Linguistic Ambiguity in News Headlines of Russia-Ukraine War

Benghazi, Amina

(Department of English, University of Tripoli, Libya)
a.al_benghazi@uot.edu.ly

ABSTRACT

This study explores the presence of linguistic ambiguity in a specific register, namely, the news headlines of The Guardian covering the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict from 2023 to 2024. The objectives of the study are to identify instances of ambiguity in the selected headlines, to analyze these ambiguous constructs through Kreidler's model to examine their potential interpretations. The results revealed the presence of 15 ambiguous headlines were categorized according to the model. Within this subset, 5 headlines were lexically ambiguous, 5 exhibited syntactic ambiguity, and 5 were characterized by referential ambiguity. The findings have further demonstrated that syntactic ambiguity of the surface type was serving as a primary catalyst for diplomatic tensions, exacerbating existing conflict, and fostering an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion at the international scale. While the study offers valuable guidance to practitioners of language, helping them gain a deeper understanding of English language ambiguity, further research is still required in this area.

Keywords: ambiguity, news headlines, political news, *The Guardian* newspaper

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة ظاهرة الغموض اللغوي في عناوين الأخبار بصحيفة *الغارديان* التي تناولت الصراع الروسي–الأوكراني خلال عامي **2023** و**2024**. وتهدف إلى رصد مظاهر الغموض وتحليلها وفق نموذج كرايدلر (Kreidler) للكشف عن تفسيراتها المحتملة .كشفت النتائج عن وجود خمسة عشر عنوانًا غامضًا صُنِّفت بالتساوي إلى غموض معجمي ونحوي ومرجعي .كما أظهرت أن الغموض النحوي السطحي كان العامل الرئيس في تأجيج التوترات الدبلوماسية وتعميق حدة الصراع، مما ساهم في تعزيز مناخ الشك وانعدام الثقة على المستوى الدولي. وتؤكد الدراسة أن نتائجها تُسهم في توسيع فهم الباحثين لظاهرة الغموض في اللغة الإنجليزية، وتدعو إلى مزيد من الدراسات المستقبلية لاستكشاف أبعادها في الخطاب الإعلامي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الغموض، عناوين الأخبار، أخبار سياسية، صحيفة الغارديان

Introduction

A dialogue occurs between two interlocutors: the speaker, who utters the linguistic expression, and the addressee, who receives it. What is expected from this reciprocal speaker-hearer relationship is to attain a mutual understanding of the utterances. Nevertheless, there are certain situations in which dialogues do not conclude with utter comprehension of the intended message due to issues related to linguistic structures and their previous knowledge. This issue of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of what someone intended to deliver is called ambiguity. Ambiguity is a pervasive aspect of human lives; it permeates various dimensions of human existence, impacting perceptions, interactions, communication decision-making, and the overall complexity of human experience, which makes it an interesting topic to study (Lyons, 1973).

Ambiguity, as a linguistic feature, occurs when a word, phrase, sentence, or utterance can be interpreted in multiple conceivable senses, often with two or more denotations that are unrelated to the one another. These different interpretations can lead to confusion or uncertainty in comprehending the intended message. Moreover, ambiguity is not solely restricted to written communications but can also be found in spoken language. This linguistic feature is frequently present in media, particularly in newspaper headlines, which are considered a fundamental, crucial, and compelling part of journalistic writing (Brône & Coulson, 2010). Editors and news writers advertently or not utilize this linguistic feature to serve various purposes. For instance, to stimulate reader's curiosity, compelling them to engage with the news story in order to disambiguate the intended meaning and gain a deeper understanding of the topic.

On the other hand, the excessive use of ambiguity in newspaper headlines can significantly hinder a reader's motivation to engage further with the article, as it may leave them uncertain about the article’s true focus or message. When headlines are overly vague or ambiguous, readers may feel disoriented or frustrated, ultimately discourage them from pursuing the full article. Additionally, this ambiguity not only has the potential to lead to misinterpretations, particularly when addressing complex or sensitive subjects, such as the

ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, followed by millions of people worldwide, but it also often exacerbates the conflict and reinforces political biases (Reah, 2002). Therefore, the current study aims to identify the linguistic ambiguity utilized in constructing the selected headlines of Russia-Ukraine conflict. Furthermore, it intends to provide an adequate analysis of the conceivable interpretations of the ambiguous selected headlines according to Kreidler's model (2002). The *The Guardian* is considered a leading newspaper not only in the UK but also internationally (The Guardian, 2011).

Relevant Literature Review

Ambiguity is a complex notion that refers to the quality of being open to multiple interpretations or having uncertain meaning (Webster, 1984). It is an inherent feature of language and can be found in various areas of communication. Discussing ambiguity from a linguistic perspective, McArthur (1996, p. 36) introduces ambiguity as the presence of actual or potential uncertainty in meaning, particularly when a word, phrase, or sentence can be interpreted in two ways. Similarly, Kreidler (2002, p. 298) a renowned linguist, whose model on ambiguity is adopted in this study, defines ambiguity as "the condition whereby any linguistic form has two or more interpretations".

When considering ambiguity and vagueness, it is significant to recognize that they are separated from one another. Although Pinkal (1995, p. 19) acknowledges their relationship in language and communication, he argues that they denote different concepts. Ambiguous expressions have a finite but arbitrarily large number of interpretations. This implies that while there are a limited number of potential senses, the range of possible interpretations can be quite extensive. On the other hand, vagueness is characterized by imprecise or uncertain boundaries of meaning.

In Generative Transformational Grammar, the interpretation of ambiguous sentences relies on phrase markers. Linguistic ambiguity is defined as an expression that can accommodate multiple structural analyses (Gillon, 1990). An example of this is the sentence: " Sally saw the man with the telescope". It could be understood in two various ways, depending on the phrase structure: either Sally used a telescope to see the man or Sally saw a man who had a telescope.

Previous Studies

The use of ambiguity in newspaper headlines has been a topic of interest and study among many researchers, journalists, and scholars for a long time and will continue to do so as long as human communication remains relevant (Ungerer, 2000). News headlines, as the first point of contact between readers and news stories, play a significant role in capturing attention, conveying information, and shaping the desired perspectives and ideologies (Ethelb, 2022; 2023).

Newspaper headlines have been extensively examined from various angles due to their unique characteristics and functions. For instance, Williams & Wright (2024) investigated the usage of pronouns by UK government speakers during televised COVID-19 briefings between March and June 2020. The emphasis was on how these pronouns were used to assign responsibility to themselves and others. Every usage of the first-person plural pronoun (1PL) in the research had its referents classified as either "inclusive," "exclusive," or "ambiguous". The claim was that the UK government purposefully made use of the 1PL pronouns to shift responsibility for controlling the virus onto the general public while minimizing their own accountability.

Nurradiatummardiah (2020) examined lexical and structure ambiguity of 137 news headlines in the Al Jakarta newspaper. The researcher analyzed data using Quiroga-Clare's theory (2003). However, only 15 of the headlines contained ambiguity, ten headlines were structurally ambiguous, and five headlines were lexically ambiguous. Moreover, the study indicated that structure ambiguity was more dominant than lexical ambiguity. Contrary to what Fitri (2019) stated, lexical ambiguity was the most dominant in the headlines analyzed. A further study (Khalifa, 2018) specified ambiguity types such as lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic that would motivate readers and prompt them to read the entire content of headline news stories. The results indicated that readers struggled the most with interpreting syntactic ambiguity. Additionally, the study observed that readers showed a greater inclination to continue reading headlines with lexical ambiguity compared with other types of ambiguity.

In an alternative approach, Bucaria (2004) examined various forms of linguistic ambiguity in English, especially focusing on newspaper headlines as a specific register. The results of the study indicated that both

lexical and syntactic ambiguities were significant tools for creating puns in humor.

In today's digital era, online news has largely replaced traditional newspapers. News agencies and social media platforms deliver information online; however misleading headlines often disappoint readers with content that differs significantly. Clickbaits as a deceptive technique that used ambiguity to entice readers into clicking a link, was explored in Galstyan's study (2024).

Previous studies have examined the utilization of ambiguity in news headlines from various angles, including the examination of humorous ambiguity, ambiguity related to global pandemics and the analysis of headlines from a pragmatic standpoint. Furthermore, the presence of ambiguity in clickbaits headlines and its impact on readers of digital media. Conducting a study on linguistic ambiguity and examining its types within a political discourse as the international conflict between Russia and Ukraine holds a significant role in shaping and intensifying political tensions and ideologies.

Methodology

The major concern of the current study is to present an interpretative linguistic analysis of the ambiguous headlines of political news regarding the Russia-Ukraine war. Hence, it is qualitative in nature. It opts to utilize *The Guardian* as a data source due to its accessibility and round the-clock availability.

The online content of *The Guardian* serves as a rich and convenient source for the sake of the current study, catering to global audiences such as well-educated, middle-class, and left-leaning ones. Furthermore, the samples of the study are 15 ambiguous news headlines that specifically target the ongoing conflicts between Russia and Ukraine. Prior to selecting these samples, a set of criteria is carefully adhered to for their inclusion in the study.

Firstly, solely headlines directly and explicitly related to the Russia-Ukraine conflict are included. Secondly, the study limits news headlines to those published on the *The Guardian*'s online platform within a specific timeframe: 2023 and 2024. Lastly, only news headlines that exhibit particular types of ambiguity are subject for analysis. These includes: lexical ambiguity, syntactic ambiguity, referential ambiguity. Consequently, headlines that exhibit other forms of linguistic ambiguity,

such as scope ambiguity, phonetic ambiguity or pragmatic ambiguity, are excluded. Additionally, the collected data are meticulously analyzed through Kreidler model in 2002, which adeptly categorizes linguistic ambiguity into three primarily types: lexical, referential, and syntactic ambiguity. It is noteworthy that the category of syntactic ambiguity is further subdivided into two distinct types: surface syntactic ambiguity and deep syntactic ambiguity. Presented below are various instances of ambiguous headlines, accompanied by their respective analyses.

Analysis and Discussion

Lexical Ambiguity

This section offers a thorough analysis of some of *The Guardian* news headlines featuring lexical ambiguity, exploring how language can carry multiple senses within a single context. It covers various subtypes, such as homonyms, polysemes, and the interplay between figurative and literal meanings, which can further complicate interpretation (Kreidler, 2002).

1. Ukraine defence minster expects Nato <u>guarantee</u> for after war

In headline 1, the verb "guarantee" is an illustration of lexical ambiguity. According to the online Cambridge English Dictionary, the word "guarantee" is polysemous with conceivable meanings, including: (a) to engage, which might imply that Ukraine expects NATO to undertake or promise a path towards membership in the alliance, which includes long-term security assurance and support. (b) it also means to warrant, which might imply that Ukraine expects NATO to provide military and economic assistance to Ukraine after the conflict, assisting in the reconstruction of infrastructure and stabilization of the nation. Or (c) it means to ensure, which could also mean that Ukraine expects NATO to ensure its territorial integrity and security, preventing any further threats or incursions into Ukrainian territory. According to Kreidler's model (2002, p. 52), a word with multiple related meanings can cause confusion and lead to misunderstanding the intended sense. Therefore, readers of various backgrounds and perspectives probably interpret this headline in varied ways and stimulate them to read the whole story to reveal the truth.

2. Interest rate hike just a sticking plaster for Russia's war-fuelled economic woes

In headline 2, lexical ambiguity occurs as a result of a longer linguistic form that has both literal and figurative senses (Kreidler, 2002, p. 56). In the online *Cambridge English Dictionary*, the phrase "sticking plaster" possesses literal and figurative senses. "Sticking plaster" is a British term for band-aid, which could be taken literally as (a) a small adhesive strip used to cover minor cuts or wounds. Or (b) figuratively, "sticking plaster can imply a superficial or temporary fix for massive problems. The latter can emphasize the idea that the interest rate hike may only provide a short-term or surface level remedy for the economic difficulties exacerbated by the ongoing conflict in Russia. Readers of various English levels and political backgrounds probably interpret the term in its literal sense, which is not the right meaning. This kind of ambiguity has the potential of causing confusion and misleading the intended sense of the headline.

3. Putin has become a global bogeyman. Russians must exorcise this <u>ghoul</u>

Headline 3 is also an instance of lexical ambiguity that results from the literal and figurative meanings (Kreidler, 2002, p. 56). Tisdall (2023), the foreign affairs commenter for *The Guardian's Observer,* utilizes the word (noun) "ghoul" to illustrate Putin, which is a striking example of how language shapes public perception. Linguistically, the word "ghoul" embodies a layer of ambiguity, suggesting both literal and figurative senses. In a literal sense the lexicon "ghoul" means an evil spirit or creature that feeds on dead bodies as in the *Cambridge English Dictionary*. However, in a figurative sense, it is used as a metaphor for how the West views Putin's actions.

This term, with its eerie and supernatural connotations, goes beyond describing Putin as a political leader, instead portraying him as frightening and morally corrupt figure. The choice of words in this headline taps into emotions, creating fear and reinforcing a narrative that positions Putin as a global threat. Tisdall's choice of words underscores the role of media rhetoric in influencing how audiences interpret global affairs. Ultimately, this complexity not only have the potential to perplex the readers of *The Guardian* but also to exacerbate

tensions between the involved parties and to deliver embedded messages.

4. ‘Drone sanctions’ burn Russian oil reserves

In headline 4, the verb "burn" is lexically ambiguous in the case of literal and figurative senses (Kreidler, 2002, p. 56). As pointed out in the online *Cambridge English Dictionary*, the word "burn" can denote (a) physical harm, damage, or destruction caused by fire or (b) the experience of emotional or financial harm. In the context of the headline, this ambiguity allows for dual interpretations. On one hand, it can be interpreted literally, suggesting that drones are actively causing physical destruction by setting Russian oil reserve on fire. On the other hand, it can be interpreted figuratively, implying that Russia oil reserves are suffering negative consequences or depletion due to sanctions associated with the drones.

The ambiguity of the term "burn" thus creates a layer of interpretative complexity, requiring readers to engage with the broader context to ascertain whether the damage described is physical or metaphorical. This highlights the subtle interplay between language and meaning in journalistic discourse, where a single word can evoke multiple dimensions of understanding, leading readers to perplexity or misinterpretation.

5. Mourning for ‘Ghosts of Kyiv’ fighter pilot

Headline 5 also illustrates lexical ambiguity due to the phrase "Ghosts of Kyiv" which possesses literal and figurative meanings (Kreidler, 2002, p.56). The phrase "Ghosts of Kyiv" can literally be interpreted as (a) a spectral manifestation of a deceased individual that is thought to be visible or evident to the living in Kyiv, or (b) it can figuratively be interpreted as the spirit of Ukrainian resistance and bravery, transcending mere moral identity to represent the enduring courage and determination of the Ukrainian people in the face of war. This news headline with its former and latter interpretations has the potential to perplex readers who do not have political knowledge and are unaware of the events that are taking place in 2022. This lack of context may

result in misunderstanding of the significance behind these interpretations.

Syntactic Ambiguity

The subsequent paragraphs are thorough analysis of some of the news headlines with syntactic ambiguity. They cover various subtypes, such as surface structure ambiguity occurs where the potential clustering of words in various constructions leads to multiple interpretation, whereas deep structure ambiguity occurs where a single sequence of words conveys more than possible meaning (Kreidler, 2002).

6. <u>Russian missiles and drones</u> target Odesa

Headline 6 illustrates another instance of ambiguity, which is the syntactic one as pointed out in Kreidler's model (2002, p. 169). It occurs when words can group together in various constructions; it gives rise to surface syntactic ambiguity, as in the "Russian missiles and drones" is structurally ambiguous in the case of a coordinate head with one modifier. The phrase "Russian missiles and drones" can be interpreted in two ways: as (a) [Russian] [missiles and drones], suggesting that Odesa is targeted by missiles and drones both coming from Russia. Or (b) [Russian missiles] and [drones], can imply that Odesa is targeted by Russian missiles, and the drones possibly to be of any other countries that support the Russian war on Ukraine. These dual interpretations have the potential to mislead readers and provoke intense reactions. They may cause confusion and fuel controversy, particularly among audiences with differing political perspectives. This ambiguity can lead to escalate tensions, as some may interpret the message as suggesting that a foreign nation is actively supplying drones to Russia. Therefore, such ambiguity can spark diplomatic disputes, exacerbate existing conflict, and create an environment of mistrust and suspicion on the international stage.

7. Zelenskiy discusses grain corridor and security in Odesa with Macron

Headline 7 represents surface syntactic ambiguity arising from the phrase structure "grain corridor and security." as a coordinate head with one modifier (Kreidler, 2002, p. 169). This headline may confuse

readers and lead to two varied meanings regarding how security is connected to the grain corridor. It can be interpreted as (a) [grain] [corridor and security]; the grain corridor and grain security as one entity. Alternatively, (b) as [grain corridor] and [security], the grain corridor and security as separated entities. The former interpretation suggests a specific geographical area or path designed for transporting or distributing grains. Security in this context involves safeguarding the corridor and ensuring the safe transportation of grain. In the latter interpretation, the phrase addresses broader security issues such as national security, food security, and cybersecurity, which are not directly related to the protection of grain transportations but encompass a wider range of security concerns. Readers who have interest in the affairs of Ukraine might encounter confusion or misinterpret the news headline, possibly leading to a wrong interpretation.

8. Why are Indian and Nepali men ending up on the frontline in Ukraine?

Headline 8 has also surface syntactic ambiguity in the phrase "the Indian and Nepali men" which features a head with a coordinate modifier (Kreidler, 2002, p. 169). Therefore, it can be interpreted in dual varied ways: as (a) [Indian and Nepali] [men], this structure suggests that both nationalities (Indian and Nepali) collectively describe the group of men. Or as (b) [Indian] and [Nepali men], this structure refers to distinct groups of Nepali men and possibly individuals of Indian nationalities, who may not necessarily to be men but might include individuals of other genders; they might be young ones or teenagers, who are positioned on the front lines fighting for Ukraine. Ambiguity in this headline can also escalate the conflict between the two parties if they are misinterpreted, especially the genders from Indian nationality.

9. Mike Johnson unveils complex plan for Israel and Ukraine aid as pressure rises

Headline 9 exemplifies the surface syntactic ambiguity of a head with a coordinate modifier (Kreidler, 2002, p. 169). The phrase "Israel and Ukraine aid" can be interpreted in two varied ways: (a) it can be

understood as [Israel and Ukraine] [aid], this structure highlights that Mike Johnson, US speaker, reveals a comprehensive plan to assist both Israel and Ukraine. Or, (b) it can be understood as [Israel] and [Ukraine aid] in this structure, Mike Johnson presents a strategy to support Ukraine, with Israel included in the plan or agenda but not specifically for assistance.

This news headline with its dual conceivable interpretations not only risks escalating tensions between Russia and Ukraine, with potential U.S. involvement, but also impacts the ongoing conflict on Palestine, potentially uniting the entire Arab world against the U.S. due to its support for Israel. Therefore, such news headline prompts readers to explore the entire story for clarity and better understanding of its intended message.

Referential Ambiguity

The subsequent paragraphs are thorough analysis of the news headlines with referential ambiguity. They cover various subtypes such as indefinite referring expression, anaphora, pronoun "you", and phrase that includes the word "every". These ambiguous elements can contribute to confusion and misinterpretation of the intended message (Kreidler, 2002).

10. Russian oil facility on fire after Ukrainian drone strikes

Headline 10 is also syntactically ambiguous of inner and outer modifiers, which is a result of surface structure ambiguity (Kreidler, 2002, p. 170). In the phrase "Russian oil facility", "Russian" is the outer modifier, "oil" is the inner modifier, and "facility" is the "head" which might be understood in dual varied ways: either as (a) [Russian] [oil facility], this structure can imply that an oil facility owned by Russia is on fire after strikes conducted by Ukraine. Alternatively (b) as [Russian oil] [facility] which can imply that a facility that deals specifically with Russian oil is on fire. A news headline as this one with dual interpretations can serve as a powerful tool to captivate readers and intrigue them enough to explore the entire article to understand the intended message.

11. The monster is acting against his creator, EU foreign policy chief says of Prigozhin mutiny

Headline 11 illustrates an additional category of ambiguity known as referential ambiguity. This type is distinct from lexical and syntactic ambiguity (Kreidler, 2002, p. 145). In this news headline the ambiguity arises from the use of the anaphora, where it is unclear whether the personal pronoun "his" refers to (a) the Prigozhin mutiny, (b) the Russian President himself, (c) or another unspecified entity in the headline. Furthermore, the inclusion of the word "monster" further exacerbates the ambiguity and complicates the comprehension of the intended message, depicting the monster as being created by human entity that opposes it. Therefore, readers who are not educated politically and regularly follow the news of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine might not correctly understand it.

12. Russia's power games are a wake-up call for Britain: our democracy is precious – and fragile

Headline 12 is also another instance of referential ambiguity emerges from unclear anaphora, where personal pronouns can potentially refer to either of two preceding expressions (Kreidler, 2002, p. 145). In this headline, the ambiguity arises from the pronoun "our" in the phrase "our democracy is precious and fragile" stems from the lack of specificity the exact entity to which our refers. Interpretation (a) as UK democracy, if "our" is understood as referring to Britain, the statement suggests that the democracy of Britain is at stake and being described as both precious and fragile. In this interpretation, the headline implies that Russia's actions are highlighting vulnerabilities within Britain. Interpretation (b) as Global Democracy or Russia's Democracy, Alternatively, if "our" is understood in abroad sense or even specifically referring to Russia's democracy, the headline takes on a varied meaning. In this case, Russia's actions are serving as a reminder of this fact to the international community. This headline might not only perplex readers, but also be perceived as a threat to Britain for supporting Ukraine.

13. US Senate advances wartime aid package for Ukraine and Israel

According to Kreidler's model (2002, p. 150), this headline depicts referential ambiguity as it arises due to four reasons; one of them is when an indefinite referring expression might be a particular one or not. This indefinite referring expression is considered ambiguous because it might refer to a specific reference in the mind of readers. In other words, "aid package" encompasses diverse forms of assistance, including (a) humanitarian, (b) financial, (c) food, or (d) military aid. In such context, if readers of various perspectives perceive this primarily as military support, it has the potential to escalate war between the two parties, and also encourage Russia to take a stance against the US Senate, and heighten tension among the involved countries.

14. House approves $61bn aid for Ukraine—what we know so far, and what happens next

Headline 14 demonstrates another instance of referential ambiguity which is the indefinite referring expression with specific referent or not (Kreidler, 2002, p. 150). The word "House" in the above headline is ambiguous due to it may refer to number of referents in the mind of the reader. To explain further, the word "house" can denote varied legislative bodies depending on the news stories. Therefore, readers may interpret it as (a) the house of the United States of the representatives, the lower chamber of the US Congress; (b) the house of the United States of Senators, which is the upper chamber of the US Congress; (c) the White House; or (d) the house of parliament in another country approves aid to Ukraine. Readers with diverse political backgrounds probably find themselves uncertain about the intended meaning of this news headline.

15. Zelenskiy: 'You say time is money. For us, time is our life'

Headline 15 illustrates referential ambiguity due to the utilization of the pronoun "you," which can be generally or specifically (Kreidler, 2002, p. 151) leading to multiple conceivable interpretations: (a) Zelenskiy probably uses the pronoun "you" to indicate west countries generally stressing the significance of time to the lives of the Ukrainian population, highlighting their crucial role in the intervention of the war.

Alternatively, (b) Zelenskiy probably uses the pronoun "you" specifically to indicate someone that is sitting in front of him (interviewer) as a response to their claim. Both the former and latter interpretations have the protentional to perplex readers of *The Guardian* in determining the intended meaning.

Discussion

The analysis above demonstrated that linguistic ambiguity in news reporting significantly had the potential in influencing audience perception and interpretation of the news by providing multiple meanings for each ambiguous headline according to Kreidler model (2002).

In terms of lexical ambiguity, it was observed that polysemous words-those with multiples related senses-were employed in the selected headlines. For instance, the verb "guarantee" in the first headline with its multiple interpretations. Another form of lexical ambiguity identified was the utilization of terms or phrases with both literal and figurative meanings. In specific instances, it was evident that journalists or newsmakers, whether deliberately or not, select terms with dual interpretations to convey implicit messages or intensify the portrayal of ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. For example, the lexicon nouns: "ghoul", and the verb "burn" besides the phrases "sticking plaster", and "Ghosts of Kyiv" in the second, and fifth headlines respectively were all employed for their metaphorical use. This technique enhanced the perception of tension, specifically in political discourse, where symbolic and metaphorical language subtly reinforced narratives of escalation or hostility between opposing parties. It was noteworthy that the previous analysis did not unveil any instance of lexical ambiguity stemming from homonymy.

Furthermore, the prior analysis of the selected ambiguous headlines demonstrated the occurrence of syntactic ambiguity with its two subtypes: surface structure ambiguity and deep structure ambiguity, as proposed by Kreidler (2002). On one hand, the surface structure ambiguity, how words cluster together in distinct ways within the same utter. For instance, a coordinate head with a single modifier as in headline six with the phrase "Russian missiles and drones", and headline

seven with the phrase "grain corridor and security". A head with a coordinate modifier also one of the forms of surface structure ambiguity that depicted in headline eight with "Indian and Nepali men", and headline nine with the phrase "Israel and Ukraine aid". Nonetheless, only one ambiguous headline illustrated with inner and outer modifiers as in headline ten with the phrase "Russian oil facility". Based on the analysis outlined above, this type of ambiguity did not merely have the possibility of perplexing readers by allowing for various interpretations depending on how the components were understood in relation to one another but it was also the main source of sparking diplomatic disputes, exacerbating existing conflicts, and contributing to the creation of environment of mistrust and suspicion on the international scale. It was also important to note that the previous analysis did not reveal any instance of surface structure ambiguity stemming from a complement and modifier, two complements or the use of certain function words such as, "only" or "not" which might modify different parts of the sentence, leading to multiple interpretations.

On the subject of referential ambiguity, it arose from four main types: Firstly, unclear anaphora, where the personal pronouns were used without a clear indication of which antecedent they referred to. For instance, the personal pronoun "his" in headline eleven and "our" headline twelve. Secondly, the utilization of the pronoun "you," in headline fifteen which could be understood generally or specifically leading to multiple interpretations. Thirdly, the use of an indefinite referring expression could be a particular one or not as "aid package" in headline thirteen and "house" in the headline fourteen. These three subtypes of referential ambiguity were particularly problematic in the selected headlines, where the need for brevity often limited the context required to clarify these references. Moreover, it was worth mentioning that the fourth subtype of referential ambiguity, where a noun phrase containing the word "every" could have either a distributed or collective reference, was not found (Kreidler, 2002).

Conclusion

This study offered a thorough analysis of the utilization of linguistic ambiguity in reporting Russia-Ukraine war. The findings underscored the

crucial role of syntactic ambiguity of surface type in shaping public narratives and influencing how complex geopolitical events were interpreted. The results aligned with prior research, notably Nurradiatummardiah's 2020 study, which, grounded in Quiroga-Clare's theoretical framework, had identified syntactic ambiguity as a central linguistic phenomenon utilized in headlines. Likewise, Khalifa's 2018 analysis had highlighted the prevalence of syntactic ambiguity, while Maouf's 2021 study had highlighted its effectiveness in engaging readers through humor and emotional appeal. Prior linguistic analyses of conflict reporting (Mouzughi & Ethelb, 2024) had demonstrated that metaphorical framing and translation strategies often reflect ideological positions and shape readers' perceptions.

This study further suggested that journalists or news writers had the potential to deliberately employed syntactic ambiguity to craft layered, multifaceted messages that could shape public perceptions on Russia and its president "Putin". Such use of ambiguity had the potential to exacerbate tensions in international conflicts. Although lexical and referential ambiguity were also observed in the analyzed news headlines, they appeared to have played a more supplementary role, adding complexity to discourse. Importantly, the study uncovered the overt bias evident in certain headlines from *The Guardian*, that reported on Russia-Ukraine war. This bias has been evident in the deliberate framing of headlines that appeared to favor Ukraine while simultaneously attempting to smear Putin's reputation and provoke negative sentiment against him. Such framing reflected a broader agenda to influence public opinion and deepen societal divisions. This partiality had significantly impacted audience perceptions and had undermined the core principles of journalistic integrity, including objectivity and impartiality. In reporting sensitive and polarizing topics such as the ongoing conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, it had been essential to maintain balanced and unbiased coverage to preserve the credibility of public discourse and ensure the accurate dissemination of information.

Ultimately, these findings provided valuable insights into how language had been used as a powerful tool to influence perceptions and construct perspectives within the complex realm of global geopolitics. The study results also offered a valuable guidance to students of theoretical

linguistics and translators, helping them gain a deeper understanding of English language ambiguity.

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