

Linguistic Vagueness in UN Resolutions: A Comparison Between Security Council Resolutions Relating to the Iranian Nuclear Crisis and the Second Gulf War

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Abstract

This paper sets out to investigate patterns of linguistic vagueness in United Nations Security Council resolutions. In particular, the study aims to tease out whether the use of strategic vagueness has contributed to the breakout of the 2002-2003 Gulf war instead of leading to a diplomatic settlement of the controversies, and whether similar patterns have emerged in resolutions addressing other international political crises. The study presents a comparative analysis between a corpus of UN Security Council resolutions relating to the Second Gulf War and a corpus of resolutions concerning the 2010 Iranian nuclear crisis, focussing on two specific sections of the text type under scrutiny: preambulatory and operative clauses. The analysis shows how vague wording can be used to lead to intentionally biased interpretations of the law, as in the case of the Iraq War when vague formulations enabled the US to justify its military intervention, or to mitigate international tensions, as it is supposedly the case with the Iranian nuclear crisis.

Key-words: discourse analysis, institutional discourse, vagueness in Security Council resolutions.

1. Introduction

This work focuses on patterns of linguistic vagueness in UN Security Council resolutions. Through a comparative analysis between a first corpus relating to the Second Gulf War and a second one relating to the Iranian nuclear crisis, this study investigates to what extent vagueness can be used strategically for an intentionally biased interpretation of the law, as it happened in the case of the Iraq War,

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or to mitigate international tensions, as is supposedly the case with the Iran nuclear crisis.

Institutions such as the UN are constantly faced with the need to overcome cultural divergences between their member countries through political compromise. In an attempt to meet these requirements, UN diplomatic texts may use vague formulations extensively (Šarčević 1997; Fjeld 2001; Caliendo 2003; 2004; Wodak and Meyer 2009).

The use of vague expressions in law and diplomacy is generally accepted and often considered as unavoidable to persuade the different interlocutors involved (Frade 2005: 133) and reach compromise (Šarčević 1997). However, excessive vagueness may not necessarily produce positive effects, to the point that Endicott (2005: 27) believes it to be “repugnant to the very idea of making a norm”. Above all, intentional vagueness might lead to underinformativeness (Sorensen 1989: 175) and to possibly dangerous manipulations of language for personal intents.

In light of the above, starting from the hypothesis that the use of strategic vagueness in Security Council resolutions relating to Iraq contributed to the breakout of the 2002-2003 Second Gulf War instead of a diplomatic settlement of the controversies (De Rooij 2003; Bennis 2002), this paper aims to understand whether the same linguistic resources expressing vagueness could also be detected in resolutions on the 2010 Iranian nuclear crisis, revealing a relation between the choice of vague formulations and an overall intent of using them as a political strategy. As the analysis will show, in the case of Iran the UN seems to be determined to express a firmer and more authoritative position towards the country, for instance by repeatedly expressing its *serious concern*, plausibly to avoid the consequences that ambiguous wording had triggered in the case of Iraq, while trying to solve the issue diplomatically.

2. Brief historical notes on the 2010 Iranian nuclear issue

In his “State of the Union Address” (January 29, 2002), the then President Bush warned that the proliferation of long-range missiles developed by Iran, along with North Korea and Iraq, constituted an act of “terrorism” and posed a “threat” to the United States.

Soon after this speech had been held, the UN Security Council issued its first post 9/11 resolutions against Iraq. These were criticised by the international community as their wording did not convey the UN's authoritativeness, which would have been necessary to find a diplomatic and international solution to the crisis instead of leading to military intervention in Iraq.

Conversely, the Iranian case, which will also be analysed in this paper, was framed within a different political and diplomatic context. Since the late 1960s, Iran's nuclear programme has been receiving technological and technical support from other countries (Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control 2004). Today Iran is an area of "serious concern" for the UN, even if there have been no explicit reports that the country has worked on weaponisation of uranium or plutonium. This country has been subjected to several rounds of Security Council sanctions in relation to its nuclear programme between July 2006 and March 2008 (cf. S/RES/1696(2006), S/RES/1737(2006), S/RES/1747(2007), S/RES/1803(2008) and S/RES/1929 (2010)).

Notwithstanding UN's diplomatic attempts and Ahmadinejad's willingness to guarantee diplomatic cooperation, it has been demonstrated that Bush's position might have been to go to war independently of Iran's breach of UN resolutions (cf. STRATCOM 2005). In August 2005, Philip Giraldi, a former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer, stated that the American Vice President Dick Cheney had instructed the United States Strategic Command (STRATCOM) to prepare:

a contingency plan to be employed in response to another 9/11-type terrorist attack on the United States [including] a large-scale air assault on Iran employing both conventional and tactical nuclear weapons [...] not conditional on Iran actually being involved in the act of terrorism directed against the United States.

This means that, notwithstanding Iran's attempts to comply with UN resolutions, President Bush seemed intent on not taking these efforts into account.

¹ Mouhamed Ahmadinejad was the Iranian President at the time this paper was being written.

Today, the US Obama administration seems to be directed towards a firmer though diplomatic solution to Iran's breach of UN resolutions. Several bills to implement UN resolutions relating to Iran have been issued, one of which was passed becoming P.L. 111-195, expressing the intention of using all diplomatic means contemplated by the UN Charter to end the controversies, above all economic prohibitions and IAEA inspections.

Against this political and historical background, the following sections will focus on the linguistic features that characterise UN resolutions on Iraq and Iran, also taking into consideration the historical and legal context within which they are framed. The contrastive analysis between the two sets of resolutions on Iraq and Iran will highlight differences, but also similarities, in their formulation.

More specifically, UN resolutions will be investigated with reference to two sections called 'preambulatory' and 'operative' phrases. The former generally recite the considerations upon which an action is taken, an opinion expressed, or a directive given; operative clauses instead indicate the actions that the subject recommends or will take.

3. Corpus and theoretical framework

This section describes the two *ad-hoc* corpora on which the qualitative and quantitative analysis is based, as well as the theoretical framework of the study.

A first corpus includes the fourteen UN resolutions relating to the Second Gulf War issued by the Security Council (henceforth 'SCRIraq'). The time-span of these documents ranges from November 2001 to June 2004, starting from the first resolution issued against Iraq following September 11, 2001 (S/RES/1382(2001)) to the resolution establishing an *interim* government in Iraq (S/RES/1546(2004)). The choice of the year 2001 as the initial date is not fortuitous. During the "State of the Union Address" held on January 29, 2002, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in New York City, the then President Bush's "axis of evil" speech against Iraq, Iran and North Korea implicitly hinted at the connection between the attacks and these countries.

The second corpus (henceforth referred to as 'SCRIran') is composed of the eight UN Security Council resolutions issued

against Iran in the time-span from July 2006, with the first resolution relating to Iran after 2001, to the most recent, S/RES/2159(2014), dated June 9, 2014.

TABLE 1
Synopsis of the SCRIraq corpus (Tot. 14,757 tokens)

<i>Resolution</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Tokens</i>	<i>Resolution</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Tokens</i>
S/RES/1382	29/11/01	514	S/RES/1476	24/04/03	119
S/RES/1409	14/05/02	761	S/RES/1483	22/05/03	3,223
S/RES/1441	08/11/02	2,026	S/RES/1490	03/07/03	310
S/RES/1443	25/11/02	216	S/RES/1500	14/08/03	172
S/RES/1447	04/12/02	503	S/RES/1511	16/10/03	1,724
S/RES/1454	30/12/02	498	S/RES/1518	24/11/03	307
S/RES/1472	28/03/03	1,491	S/RES/1546	08/06/04	2,903

TABLE 2
Synopsis of the SCRIran corpus² (Tot. 16,747 tokens)

<i>Resolution</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Tokens</i>	<i>Resolution</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Tokens</i>
S/RES/1696	31/07/06	1,006	S/RES/1835	27/09/08	224
S/RES/1737	27/12/06	3,371	S/RES/1887	24/09/09	2,269
S/RES/1747	23/03/07	1,676	S/RES/1929	09/06/10	4,964
S/RES/1803	03/03/08	2,671	S/RES/2159	09/06/14	566

The above corpora only include Security Council resolutions and not General Assembly resolutions, since the former are the only UN resolutions having binding force upon Member states.

The study combines qualitative and quantitative analysis. As for the quantitative analysis, the study mainly relies on the use of AntConc (2011). Considering the nature of the information sought, automated interrogations are supplemented with manually retrieved data and qualitative analysis.

² Although the two corpora differ slightly in size, this did not affect the outcome of the quantitative analysis.

The theoretical framework of the study draws upon Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse which views language as a form of social practice enacting, legitimising, reproducing or challenging relations of power and dominance in society (Fairclough 1995). More specifically within the framework of CDA, this study was inspired by Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (Wodak 2001), as it takes into account the social and political background in which discursive events are embedded, to make "opaque structures of power relations and ideologies manifest" (Wodak and Reisigl 2000: 17). To minimise the risk of critical bias and politicising, the Discourse-Historical Approach follows the principle of "triangulation" (Wodak and Meyer 2009), that is to say it includes an analysis of the historical, political, sociological and/or psychological dimensions in the analysis and interpretation of a specific discursive event. This approach has been crucial to go beyond a mere linguistic analysis of UN resolutions and to examine the contextual elements involved in their drafting, as it emphasises the strong correlation between linguistic and extralinguistic aspects involved in discourse analysis. Our hypothesis is that the UN deliberately avoids a strict guidance rule, expressing its institutional feelings and authority through vague preambulatory and operative phrases.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Analysis of Security Council resolutions as a text type

According to the "UN Editorial Manual" (United Nations 1983: 167), UN Security Council resolutions are composed of a single long sentence, divided into three sections, as illustrated in the example below: (i) the 'Addressee or Subject', which is the name of the body issuing the resolution (e.g. the Security Council) and serves as the subject of the sentence; (ii) the preambulatory clauses, which begin with a verb in the present continuous tense or past participle (e.g. 'Urging' or 'Urged'); and (iii) the operative clauses, which begin with a verb in the present tense (e.g. 'Urges'). It is worth highlighting that preambulatory and operative phrases are characterised by different verbal tenses and that the same verb

can take on a preambulatory or operative role according to its verb tense.

To the best of our knowledge, there are no official classifications of the wording used by the Security Council for preambulatory and operative phrases. Not even the “United Nations Editorial Manual” provides a detailed description. These phrases seem to be shared knowledge among UN members, without official recording of their definitions and use. This might pose a risk for the international community, as UN phrases could be interpreted in different ways depending on the needs/intentions of the Member state involved in a dispute. A list of some UN preambulatory and operative phrases has been provided by the Model United Nations (MUN), a UN-supported educational simulation of the UN bodies used to introduce students to the world of diplomacy, negotiation and decision making. Tables 3 and 4 below include the lists provided by MUN to their students:

TABLE 3
Preambulatory phrases used in Security Council resolutions (Model United Nations)

Acknowledging	Affirming	Alarmed by	Approving	Referring
Aware of	Believing	Bearing in mind	Confident	Reminding
Congratulating	Contemplating	Convinced	Declaring	Seeking
Deeply concerned	Deeply conscious	Deeply convinced	Deeply disturbed	Taking into account
Deeply regretting	Deploing	Desiring	Emphasising	Taking into consideration
Expecting	Fulfilling	Fully alarmed	Fully aware	Taking note
Fully believing	Further developing	Further recalling	Guided by	Viewing with appreciation
Having adopted	Having considered	Having examined	Having studied	Welcoming
Noting further	Noting with appreciation	Noting with approval	Noting with deep concern	
Noting with regret	Noting with satisfaction	Observing	Pointing out	
Reaffirming	Realizing	Recalling	Recognising	

TABLE 4
Operative clauses used in Security Council resolutions (Model United Nations)

Accepts	Affirms	Approves	Asks	Strongly affirms
Authorises	Calls for	Calls upon	Condemns	Strongly condemns
Congratulates	Confirms	Declares accordingly	Demands	Strongly urges
Deplores	Designates	Encourages	Endorses	Suggests
Expresses its appreciation	Expresses its hope	Further invites	Further proclaims	Supports
Further recommends	Further requests	Further resolves	Hopes	Trusts
Invites	Proclaims	Proposes	Recommends	Transmits
Regrets	Requests	Resolves	Seeks	Urges

In 2009, Gruenberg, a Law Fellow at Legacy Heritage Fellowship, put forward an important taxonomy of preambulatory and operative phrases, which were classified into negative and positive emotive and instructive wording, as showed in Table 5 below:

TABLE 5
Emotive and instructive words from weakest to strongest (adapted from Gruenberg 2009: 487)

<i>Emotive words from weakest to strongest</i>	<i>Instructive words from weakest to strongest</i>
Concerned, Grieved, Deplored, Condemned, Alarmed, Shocked, Indignant	Decide, Call upon, Recommend, Request, Urge, Warn, Demand

The above research is an important step, since the UN lacked a classification of its official wording. However, Gruenberg’s taxonomy is rather limited and circumscribed to a negative and positive dichotomy. It is the purpose of this study to put forward a broader taxonomy for the analysis of the corpora under scrutiny.

For this reason, after conducting an empirical content analysis of all the preambulatory phrases included in the two corpora under examination, the authors of this study deemed necessary to elaborate a more comprehensive classification of formulations, which has allowed classifying all the preambulatory phrases found in the corpora into five groups, i.e. expressing: (1) negative emotive language, (2) positive feelings, (3) citations from past legislative acts, (4) assertiveness and (5) emphasis on a topic. A comprehensive analysis of their linguistic patterns was subsequently conducted.

Conversely, the operative phrases found in the two corpora were classified into two groups, depending on whether they were describing actions to be undertaken by the UN or instructing the addressee/s of the resolution to perform an action. This taxonomy will be presented on a scale from weaker to stronger, adopting Gruenberg's (2009: 487) classification.

4.2. Contrastive analysis of preambulatory and operative phrases used in SCRIraq and SCRIran

The Security Council uses a range of expressions to describe its institutional feelings towards the addressee of a resolution. In this study, it has been noticed that phrases conveying emotive language to express institutional feelings are mainly used in the preambulatory section of UN resolutions, as can be seen in Table 6 below.

The data reported in Table 6 above confirm that positive and negative emotive language is mainly used in the preambulatory phrases of the two corpora. Given that preambulatory phrases have the function to explain the considerations upon which an action is taken and opinions are given, this is why institutional feelings tend to concentrate in this part of resolutions. Operative clauses, on the other hand, usually indicate the actions that the subject will take or recommends to take; for this reason this section tends to be characterised by instructive phrases rather than emotive language. However, phrases conveying emotive language only represent a limited part of all the preambulatory phrases in the two corpora (21.9% in SCRIraq and 27.9% in SCRIran, for a total of 29.2% of all preambulatory phrases used in the two corpora). This means that the range of institutional

feelings expressed in the preambulatory phrases of Security Council resolutions cannot be limited to a mere positive/negative dichotomy and that a broader taxonomy is needed. For this reason, the authors of this study have put forward a fivefold taxonomy based on preambulatory phrases expressing: negative emotive language, positive feelings, assertiveness, emphasis on an issue and citations of past legislation, as will be illustrated in the following paragraphs.

TABLE 6
Preambulatory and operative phrases conveying emotive language in SCRIran and SCRIraq

<i>Preambulatory phrases</i>	<i>% (n = 93)</i>	<i>Operative phrases</i>	<i>% (n = 93)</i>
Concerned	12.9%	Acknowledges with appreciation	2.1%
Deploing	7.5%	Commends	4.3%
Expressing its concern	1.07%	Deplores	1.07%
Gravely concerned	1.07%	Expresses deep sympathy	1.07%
Noting with serious concern	10.7%	Expresses its appreciation	1.07%
Noting with concern	3.2%	Regrets	1.07%
Recalling its serious concern	1.07%	Welcomes	15.05%
Regretting	1.07%		
Commending	4.3%		
Encouraging	1.07%		
Expressing it appreciation	1.07%		
Looking forward to	1.07%		
Noting with interest	1.07%		
Supporting	2.1%		
Welcoming	24.7%		
TOTAL	74.9%	TOTAL	25.8%

4.2.1. Comparison between emotive wording used in preambulatory phrases in SCRIran and SCRIraq

As can be seen in Table 7 below, the comparison between the two corpora revealed that most preambulatory clauses in SCRIran express negative feelings (16.1%) rather than positive ones (8%), compared to the SCRIraq corpus (9.9% and 8.5% respectively). This difference might be due to the international community's high level of concern over Iran, mainly because the majority of these preambulatory phrases express preoccupation for the impossibility to understand whether Iran is using nuclear energy for non-peaceful purposes.

TABLE 7
Preambulatory phrases containing negative emotive wording in SCRIraq and SCRIran

Phrase	SCRIraq % (n = 141)	SCRIran % (n = 136)
Concerned	4.9%	3.6%
Deploring	3.5%	1.4%
Expressing its concern	0.7%	0%
Gravely concerned	0%	0.7%
Noting with serious concern	0%	7.3%
Noting with concern	0%	2.2%
Recalling its serious concern	0%	0.7%
Regretting	0.7%	0%
TOTAL	9.9%	16.1%

The most common negative phrase used in SCRIran is “noting with serious concern”, which is completely absent in SCRIraq. ‘Concerned’ is the weakest emotive phrase in Gruenberg’s (2009: 487) classification of emotive wording from weakest to strongest (cf. Table 5). This expression is used to introduce issues that the Security Council must take under examination.

- (1) *Noting with serious concern* that the IAEA Director-General’s report of 27 February 2006 (GOV/2006/15) lists a number of outstanding

issues and concerns on Iran's nuclear programme [...]. (S/RES/1696 (2006))³ [SCRIran]

- (2) *Concerned* by the proliferation risks presented by the Iranian nuclear programme [...]. (S/RES/1696 (2009)) [SCRIran]

Another negative emotive phrase used in SCRIran is “deploring”, which is also the second most frequently used in SCRIraq, and the only other negative emotive phrase mentioned in Gruenberg's (2009: 487) classification that is used in the two corpora. When the verb ‘deplore’ is used in the phrase, the addressee of the resolution is perceived as violating customary international law. Two examples are provided below from the two corpora:

- (3) *Deploring* further that Iraq repeatedly obstructed immediate, unconditional, and unrestricted access to sites designated by the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) [...]. S/RES/1441 (2002) [SCRIraq]
- (4) Recalling the latest report by the IAEA Director-General (GOV/2007/8) of 22 February 2007 and *deploring* that, as indicated therein, Iran has failed to comply with resolution 1696 (2006) [...]. (S/RES/1747(2007)) [SCRIran]

A general comparison between the two corpora shows that in SCRIraq negative feelings are not emphasised as much as in SCRIran (9.9 % vs. 16.1%). More specifically, Table 7 above evidences a decrease in the use of more neutral phrases expressing negative institutional feelings in SCRIran, such as “concerned” and “expressing its concern”, as well as an increase in the number of more drastic formulations in which “concerned” is pre-modified by a degree adverb or an adjective, such as “gravely concerned”, “noting with serious concern”, and “recalling its serious concern”. Based on this data, it could be said that the UN seems to express a firmer and more negative position against Iran than against Iraq. This might be due to previous experience with the Iraq case (see Scotto di Carlo 2013; 2014), when vague and weak UN wording had allowed the US to interpret UN resolutions as an authorisation for military intervention. In SCRIraq, even if the UN could have used more assertive phrases to express its stance,

³ In all examples emphasis is added.

it opted for expressions that could be collocated at a lower level of Gruenberg's (2009: 487) scale of gravity.

A second sub-division of preambulatory phrases relates to positive emotive wording, as illustrated in Table 8 below:

TABLE 8
Preambulatory phrases containing positive emotive wording in SCRIraq and SCRIran

<i>Phrase</i>	<i>SCRIraq %</i>	<i>SCRIran %</i>
Commending	1.4%	1.4%
Encouraging	0.7%	0%
Expressing its appreciation	0.7%	0%
Looking forward to	0.7%	0%
Noting with interest	0%	0.7%
Supporting	0%	1.4%
Welcoming	8.5%	8.0%
TOTAL	12.05%	11.6%

Although it can be noticed that the two corpora are characterised by almost the same percentage of phrases expressing positive feelings, such as “commending”, and “welcoming”, it is worth pointing out that the receiver of the institutional message changes across the two corpora. A more fine-grained qualitative analysis of the data emerging from the corpus search showed that, on the one hand, UN's negative institutional feelings are almost always addressing ‘Iraq’ or ‘Iran’ as a state, considering them in breach of preceding resolutions in the case of SCRIraq (e.g. S/RES/1441 (2002)) or of international agreements, such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty, in the case of Iran (e.g. S/RES/1696 (2009)). On the other hand, in SCRIraq the UN always expresses its positive institutional feelings towards the State as a response to the process of post-conflict reconstruction in the country (see ex.(5) and (6) below). In the case of SCRIran, positive wording is used uniquely to refer to: the IAEA (31.5%), which is *commend*[ed] for

its efforts to “resolve outstanding issues relating to Iran’s nuclear programme”; and the five UN permanent States (68.7%), that are *welcomed* for seeking “a negotiated solution” to the issue, and never with reference to the Iranian State:

- (5) *Welcoming* the beginning of a new phase in Iraq’s transition to a democratically elected government [...]. (S/RES/1546(2004)) [SCRIraq]
- (6) *Commending* the IAEA for its efforts to resolve outstanding issues relating to Iran’s nuclear programme in the work plan between the Secretariat of the IAEA and Iran [...]. (S/RES/1803(2008)) [SCRIran]

Thus, while preambulatory phrases used to express positive institutional feelings in the SCRIraq corpus have been used to encourage the official termination of military action in Iraq, in SCRIran they address inspection authorities and Member states other than Iran, which is still considered a major concern for, and by, the international community. Moreover, SCRIraq’s wider range of positive feelings compared to SCRIran can be explained contextually.

4.2.2. Assertiveness and emphasis in UN preambulatory clauses

After an empirical content analysis of all the preambulatory phrases included in the two corpora under examination, it emerged that some preambulatory clauses could not be classified on the basis of Gruenberg’s (2009: 469-511) positive-negative emotive scale, as they convey declarative statements expressing assertiveness or emphasis over an issue. According to Halliday’s (1994: 357) description of statements used to express emphasis or assertiveness, these phrases are used to convey “the highest possible degree of probability, even more than ‘it must be’”. In the case of the UN, statements expressing assertiveness are used in the preambulatory phrases of UN resolutions to express conditions that shall not be questioned. These phrases, listed in Table 9 below, are used by the UN to convey determination regarding an issue.

TABLE 9
Preambulatory phrases expressing assertiveness in SCRIran and SCRIraq

<i>Phrase</i>	<i>SCRIraq %</i>	<i>SCRIran %</i>
Affirming	3.5%	0.7%
Bearing in mind	0%	1.4%
Calling for	0%	1.4%
Calling upon	0%	0.7%
Convinced	4.2%	0%
Determined	4.2%	3.6%
Determining	2.8%	0.7%
Expressing its determination	0%	0.7%
Expressing resolve	0.7%	0%
Expressing the conviction	0%	1.4%
Having regard	0%	1.4%
Resolved	1.4%	0%
Resolving	0%	0.7%
Urging	0.7%	0%
TOTAL/ 141	17.7%	13.2%

Another group of preambulatory phrases give further voice to UN's firmness by expressing emphasis on a specific issue. These phrases are listed in Table 10 below:

TABLE 10
Preambulatory phrases expressing emphasis in SCRIran and SCRIraq

<i>Phrase</i>	<i>SCRIraq %</i>	<i>SCRIran %</i>
Emphasising	0%	5.8%
Noting	8.5%	6.6%
Reaffirming	12.7%	13.9%
Recognizing	7.09%	2.2%
Reiterating	1.4%	2.9%
Reiterating its determination	0%	0.7%
Stressing	4.2%	2.2%
Taking note	2.8%	0.7%
Underlining	2.1%	2.2%
Underscoring	0.7%	0%
TOTAL	39.7%	37.5%

From a quantitative viewpoint, Table 9 reveals only a slightly different number of occurrences of assertive phrases between the two corpora (17.7% in SCRIraq vs. 13.2% in SCRIran).

Also Table 10 shows a similar number of occurrences of emphatic phrases in the two corpora (39.7% in SCRIraq vs. 37.5% in SCRIran). From a first overview, it might seem that while SCRIraq uses a slightly more incisive language, expressing more assertiveness towards Iraq, SCRIran's wording is rather toned-down. However, it is only through an empirical and contextual content analysis of the preambulatory phrases listed in Tables 9 and 10 that the most significant differences between the two corpora can be understood.

The content analysis of the assertive phrases in SCRIran reveals that this corpus presents a more limited number of assertive phrases concerning Iran's non-compliance with UN decisions (13.2% in SCRIran vs. 17.7% in SCRIraq).

- (7) *Reaffirming* its commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the need for all States Party to that Treaty to comply fully with all their obligations [...] (S/RES/1929 (2010)) [SCRIran]

The reason for this more limited number of assertive phrases concerning Iran's non-compliance with UN decisions might be that these resolutions focus more on seeking a diplomatic solution of the crisis rather than a trigger for military action. This is confirmed by the fact that the emphatic phrases used in SCRIran all convey the international community's intention to solve the Iranian nuclear crisis diplomatically, which was not at all expressed in SCRIraq.

- (8) *Emphasizing* the importance of political and diplomatic efforts to find a negotiated solution guaranteeing that Iran's nuclear programme is exclusively for peaceful purposes [...]. (S/RES/1747(2007)) [SCRIran]

As far as SCRIraq is concerned, what seems to emerge from the observation of the preambulatory phrases in context is the intention to emphasise that before the onset of the Second Gulf War Iraq was still considered in "material breach" of previous resolutions related to the First Gulf War. Backing up this argument, SCRIraq presents a high rate of intertextuality, especially with references to resolutions issued during the First Gulf War. This aspect was used by the US and its allies to prove that military action against Iraq was deemed necessary, as a response to its perpetuation of not respecting UN

resolutions (Dinstein 2011: 305). From a linguistic viewpoint, this is evidenced by the use of ‘citation phrases’, listed in Table 11. This group of phrases gives sound legal basis to the resolutions in which they appear by making reference to past legislative acts. In SCRIran, intertextual references are mainly used to cite collateral international documents, i.e. IAEA decisions and the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

TABLE 11
Preambulatory Phrases containing citations of past legislative acts

<i>Phrase</i>	<i>SCRIraq</i>	<i>SCRIran</i>
Acting under Chapter VII of the Charter	9.2%	4.4%
Having considered	0.7%	0%
Recalling	17.2%	16.1%
TOTAL	26.9%	22.05%

- (9) Having considered the report of the Secretary-General of 15 July 2003 (S/2003/715) [...]. (S/RES/ 1382 (2001)) [SCRIraq]
- (10) Recalling the latest report by the IAEA Director-General (GOV/2007/8) of 22 February 2007 and deploring that, as indicated therein, Iran has failed to comply with resolution 1696 (2006) and resolution 1737 (2006) [...]. (S/RES/ 1747 (2007)) [SCRIran]

The citation phrases used in SCRIraq give further support to the hypothesis that the Second Gulf War was actually a continuation of the First Gulf war rather than a response to the New York City 9/11 terrorist attacks (De Rooij 2003; Bennis 2002). This is proved by the fact that SCRIraq is characterised by a prevalence of warnings emphasising Iraq’s continuation of material breach of past UN resolutions, while SCRIran emphasises the international community’s intention to solve the Iranian nuclear crisis diplomatically. Interestingly enough, the contrastive analysis also showed that diplomatic means were never mentioned throughout the SCRIraq corpus.

4.2.3. Comparison between instructive wordings used in operative clauses in SCRIran and SCRIraq

Operative clauses are used to express statements of policy in a resolution, as they indicate the concrete actions that will be taken by

the UN, or to instruct the addressee(s) of the resolution to perform an action. According to Gruenberg (2009: 487), “[t]hese words indicate the amount of authority the Security Council intends to convey to the Entity of each resolution in order to make the Entity recognize the severity of the Subject. The stronger the instructive word, the greater risk an Entity takes by ignoring it”. Following the MUN’s classification of UN operative phrases, the occurrences of operative phrases found in SCRIraq and SCRIran have been classified into two groups: phrases describing actions to be undertaken by the UN (Table 12) and phrases instructing the addressee(s) of the resolution to perform an action (Table 13).

TABLE 12

Operative phrases used for actions to be taken by the Security Council

<i>Phrase</i>	<i>SCRIraq % (n=195)</i>	<i>SCRIran % (n=214)</i>
Acknowledges with appreciation	0%	0.9%
Affirms	0.5%	6.07%
Approves	0.5%	0%
Authorizes	1.5%	0%
Commends	0%	1.9%
Condemns	1.02%	0%
Confirms	0%	0.4%
Decides	26.6%	20.09%
Decides to remain actively seized	0.5%	0.4%
Decides to remain seized	6.6%	2.8%
Declares	0.5%	0.4%
Deplores	0%	0.4%
Determines	1.02%	0%
Directs	2.5%	0.4%
Emphasizes	2.5%	1.8%
Encourages	0.5%	7.9%
Endorses	1.5%	0.4%
Expresses deep sympathy	0.5%	0%
Expresses its appreciation	0.5%	0%
Expresses its determination	0%	1.4%
Expresses its intention	0%	1.4%

(continued on next page)

TABLE 12 (continued from previous page)

<i>Phrase</i>	<i>SCRIraq % (n=195)</i>	<i>SCRIran % (n=214)</i>
Expresses its readiness	1.5%	0%
Expresses the conviction	0%	0.9%
Instructs	0.5%	0%
Notes	5.1%	1.4%
Reaffirms	3.5%	4.6%
Recalls	1.02%	1.4%
Recognizes	2.5%	0%
Re-emphasizes	0.5%	0%
Regrets	0%	0.4%
Reiterates	1.5%	0.9%
Reminds	0.5%	0%
Requires	0%	1.4%
Resolves	0.5%	0%
Stresses	0.5%	2.3%
Supports	1.5%	0%
Takes note	0.5%	0.4%
Underlines	1.02%	6.07%
Undertakes	0%	0.4%
Welcomes	4.1%	2.8%
TOTAL	72.3%	70.5%

TABLE 13

Operative phrases used to instruct a subject to perform an action in SCRIran and SCRIraq

<i>Phrase</i>	<i>SCRIraq % (n=195)</i>	<i>SCRIran % (n=214)</i>
Appeals	2.5%	0%
Calls for	0%	0.4%
Calls on	1.5%	0.4%
Calls upon	6.1%	17.7%
Demands	0.5%	0.9%
Invites	1.02%	0%
Requests	13.3%	7.4%
Urges	2.5%	2.3%
TOTAL	27.6%	29.4%

The most frequent instructive phrases in the corpus were then compared with Gruenberg's scale (2009: 487) presented in Table 5, which classifies operative phrases on a scale from weaker to stronger:

TABLE 14
Instructive words classified from weakest to strongest according to Gruenberg's (2009) scale

<i>Phrase</i>	<i>SCRIraq</i>	<i>SCRIran</i>
Decides	26.6%	20.09%
Call upon	6.1%	17.7%
Recommend	0	0
Request	13.3%	7.4%
Urge	2.5%	2.3%
Warn	0	0
Demand	0.5%	0.5%

The most tentative operative phrase used in both corpora concerning actions to be undertaken by the Security Council is “decides”, as it simply denotes the action of thinking carefully about the different possibilities before making an official or legal judgment. It is the most used operative phrase in SCRIran (26.4%) and in SCRIraq (20.09%). Two examples from the two corpora are provided below:

- (11) *Decides* that, beginning at 0001 hours, Eastern Daylight Time, on 30 May 2002, the funds in the escrow account established pursuant to paragraph 7 of resolution 986 (1995) may also be used to finance the sale or supply to Iraq of those commodities or products that are authorized for sale or supply to Iraq under paragraph 3 above [...]. (S/RES/1409(2002)) [SCRIraq]
- (12) *Decides* that all States shall take the necessary measures to prevent the supply, sale or transfer directly or indirectly from their territories, or by their nationals or using their flag vessels or aircraft to, or for the use in or benefit of, Iran [...]. (S/RES/1737(2006)) [SCRIran]

A specific phrase featuring ‘decides’ is “decides to remain seized of the matter” (6.6% in SCRIraq vs. 2.8% in SCRIran). If present, this phrase is always the last operative phrase of a resolution. It seems

to be used to reassure that the Security Council will consider the topic in the future if necessary. It could also implicitly state that the UN is the only institution holding the right to further decide on the issue, as opposed to any other institution or individual State. This would further confirm the illegitimacy of any unilateral US military intervention.

- (13) 7. Decides that, for the purposes of this resolution, references in resolution 1360 (2001) to the 150-day period established by that resolution shall be interpreted to refer to the 180-day period established pursuant to paragraph 1 above;

8. *Decides to remain seized of the matter.* (S/RES/1382 (2001)) [SCRIraq]

The second most used operative phrase in SCRIran is ‘encourages’ (7.9%), which is almost never used in SCRIraq (0.5%). This phrase is not part of Gruenberg’s taxonomy, as it is a positive instructive wording while his classification only includes negative phrases. This operative phrase is used in SCRIran to spur the IAEA to: continue its action of investigation on nuclear energy used for non-peaceful purposes (31.5%); request Iran’s re-engagement in diplomatic negotiations (31.5%); and encourage other States to cooperate with the IAEA (36.8%).

- (14) *Encourages* the work of the IAEA on multilateral approaches to the nuclear fuel cycle, including assurances of nuclear fuel supply and related measures [...]. (S/RES/1887(2009)) [SCRIran]

Emphasis on seeking a diplomatic solution is further expressed by the third most frequent operative phrases in SCRIran, which are ‘underlines’ and ‘affirms’ (*ex aequo* 6.07%). In SCRIran, it is “affirmed” that Iran has to “take the steps required by the IAEA to build confidence in the exclusively peaceful purpose of its nuclear programme [...]” (S/RES/1737 (2006)). It is also thoroughly “underlined” that although there is a willingness on the part of the international community to find a “diplomatic, negotiated solution” (S/RES/1747(2007)), there is a necessity of the IAEA to continue “its work to clarify all outstanding issues relating to Iran’s nuclear programme” (S/RES/1747(2007)), and “further decisions will be required should such additional measures be necessary” (S/RES/1737(2006)).

As for operative phrases instructing a subject to perform an action, the most frequent in SCRIran is 'call upon' (17.7%). 'Call upon' is the weakest instructive phrase used by the Security Council to ask or demand an entity to engage in an action. In both corpora, this operative phrase is used to convey mild force also for rather delicate and important requests, for instance, when asking all Member states to "exercise vigilance over transactions" with Iran (S/RES/1696 (2006)) and when asking Iran to "act strictly in accordance with the provisions of the Additional Protocol" (S/RES/1737(2006)). In the corpus related to Iraq, Member states were called upon to "respond immediately to the humanitarian appeals of the United Nations" (S/RES/1483 (2003)).

Comparing the results emerging from the analysis of the two corpora on the basis of Gruenberg's scale, it can be said that, from a quantitative viewpoint, SCRIran and SCRIraq are generally characterised by weak operative clauses, such as 'calls upon' (17.7% in SCRIran), and 'requests' (13.3% in SCRIraq) rather than stronger formulations, such as 'urges' (2.5% in SCRIraq and 2.3% in SCRIran), 'warns' (0%) or 'demands' (0.5% in SCRIraq and 0.9% in SCRIran). The contrastive analysis of operative phrases in the two corpora suggests that the UN had a moderate reaction to the outbreak of the Gulf conflict and expressed a weak stance on the Iranian nuclear crisis as well. Although there were many stronger phrases that could have been used to express negative institutional feelings, the UN preferred to use operative phrases that could be collocated at a lower level of the scale of gravity.

The results of the analysis of the operative phrases in the two corpora might seem in contrast with the results obtained with the investigation of preambulatory phrases, in which, in the Iranian case, the UN seems to be more determined to express a firmer and more authoritative position against Iran. This difference can be explained taking into account the different nature and function of operative and preambulatory phrases. Preambulatory phrases generally recite the considerations upon which an action is taken, while operative clauses indicate the actions the UN recommends or will take. In the Iranian case, preambulatory phrases firmly express the UN's concern to understand whether Iran intends to use its nuclear energy for non-peaceful purposes, while operative phrases are slightly toned-down

because Iran is only allegedly capable of using its nuclear potential in a non-peaceful way (Dilanian 2012).

The wording used in resolutions concerning Iran is crucial, as it could trigger the same consequences that it had in the Iraqi case, or elude them.

5. Summary and conclusions

This work analysed linguistic elements of vagueness in UN Security Council resolutions through a comparative analysis between a corpus of the resolutions relating to the Second Gulf War and a second one concerning the Iranian nuclear crisis.

The comparison between the two corpora revealed that preambulatory phrases in SCRIraq are mainly characterised by the intention to emphasise that Iraq was considered still in “material breach” of previous resolutions related to the First Gulf War, while SCRIran is characterised by emphasis on the international community’s intention to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis, which was never expressed throughout SCRIraq.

However, the data could also suggest that in both corpora the UN has had a moderate reaction, emphasising some issues more than reacting in an authoritative and assertive way. In fact, although there were many more severe phrases that could have been used for both preambulatory and operative clauses, the UN opted for formulations that could be collocated at the low level of the scale of gravity. In general, the UN has shown to be reluctant to act upon its own resolutions. The contrastive analysis between the two corpora suggests that the UN has had a moderate reaction to the Gulf conflict and that, although SCRIran is characterised by more negative phrases, the UN has overall expressed a rather weak stance on the Iranian nuclear crisis as well.

However, some changes have been occurring. Though the UN still seems to express a rather moderate reaction against Iran, the wording used in its resolutions is at the same time more cautiously thought, less menacing, but firmer. These changes might be due also to the US’ new stance on foreign politics in the aftermath of Obama’s election. Contrary to his predecessor, Obama seems directed towards a firm but diplomatic solution of the Iranian issue, expressing the willingness to use all diplomatic means allowed by the UN Charter to settle controversies with this State. This has

been further confirmed by Obama's so-called 'Iranian Deal', finalised on July 14, 2015. During his speech held at the American University on August 5, 2015⁴, Obama described his aim to establish an agreement with Iran based on strong, principled policy diplomacy. Interestingly enough, the President made numerous references to the Second Gulf War and its connections with the Iranian crisis. Obama stressed the difference between his administration and Bush's presidency, which was characterised by "a preference for military action over diplomacy, a mindset that put a premium on unilateral U.S. action over the painstaking work of building international consensus" (The Washington Post, Aug 5, 2015).

Although Obama's presidency keeps all options open to prevent Iran from ever developing nuclear weapons, Obama clearly expressed his preference for a peaceful diplomatic resolution of the issue, which cannot be obtained through unilateral US sanctions against Iran, but by means of new UN Security Council resolutions. Only history will tell what consequences the resolutions' wording will entail, in the hope that the international community has learnt from the disastrous effects that vague and weak UN wording have had on Iraq.

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⁴ Source: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/08/05/text-obama-gives-a-speech-about-the-iran-nuclear-deal/>, last accessed August 2015.

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