In the diplomatic world, vagueness has its distinctive functions in communication. The study of the functions of vague language in diplomacy will be of theoretical and practical significance.

It is frequently acknowledged by many linguists that language may be used to perform many communicative functions of which the most important function should be the communication of information. They assume "that what the speaker or writer has primarily in mind is the efficient transference of information. Language used in such a situation is primarily 'message oriented'. It is important that the recipient gets the informative detail correct." (Brown and Yule, 2000:2) But on the other hand, "Whereas linguists, philosophers of language and psycholinguists have paid particular attention to the use of language for the transmission of 'factual or propositional information', sociologists and sociolinguists have been particularly concerned with the use of language to establish and maintain social relationships. In sociological and anthropological literature the phatic use of language has been frequently commented on. Conversational analysts have been particularly concerned with the use of language to negotiate the relationship, peer-solidarity, and the exchange of turns in conversation, the saving of face of both the speaker and the hearer. It is clearly the case that a great deal of everyday human interaction is characterized by the primarily interpersonal rather than the primarily transactional use of language." (Brown and Yule, 2000:3)

In the process of diplomatic activities, although the major function of diplomatic language is to make an efficient transference of information to other states on behalf of one's own country, many other functions can be detected because of the fundamental goal in the diplomat's mind of sustaining a good relationship between countries. And vagueness, of no doubt, can certainly do a great favor to the diplomats, especially in handling delicate or thorny situations. In this chapter, we'll make an attempt to explore and manifest some important pragmatic functions of vagueness in diplomatic language.

## 4.1 Positive Effects on the Speaker's Side

In the diplomatic world, vagueness has its distinctive functions in communication. The study of the positive effects of vagueness in diplomacy will be of great practical significance.

### 4.1.1 Achieving Politeness

We are very familiar with the Politeness Principle proposed by G.N.Leech(1983), To avoid giving offense or to avoid the loss of face as a result of public humiliation and embarrassment, vagueness in language is thus used to maintain respect, dignity, and harmonious relations between diplomatic groups.

The ancient Indian saga Manu once said that a good diplomat might “speak the pleasant, but not the untruth; speak the truth, but not the unpleasant”, which somewhat demonstrates functional vagueness in obeying the maxim of quality and the principle of politeness. During the interaction between nations, there are a number of situations in which politeness is of central importance in diplomatic affairs.

It is known to all that Quality Maxim requires that the speaker should try to make his/her contribution that is true and should not say what he/she believes to be false. However, the speaker could achieve his/her purpose by flouting Quality Maxim while maintaining certain relationship for the sake of politeness. This is not difficult to be evidenced in diplomatic activities.

When a state cannot avoid mentioning its past disputes or unpleasant relations with another state on a diplomatic occasion, it sometimes has to resort to reserved terms. For example,

[1] Premier Zhou delivering a speech at his reception in honor of U.S. President Nixon said, “The peoples of our two countries have all along been friendly with each other. But, *owing to reasons known to all*, the contacts between our two peoples are interrupted for twenty years. Thanks to the common efforts of America and China, the door to friendly contacts has been reopened in the end.” In this speech, Premier Zhou avoided mentioning U.S. intervention in China's civil war and its launching of the Korean War.

[2] Here is another example. In September 1982, British Premier Minister Mrs. Margaret Thatcher said at the welcoming banquets in Beijing, “Today, although *our political*



*philosophies* are very different, our understanding has grown enormously and in world affairs our interests over wide areas are close.” Here the British Premier Minister used “our political philosophies” instead of “our political systems” to make it sound less antagonistic. (Guo Hong, Peng Xiaodong, 1999:39)

The above examples demonstrate that the Politeness Principle is dominant at the expense of Quality Maxim of the Cooperative Principle in diplomatic field.

#### **4.1.2 Declaring one's Position**

In diversified diplomatic occasions, spokesmen and senior diplomats, on behalf of their own countries, show responses, give opinions or declare their positions about significant international events, which could also be called *diplomatic declaration*. Since it is in the diplomatic field, and diplomats are less intimate with each other, the wording of diplomatic declaration sometimes is indirect, euphemistic and leaves some room, which is a way of using vagueness in diplomacy.

It is a diplomat's duty to clarify his or his government's position. That is to say, there should be no mistakes in the realization of ideational functions, while a harmonious atmosphere should be maintained, enabling diplomats or statesmen to convey respective attitudes to each other.

It's known that politicians are always speaking as representatives of a political party or of a government, and they are engaged in policy-making, outlining or defending their own political decisions, directly or indirectly criticizing or commenting on ideas or actions of their political opponents. International conflicts are generally rather acute. In diplomatic dialogues, diplomats and statesmen sometimes cannot avoid saying sharp things to maintain their respective positions. However, they are not supposed to appear rude or arrogant, still less provocative or impolite. In this case, they need phrases, which enable them to make unpleasant things sound pleasant or at least less unpleasant. Thus, vague languages are assumed to be decisive parts in a diplomatic speech, to declare and even strengthen their positions.

If a statesman or a diplomat of one state informs the government of another state that his own government “*cannot remain indifferent to*” some international dispute, he is clearly

understood by his counterpart that the dispute is one in which his government will certainly intervene. If, instead, he uses such phrases as *"my government view as concern"* or *"view with grave concern"*, then the illocutionary meaning is that his government intends to adopt a strong line. By cautious gradation such as these, a diplomat or a statesman is able, without using threatening language, to declare his country's position to a foreign government. If neglected by the public or the counterpart intentionally or unintentionally, he would make a repetition of these phrases to emphasize his or his government's attitude. If he says, *"In such an event, my government would feel bound carefully to consider their position"*, he is implying that friendship is about to turn into hostility. If he says, *"My government is obliged to formulate express reservations regarding..."* he is, in fact, saying, *"My government will not allow..."* The expression *"In that event, my government will be obliged to consider their own interests,"* or *"to claim a free hand"*, indicates that breaking of diplomatic relations is being considered. If he says, *"He must decline to be responsible for the consequence."* the illocutionary meaning is that he is about to provoke an incident, which will lead to war. And if he demands, even in terms of careful politeness, a reply *"before six O'clock on the evening of the 25th"*, then his statement is rightly regarded as an ultimatum. (Guo Hong, Peng Xiaodong, 1999:38)

The above indirect expressions actually are declarations of diplomats and the countries represented by them. Any counterpart who fails to interpret the implications contained in them might lose his opportunity to respond duly and correctly to his interlocutor.

There are some examples to illustrate this point. For instance,

[3] In December 1987, the American government claimed that two of our diplomats accredited to America *"have engaged in activities which are not suitable for their statues"* and demanded their leave. In reply, the Chinese Foreign Ministry *"loges a strong protest and reserves the right of further response"*. (Guo Hong, Peng Xiaodong, 1999:39) In declaring Chinese position, by using *"further response"*, the Chinese government stated that it would take action concerning the issue. What kind of further response would be taken is quite vague, what kind of result would occur if the U.S. side is bigoted? The vague expression gives the U.S. side room to consider the situation and carry out its further step.

[4] Another example is from the 2009 NPC, CPPCC Annual Sessions. Foreign Minister

Yang Jiechi has answered questions of journalists all over the world, a journalist from Hong Kong TVB asked questions about the bronze heads and China-French Relations:

Q: "The French company insisted on going ahead with auctioning two bronzes from China's old Summer Palace. The relevant Chinese department has said that this has offended the Chinese people. In spite of China's strong opposition, French president met with Dalai at the end of last year. How do you comment on China-French relations?"

A: The Chinese government opposed the auction by the relevant company of the two bronze heads from the old Summer Palace, because these two bronze heads are cultural relics looted from China and China has the right to recover those looted relics. This move is adding salt to injury and it is immoral. In the past 45 years, since the establishment of the diplomatic relations, China-France relations have made a lot of progress and brought real benefits to people of both countries. China has always attached great importance to promoting relations with France and made tremendous efforts to this end. *The current problem in China-France relations is not caused by the Chinese side. The responsibility for it does not rest with China. We hope* France will make a positive response to the major concerns of the Chinese side. Finally I want to emphasize that I have confidence for the long-term development of China-France relations. Because that serves the common interests of both countries and it is in accordance with the aspirations of both peoples.

Though the Chinese side feels really sorry for the worsening relations with France, from Foreign Minister Yang's remarks, some well-selected vague phrases and sentences are used, such as "*hope*", "*does not rest with China*," etc. On one hand, they are to declare the position of the Chinese government, and on the other, to lessen the embarrassment.

[5] Another example is concerned with a German journalist who asked the Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi a question about Dalai Lama:

Q: The cooperation between China and Europe has to tackle a lot of issues, like the financial crisis and climate change. Last year, many Europeans are puzzled that China cancelled the EU-China summit in December because French President Sarkozy was going to meet the Dalai Lama. There is a lack of understanding in Europe that China will suspend this important cooperation at any time, even in crisis when the European leader meets the Tibetan religious leader for a chat, for a tea? How do you respond to that? And the EU presidency has

proposed the New EU-China Summit in May? Will China take part in the summit as the day fixed?

A: The China-EU Summit had to be postponed at the end of 2007. The responsibility does not rest with the Chinese side. *And I believe people are clear about the cause of it.* People in Europe know well the classic philosophy of ancient Greek and I believe they have very good logic. The Dalai Lama's side still insists on establishing a so-called Greater Tibet on a quarter of Chinese territory. They want to drive away Chinese armed forces on Chinese territory and ask all non-Tibetans to relocate themselves, people who have long spent their lives on that part of Chinese territory. You call this person a religious figure? Would Germany, France or other countries accept that a quarter of their territory be separated?"

In answering this question, Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi also adopted several vague expressions, such as *"I believe people are clear about the cause of it."* But it by no means has hindered people from knowing his real meaning.

#### 4.1.3 Protecting Oneself

Diplomatic language is largely used in the defense of the indefensible. Things which cannot hold water indeed can be defended by arguments using sheer vagueness to make it euphemistic so as to be self-protecting.

Diplomatic subjects are generally about important issues in international affairs or matters concerning vital interests of the states. The course of negotiation is full of contradictions of positions and conflicts of interests. Diplomats from different countries try hard to reach compromises or agreements through using vague language.

Diplomats are people with abundant interpersonal experience. In diplomatic situations, the use of vague language, especially hedging devices, can help the diplomats to achieve the absolution, and meantime, relieve them of some responsibilities for their statements and avoid criticism of the audience.

[6] The following is a typical example about the briefing on the U.S. war against Iraq by the U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld at Pentagon: "As we know, there are known knows. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say,

there are things we know we don't know. But, there are also unknown unknowns. These are things we don't know we don't know."

At first sight, there are so many related words about "know", and what Rumsfeld said seems vague, however, after careful analysis, we can perceive the messages that the defense secretary wants to send:

The fact is that the United States occupies Iraq (things we know).

When the United States will leave Iraq remains unknown (things we know we don't know).

We are unaware of some unknowns' nature (things we don't know we don't know).

But we know postwar Iraq is chaotic and dangerous (there are known knows; there are also unknown unknowns). (Li Wen, 2004:20)

Regardless of what Rumsfeld knew, his using of vagueness exposed his attitude toward the war strategy by Bush against Iraq. He thought that there is more unknown than known. Therefore, he held the opinion that an administration should know more about the old and new information before it actually carries out the war strategy. In some sense, the Defense Secretary criticized the Bush administration in a mild way. Because he had the same responsibility as Bush, that is they should maintain the security of the U.S.A., however, he could not say any offensive words against Bush publicly. Therefore, he adopted the Agreement Maxim, minimizing disagreement between himself (Rumsfeld) and others (Bush) while violating the manner maxim of avoiding obscurity of expression. In this vague speech, Rumsfeld not only expressed his viewpoint on the war against Iraq, but also defended his own political position. The most important illumination of this example is that, by using vagueness, he was able to reduce the risk of being criticized by the audience for his battling statements.

[7] In the China-US Shanghai Communiqué (February 28, 1972), the two governments differed greatly on the issue of Taiwan. The skillful employment of language provides a good example to illustrate this feature of diplomatic language. On the one side, China reaffirmed its position:

The Taiwan question is the crucial question obstructing the normalization of relations between China and the United States; the government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government of China; Taiwan is a province of China which has long been returned

to the motherland; the liberation of Taiwan is China's internal affair in which no other country has the right to interfere; and all U. S. forces and military installations must be withdrawn from Taiwan. The Chinese Government firmly opposes any activities which aim at the creation of 'one China, one Taiwan', 'one China, two governments', 'two Chinas', an 'independent Taiwan' or advocate that 'the status of Taiwan remains to be determined'.

On the other side, with very skillful wording, the U. S. declared:

The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States Government does not challenge that position. It reaffirms its interest in peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves. With this prospect in mind, it affirms the ultimate objective of the withdrawal of all U. S force and military installations from Taiwan. In the meantime, it will progressively reduce its forces and military installations on Taiwan as the tension in the area diminishes.

By using "either side of the Taiwan Strait", it avoided mentioning "the People's Republic of China" or "the Republic of China". And it is indeed the common position of the two sides that "there is one China and that Taiwan is a part of China" and so the statement will not invoke any opposition of either side. At the same time, the U. S. Government also made clear that the rate of its reduction of forces and military installations on Taiwan depends on the rate at which the tension in this area diminishes by stating "it will progressively reduce its forces and military installation on Taiwan as the tension in the area diminishes." In other words, the U. S. may not withdraw its forces and installations from Taiwan or may do it slowly if the tension in the area does not diminish or diminishes at a low rate. Thus this statement of the U. S. not only serves its purposes but also in principle acceptable to China. Through negotiations, in which diplomatic language is carefully used, the year 1979 saw the Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China. (January 1, 1979). In this communiqué, the U. S. declared in its separate statement (United States Statement, December 15, 1978):

On that same day January 1, 1979, the United States of America will notify Taiwan that it is terminating diplomatic relations and that the Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of China is being terminated in accordance with the provisions of the

Treaty. The United States also states that it will be withdrawing its remaining military personnel from Taiwan within four months.

....

The United States is confident that the people of Taiwan face a peaceful and prosperous future. The United States continues to have an interest in the peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue and expects that the Taiwan issue will be settled peacefully by the Chinese themselves.

The U. S. termination of diplomatic relations with Taiwan is one great triumph of the Chinese people against the U. S government. However, the U. S. shows its reluctance to leave the Taiwan question to the Chinese people completely by stating, "The United States continues to have an interest in the peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue...."

[8] Another example is from the 2009 NPC and CPPCC Annual Sessions. A Japanese Journalist asked a question about the poisoned dumpling incident, the Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi answered very tactfully.

Q: There're both victims of the poisoned dumpling incident. The incident has not been resolved since it broke out more than a year ago. And the Japanese consumers are still concerned about the quality of made-in-China food, what is the biggest obstacle in resolving this case?

A: First, I would like to say that the Chinese government or relevant government department takes food quality and safety very seriously. The dumpling incident you referred to is a criminal case. The relevant Chinese department is still conducting the investigation and working hard to crack the case. We believe that China and Japan should continue to cooperate in the investigation. I wonder if there are cases in Japan too, which after a long time of investigation still cannot be resolved. I believe the Japanese police will not give up their efforts and will pursue the investigation until these cases are resolved. That's what we're determined to do on this specific case. As well, I think we should have the understanding of the Japanese side on this point and the two countries should cooperate on resolving the case to ensure the food safety. And I also believe it is important that our two countries establish a long-term cooperation mechanism on food safety. Isn't it a good idea?

I would like to make a comment here which I hope the journalists will not misinterpret. I can't say that we don't have any problem at all in the food in China, but more often than not,

I'll go to attend some foreign or diplomatic functions after I have taken some China-made frozen dumpling.

By comparison with the Japanese policy, Foreign Minister Yang tactfully avoided mentioning the exact reason and effectively protected our interest.

[9] Another example, one of the journalists asks President Bush about the next presidential election and his standing point.

Q: What is your feeling right now about the tone of the campaign and, in particular, on the Republican side, some of the talk on immigration?

A: Wolf, the next three months you and your august colleagues are trying to get me to be Pundit-in-Chief and I unfortunately practiced some Punditry in the past, I'm not going to any further. I know, I know. (<http://www.whitehouse.gov> December 4, 2007)

In this conversation, the journalist just wants to hear President Bush's idea whether he particularly supports the Republican side. He doesn't want to show his personal opinion on this issue because he's going to leave his post and doesn't want to be involved in this political campaign. In order to protect himself from this conflict, he adopts vagueness strategy. In this process, he uses five noun phrases to smartly get rid of this contradiction, firstly, he describes the next presidential election is a cruel war like "wolf"; then, he points out that the journalists will have a lot of news to report during the election, which will create "august" atmosphere at that time, "august" here means "awful". "Pundit-in-Chief" means the most important and most intelligent person who leads the talented persons.

President Bush uses this phrase in order to say that the journalists will make him a so-called "Pundit-in-Chief" to give evaluation on the campaign. He has played this kind of role and doesn't want to repeat, as the last sentence indicated "I'm not going to any further". All of these vague expressions are to fulfill the function of protecting his position and avoiding getting in trouble. As the current president of the USA, it is a wise choice for George W. Bush to escape from the following election campaign by using pragmatic vagueness. In this way, he keeps his neutral position and protects good image in the public.

[10] Another example:

Q: Did Chairman Kim Jong-Il and Premier Park Pong-chu visit Tianjin and Hancunhe Village yesterday? Where did Chairman Kim Jong-Il go in Tianjin and why is the visit? Is



the visit to Tianjin and Hancunhe Village a recommendation of China or a request of DPRK?

A: I don't have any detailed information with me about the visit you mentioned. What I have in hand is only the press release published yesterday afternoon. As for how to choose destinations of visit, I guess DPRK may have indicated some places they would like to visit. I suggest you could raise the question further with the International Liaison Department of the CPC Central Committee for more details. (Foreign Ministry Spokesperson KongQuan's Press Conference on 22 April, 2004)

The journalist wanted to know whether the visit to Tianjin and Hancunhe Village is a recommendation of China or a request of DPRK. From his remark, it can be inferred that he knew no more details about the issue. The spokesperson gave an uncertain answer by using the hedge words "I guess" in order to maintain the good image before the public when he was unsure of the question presented by the journalist.

[11] The last example is from the News Conference of the Chinese spokesman Qin Gang:

Q: What is China's stance on the presidential statement of the UN Security Council on the Iranian nuclear issue? Does China support the statement of Russian Foreign Ministry opposing the use of force in solving the issue? What is China's view on Iran's proposal to set up a joint venture for uranium enrichment inside Iran? Will China participate in this program?

A: The UN Security Council passed a presidential statement on the Iranian nuclear issue on the March 29th. This statement urges Iran to adopt the steps required by the IAEA, especially resume the suspension of all uranium enrichment-related and reprocessing activities. In the meantime, it emphasizes that the Security Council strongly supports IAEA's role in resolving the problem. China hopes the statement can help to strengthen the authority and role of the IAEA.

About the second question, under the current circumstances, there is still room for solving the problem through diplomatic negotiation. The international community shouldn't give up diplomatic endeavor. We wish to see that various parties exercise restraint and patience so as to create positive atmosphere for a diplomatic solution. We remain open to all suggestions and endeavors that will help to achieve the goal. (Qin Gang, Chinese Spokesman, April 30, 2006)

We know the hedge 'hope' and 'wish' is connected with mental status or mental processes of the sender who expresses his judgment or attitude towards the information uttered. Mr. Qin is fully aware of his status and gracefully hedges his speech when facing some sensitive questions. He employs the word 'hope' and 'wish' to provide Chinese government's position on the Iranian nuclear issue. The spokesman uses the two verb hedges to answer questions about the sensitive issue at the press conference, which is polite and tactful.

#### **4.1.4 Withholding Information**

In many circumstances, speakers use vague language deliberately to hide information, though they own the information that the hearers might expect. There are many ways to withhold information, such as deceiving, refusing to answer, changing a topic and so on. All these devices will violate the cooperative principle. They may produce a negative effect to the whole communication, and may even make the communication reach an impasse, especially in the complicated diplomatic occasions.

Using diplomatic vagueness enables diplomats to withhold confidential information or important information successfully. For example:

[12] In 1945, after the bombing of two nuclear bombs in Japan, news media of both USA and China were wondering whether the former Soviet Union had the nuclear bomb. When the Foreign Minister of the former Soviet Union delegation visited USA, a crowd of American journalists surrounded him. One of the journalists asked how many nuclear bombs the former Soviet Union had. The Foreign Minister answered with a long face: "Sufficient!" In this example, the journalist's question is rather challenging. As the Foreign Minister of the former Soviet Union, he could simply answer by the utterance of "It is a secret." or "No comments." or anything like this. But this sort of answer seems too common and less tactical. Sharply contrasted with this, his simple but strategic answer "Sufficient!" shows both his intelligence and qualification as a diplomat because he has a capability to show the power of his nation, meanwhile maintaining the confidential information when he is challenged off-hand.

On the other hand, certain western diplomats use vague language sometimes just to whitewash and cover up the facts, and even use good words to conceal hideous things. In

diplomatic practice, military deployment and maneuver concerning national security are evasive problems. During the time of Cuba missile crisis, the temporal U. S. president Kennedy ordered the navy "to insulate" Cuba, compelling all the sails of Soviet Union carrying missiles return in the midway. It is obvious that the American navy "quarantined" Cuba. But "insulate" is used rather than "quarantine" because the word "quarantine" has its strict meaning in international law. In the public world, how can a "free" and "democratic" country order to blank off the country it dislikes in the light of the day? Moreover, if "quarantine" were used, the U.S. would be afraid of enraging another super power and causing other troubles.

[13] Another example: Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called *elimination of unreliable elements*. Such phraseologies are needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them. This style of vague understatement itself is a kind of withholding information.

It seems that the American government is the most typical one to use vague terms to describe the nature of war they have launched or will launch. When committing aggression against Korea, America put it into the term "police action". The invasion in Vietnam was "conflict"; the burning, bombing, and imprisonment were blotted out at one stroke by "pacification"; the air attack was called "logistical strike" or "close air support", or "surgical strike"; the slaughter on populace was whitewashed by "wasting the enemy"; The civilian casualties were glossed over by "collateral damage"; and the surprise attack was called "pre-emptive strike". The Gulf war in 1991 was called "armed situation" by Bush, and a lot of vague terms were created during this time, for instance, to express the fight, "air operation" and "ground operation" was used. The warhead was "payload", nuclear bomb was "nuclear device", missile was "vehicle", suicidal attack was "one-way mission", and defense crushed was "defense neutralized". The vagueness used in the situations makes the nature of aggression covered, putting America in a position of world police to maintain the peace without a faint trace of bloodiness.

[14] The bombing of Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, and the accident of the spy plane in April, 2001, were serious political incidents, but the American government expressed

its “regret”, and called them “unfortunate accidents”. We can see the difference between “regret” and a formal apology very clearly since “regret” does not mean the speaker accepts responsibility. So, America, once again, protects itself by using vagueness and sheds off the responsibility.

The proverb “To say is one thing, to practice is another” illustrates exactly what the politicians say is to cover up what they will do or gloss over what they have done. From the above examples, it may be sensed that diplomatic vagueness makes it possible for diplomats to provide an answer superficially but not let out any information actually. At the same time, it drops a hint to the addressee that the addressor feels reluctant to touch upon the topic. Thus the addressee can usually take the hint.

#### **4.1.5 Breaking the Deadlock**

Diplomatic negotiations often fall into deadlocks that two parties stick to their own ideas and refuse to compromise. At this time, if vague language is timely and consciously introduced to minimize the differences, hope may appear and agreement will be achieved at last.

[15] The typical example should be the two different attitudes held by Hillary Clinton in terms of the Human Rights problem in China. In 1995, Mrs. Clinton told the Fourth World Conference on Women assembled:

“It is time for us to say here in Beijing, and the world to hear, that it is no longer acceptable to discuss women’s rights as separate from human rights,” ; “It is a violation of human rights when babies are denied food, or drowned, or suffocated, or their spines broken, simply because they are born girls,” or “when women and girls are sold into slavery or prostitution for human greed” ; “It is a violation of human rights when women are doused with gasoline, set on fire and burned to death because their marriage dowries are deemed too small” she continued, or “when thousands of women are raped in their own communities and when thousands of women are subjected to rape as a tactic or prize of war.”

Afterward, Mrs. Clinton said she hoped the Chinese had gotten the message of her speech. “I think it is important that all governments which in any way infringe on human

rights know that this conference takes a strong stand and that this conference is trying to move toward the realization of human rights," she told a news conference.

She said President Clinton's goal is to remain "engaged" with China in a broad and comprehensive relationship, but added, "We are trying to have an honest relationship." "To me, it was important to express how I felt and to do so as clearly as I could," she said.

The above is parts of the speech made by Hillary Clinton on Human Rights in 1995. However, 14 years later, she is now Secretary of State of the United States and the Obama Administration is now facing a series of touchy problems, such as the economic crisis. In order to seek help from China, Let's see what Mrs. Clinton will say now about Human Rights of China.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Friday that she would not emphasize contentious issues such as human rights in talks this weekend with the Chinese, focusing instead on topics on which progress may be more likely: the global economy, climate change and security issues.

"We know what they're going to say because I've had those kinds of conversations for more than a decade with Chinese leaders," Clinton told reporters. "We have to continue to press them. But our pressing on these issues can't interfere with the global economic crisis, the global climate change crisis and the security crisis."

You cannot deny the above speech a kind of diplomatic tricks to break the deadlock. It is really helpful to ease the tensions concerning some sensitive questions.

Another example:

[16] During the negotiation of Sino-US jet crash event on April 2001, our part demanded the US part not only shoulder the whole responsibility of the event, stop all the martial scout craft in Chinese coastal airspace and ensure avoiding the repeated occurrence of similar events, but also give a compellent explanation to all the Chinese people and make an open and formal apology. However, the US part disavowed by every means and made sophistication, reluctant to make open and formal apology. Under pressures from international consensus and iterative negotiation, American ambassador in China Joseph Prueher submitted a very sorry letter on 11<sup>th</sup>, April to Chinese foreign minister Tang Jiaxuan. One part of it is as follows:

“Both Presidents Bush and Secretary of the State Powell have expressed their sincere regret over your missing pilot and aircraft. Please convey to the Chinese people and to the family of pilot Wang Wei that we are very sorry for their loss.” “Very sorry” in the quoted words is never optionally chosen but through careful thinking and repetitive consideration. The meaning of “sorry” here actually cuts both ways and is rather vague. According to Webster’s New World Dictionary, “sorry” expresses two kinds of meanings: full of sorrow or sympathy; an expression of apology or mild regret. Besides, from the stylistic angle, “sorry” is usually used in oral communications to express regret towards bagatelle in daily life while it is not so stated in diplomatic relations. But the US part added “very” before “sorry” to strengthen the mood and compensate for the deficiency. Therefore, “very sorry” became the balanceable point accepted by both sides.

Through this way, Joseph Prueher has found a way to break the deadlock in a certain degree.

#### **4.1.6 Creating Harmonious Atmosphere**

Peace and development has been the theme of the current times. The aim of diplomacy is to deal with multilateral relationship among various nations properly, because the harmonious atmosphere can provide peaceful environment for development for all of the nations. So the diplomats try to maintain good relationship with others for the mutual benefits. The production of diplomatic language is a process of negotiating and compromising.

There are some fixed structures to show their common interest and to create a light atmosphere like “We strongly support...”, “We agree...”, “We admire...”, “we appreciate...” and so on.

[17] Let’s see an example from the 2009 NPC and CPPCC News Conference. A ROK journalist asked Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi a question:

Q: If the DPRK insists on launching a satellite, what will be the response of the Chinese side? And how will it impact on the six-party talk process?

A: “We’ve encountered some difficulties at present and these emerged in the course of negotiations over this complex issue. We should see that this is normal. The important thing is that all parties should act according to the agreement made on Sept. 19, 2005, and join hands

to fulfill the second phase action plan at an early date, and advance the talks to the third phase.”

“We have noted that the North Korean side has announced it will launch a trial communications satellite, and we have also noted the reaction of various countries. We express our concern about the developments ... We hope that all parties will do more things that are helpful.”

By saying these words, Foreign Minister Yang has tried to ease the tension in order to create a harmonious atmosphere between DPRK and ROK.

[18] Another example is about a question for Mr. President Bush on the comfort women issue.

Q: From the perspective of human rights and Asian history perceptions, I wonder if you could express your thoughts or views.

A: The comfort women issue is a *regrettable* chapter in the history of the world, and I accept the Prime Minister's apology. I thought it was very, I thought his statements—Kono's statements, as well as statements here in the United States were *very straightforward and from his heart*. And I'm looking forward to working with this man to lead our nations forward. And that's what we spent time discussing today. We had a personal visit on the issue. He gave his—he told me what was on his heart about the issue, and *I appreciate his candor*. And our jobs are to, obviously, learn lessons from the past. All of us need to learn lessons from the past and lead our nations forward. That's what the Prime Minister is doing in a very capable way. (<http://www.whitehouse.gov>)

Comfort women issue is a sensitive topic for America, Japan and other Asian countries. In the previous part of the press conference, Prime Minister Abe apologized for the crime Japan army committed in the World War II. Considering Japan is one of the rapidly-developed countries with big say in international affairs, the United States needs to maintain good relationship. So he firstly shows sympathy to Asian countries, the comfort women is a “regrettable” disaster in Asian history, then accepts Abe's apology, next, points out that they need to learn from history and look forward to the future. The whole piece conversation is a good example of demonstrating the good relationship function of pragmatic vagueness in diplomatic language.

[19] Another example is from the Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's Press Conference on 11 December, 2003:

Q: How do you comment the possibility of the next round of Six-Party conference? Are you sure the conference will be held at the end of this year, or do you only think it will be hoped to be held at the end of this year? The new term of office has been assumed for almost one year, what is your comment on the diplomatic policies of China in the past year? Do the leaders follow the diplomatic policies of the predecessors or do they make some changes? For example, do they take more active diplomatic principles in the fields like the nuclear problem in Korea Peninsula?

A: China hopes the next round of Six-Party conference will be held as early as possible. We believe it is hopeful to be held before the end of the year if each party makes great efforts to prepare well and narrow down the differences. China will devote herself to promoting the early coming of the conference.

As to your second question, don't you think it is a little bit early to raise that? There are almost two months before the year end, and we will have a series of important diplomatic activities before the year end, including Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to the U.S. A. and so on. After the March of this year, especially after the Sixteenth National Congress, the new leaders of China follow the traditional diplomatic policies, they retain the continuity and stability of the diplomatic policies, and meanwhile they manifest the spirit of developing with time. The report of the Sixteenth National Congress is the embodiment of China's foreign policies. Our goal is to maintain the world peace and promote mutual development. In the past year, China has made persistent efforts and conquered various difficulties.

You have mentioned that China has played an important role in the nuclear problem of Korean Peninsula, and China's efforts have been widely concerned and praised. China will participate in international affairs with a positive attitude, and will make its own contributions to the maintenance of world peace, the promotion of mutual development and the solving of international and regional hot questions together with other countries. (Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's Press Conference on 11 December, 2003)

The spokesperson intended to tell the journalist that he shouldn't ask this question at the moment. The journalist didn't make clear the right time of presenting the kind of question in



the press conference. In order to reduce the degree of threatening the journalist's positive face, the spokesperson added the hedge word "a little". In addition, the spokesperson used the common interrogative sentence which indicated that his remarks seemed uncertain. As a matter of fact, he knew the right time and wanted the journalist himself to comprehend the answer. On purpose, he wanted to reduce the degree of criticizing the journalist.

These above mentioned examples are words between two countries; both parties want to express their respective ideas while maintaining usual harmonious atmosphere. On the one hand, the diplomats want to keep a long-term friendly relationship with each other, by which the interpersonal function is dominant. While on the other hand, they should maintain a precise manner. Thus both parties try hard to make the receiver feel at ease to represent their respective countries, rather than hurt the feeling of the assumption that the same will be done to them.

## **4.2 Possible Negative Effects**

It is worth pointing out that the pragmatic function of vague language is not always positive or desirable. Sometimes speakers may use vague words to stall certain controversial issues because they don't know the exact answers or are unwilling to give them. One should always keep the point in mind that the importance of vagueness of language cannot be exaggerated.

On some diplomatic occasions, when a state cannot avoid mentioning its past disputes or unpleasant relations with another state, while it has the wish to make the dialogues or negotiations fruitful, it sometimes has to resort to reserved terms. Those reserved terms can be taken as Guarded Understatements which we have mentioned in the previous chapters. Although the Guarded Understatement can do a great favor to diplomats, it can do the reverse too.

*"The advantage of this conventional form of communication is that it maintains an atmosphere of calm, while enabling diplomats or statesmen to convey serious warning to each other which will not be misunderstood. The disadvantage is that the public and sometimes even the diplomats and statesmen themselves are not quite clear about the actual value of the expression they use". (Nicholson 1950: 256).*

It can easily be understood that on the one hand, an improper or careless use of these phrases may give a situation a seriousness that does not really exist. On the other hand, when the situation is indeed very serious, the public may be deceived by the mildness of the language and takes it for granted that the crisis can not be as serious as the warning was intended to say. As a result, Guarded Understatement should be used in an appropriate manner to minimize the negative effects that may otherwise be caused by its disadvantages.

It is well known that the diplomatic activity is very formal and conservative. Even though vague language can work as speech strategies to make the activity smooth and effective, they can also cause pragmatic failure if they are not used appropriately.

### **4.3 Summary**

Vague language is not bad or wrong, nor is it inherently good. The positive and negative values of them tell that vagueness of language is an undeniable attribute. They can be used for different purposes and they might also make hearers confused at the vague information brought by them. Moreover, what matters is not vague language itself but the ideas and functions the “use of vague language” made, it is neither good nor bad to use it, the key point is how to use the vague language appropriately. Therefore this attribute of language should be treated scientifically: not to be ignored and not to be exaggerated.

## Conclusion

The descriptive and analytical work of the paper is now complete. This concluding part will consider what has been achieved, its limitations, the implications and suggestions for further study. It is apparent that this study of vagueness in diplomatic language has raised more questions than it has been able to propose to answer. This is, however, exactly what we would expect of an investigation that takes on a relatively unexplored area. We expect further studies on this subject or in related areas to be conducted in the future.

### Major Findings and Implications

Vagueness, an inherent property to language, is one of the important phenomena involved in linguistic research. Analysis of vague expressions shows that their meanings are themselves vague, they are deliberately chosen for their contribution to the communicative message rather than empty fillers. Vagueness, as one of the essential features of human languages, is very difficult to define. Many researchers have worked on it for a long time, but until now there is no congruent definition of it. In order to have a clear understanding of vagueness, we have to distinguish some notions which may always be confused by a lot of learners, even scholars, of vagueness. This paper tries to pay more attention to the linguistic literature to generality, vagueness, ambiguity and fuzziness.

Vagueness had been once treated negatively as a “defect” or “deficiency” of language. Many people consider it as a “bad thing” or a “disadvantage”, thus should be avoided in speaking and writing. However, recently, more and more researches have proved that the appropriate use of vagueness in diplomatic language can perform a lot of pragmatic functions that cannot be accomplished by precise and clear language. In Chapter 1 the existence of vagueness in diplomatic language has been explored from the objective reasons and subjective reasons.

Vague language can be realized through different approaches. Since vague language has practical applications in a number of fields such as psychology, mathematics, sociology etc., the understanding of vague language use would appear to be valuable in any field. One obvious example of it is vagueness employed in diplomatic language. We begin with an

introduction to diplomatic language and the definition of vagueness. Then we go on elaborating on the linguistic realizations of vagueness in diplomatic language with numerous case analyses, followed by a pragmatic study from the perspectives of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle and Speech Act Theory.

People have different tendencies and motives in using vague language. Diplomats use vague expressions when they want to show their cooperation and politeness, or when they deliberately want to express their particular illocutionary force or hidden intention. The use of vague language can, to some degree, help them achieve the purposes and enhance the understanding of each other. On the basis of some authentic examples, this paper manifests that vagueness is used in diplomatic language aiming to achieve the following functions: achieving politeness, declaring one's position, protecting oneself, withholding information, breaking the deadlock and creating harmonious atmosphere.

As a beginner, the present thesis concerns only a minor topic of vague linguistics. It is only a tentative study of vagueness in diplomatic language, but we still hope that it can do help to the research of vague language and provide good suggestion for the diplomats and English learners.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Since vague language is a broad and fruitful area of language study, with considerable potential for further work, in this thesis, there are still some limitations as follows:.

(1) As far as the materials are concerned, they can not cover every aspect of diplomatic communications. In other words, to some extent they delimit the requirements of the objectiveness and universality of the collected data.

(2) As we mentioned before, this thesis only deals with a pragmatic analysis of vagueness used in English. In order to get a comprehensive view, a comparative study of both English and Chinese diplomatic vagueness should be handled. If this kind of study were conducted, the research results would be more meaningful.

(3) We have only presented a general view on vagueness in diplomatic discourse, leaving untouched the application of the study to other fields, such as teaching, translating and intercultural communication. As a matter of fact, vagueness constitutes a rich area in

linguistic analysis and further researches of their forms, their frequency and functions in different contexts and cultures present a fascinating and valuable enterprise.

### **Suggestions for Further Study**

The study of vagueness is a field deserving great attention to the efficient communication and the development of linguistics. The study of occurrence of vagueness in different genres may be one of the promising directions, which will need the combination of theory together with practical use. And another potential area may be the study of the psychological origin of vagueness. Moreover, the study of vagueness can be applied to engineering design, the exploration of computer software, even the research of modern science and technology. No doubt, more study awaits further investigation and improvement. For the researchers, certainly, there is a long way to go.

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