

Vague Language in Nigerian Presidents' Speeches

Thompson Ewata

University of Africa, Toru-Orua, Bayelsa State, Nigeria
toewata@gmail.com

Abstract

The extent to which vague language is present in formal written discourse is the focus of this paper. The study compared the use of vague language in the speeches of four Nigerian presidents focusing on vague quantifiers and linguistic approximators as types of vague language and it investigated the functions and frequency of the items. Using the relevance theory framework and employing corpus linguistics methodologies through AntConc 3.5.8, the study analysed a corpus of 16 Nigerian presidential speeches from Presidents: Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Yar'Adua, Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari (from 1999 to date). The study examined the functions of the quantifying expressions and determined their frequency of use, on president-by-president basis in the corpus. The study found that vague quantifying expressions were used to make quantifications inexact and to convey a range of vague propositions as well as make statements that were general in nature rather than being specific.

Keywords: corpus, linguistics, presidential, speeches, vague

1. Introduction

Human existence is enhanced by interrelatedness with one another which involves communicating informally and formally to become “communicative competent” (Kreps, 1986, p. 5). This entails, amongst others: critical thinking and mindfulness, making reasoned choices, being able to codeswitch between different language styles depending on the situation, being culturally aware and sensitive, and communicating ethically (DeVito, 2017, pp. 18–21). All achieved through the human language. The human language is vital to human existence without which humans would not be humans. Despite the importance of language to humans, it is accused of inadequacy in its communicative function and found to be vague or inexplicit, most times. Though, vagueness in communication was seen as a deficiency, the deficiency view of language has since changed as vague language (VL) is now viewed as an inadvertent and a deliberate human communication characteristic deployed for different purposes (Parvaresh & Sheikhan, 2019). Commentators of vagueness stress that purposeful use of VL should not be censured but be encouraged because it is an “integral component” of the human language and communication (Channell, 1994, p. 5). Attention on vagueness has become subject of study in different aspects of human knowledge depending on the foci of scholars and forms “part of a detailed description of the pragmatics of a particular delimited area of language use” as against a general theory of language use (Channell, 1985a). Except in some rare occasions, every human culture and endeavour thrives on VL, intentionally or inadvertently, and VL has been of interest to man since human civilisation (Fisher, 2000).

The notion of VL as pejorative no longer holds as experience has shown that language use without vagueness is unattainable (Partridge, 1947, 1947, cited in Channell, 1994, p. 1). At the same time, the idea that vagueness makes human interaction unclear or that it is suitable for informal communication alone is no longer tenable (Cutting, 2019). VL is now viewed positively as an effective, deliberate, human interactional device as most of what was once assumed to be a

good form of language actually contained some aspects of VL (Stubbs, 1986). It is thus rare to see an aspect of human knowledge that does not contain VL (Li, 2017, 2019; McGee, 2018; O’Keeffe, 2004; Prince, et al., 1982; Quammie–Wallen, 2019; Ruzaitė, 2007; Samigoullina, 2020). Apart from inherently vague linguistic elements, humans will be vague as blunt expressions are inappropriate. VL helps humans make reference in a “non-specific, imprecise way” and is a central part of a native speaker’s “communicative competence” (Carter & McCarthy, 2006 cited Cutting, 2007, p. 6).

Despite the importance of VL to humans, however, defining it or what constitutes VL, itself is contentious. More so, the language examples touted as VL are most times all borderline cases. In addition, scholars who study vagueness do so differently because they (scholars) are from different fields of knowledge. Thus, looking at VL from the different perspectives, make commentators argue that VL is “a vague concept” with undefined boundaries (Adolphs, et al, 2007; Fraser, 2010). For the purpose of this study, we shall take our working definition from these criteria of vague language:

- a. it can be contrasted with a precise term;
 - b. its vagueness is intrinsic; and
 - c. it is purposely vague (Channell, 1994)
- and categorise how VL can be achieved into:

- i) vague additives,
- ii) vague words,
- iii) vagueness by omission, and
- iv) vagueness by implicature (Channell, 1983, p. 51).

The extent to which humans deliberately use VL in their interactions to achieve communication goals is the focus of this study. The study argues that deliberately, humans, in this case the Nigerian presidents, use vague language to sell their policies and stands to their audience.

The study focuses on the following purposively sampled 15 quantifying expressions (quantifiers and approximators): *less than, the majority, little, almost, often, within, about, more than, several, (a) few, some, most, much (more), over* and *many* aspects of VL.

2. Importance of Vague Language in Human Interaction

VL is crucial to human interaction in many ways. It helps speakers in not imposing on their interlocutors. At the same time, VL leaves room for escape for speakers by not committing themselves; and serves as a sign of social and personal relaxation in interaction. Understanding the dynamics of VL serves as part of our socio-pragmatic norms and conventions and a crucial component of our communicative competence (Cucchi, 2007; Terraschke & Holmes, 2007). VL serves as a strategic discourse device that helps interlocutors prevent boredom; make communication flow; achieve inclusiveness (Li, 2019); as well as serves as a threat-minimizing strategy (Salager-Meyer, 1994). VL helps speakers talk about subjects they are very knowledgeable about or subjects they lack the necessary vocabulary (Channell, 1985b). It is also used as a tentative discourse strategy to make claims and an in-group membership marker used to shut out outsiders (Cutting, 2000, 2019). At the same time, VL enhances social and personal equality which must be encouraged in interactions so that foreign learners would understand

them. Whilst without VL in human interaction, communication becomes unintelligent, inappropriate, “blunt and pedantic” (McCarthy & Carter, 2004).

2.1 Vague Quantifiers and Approximators

The vague quantification expressions covered in this study are from the English non-numerical quantifiers (here classified as vague quantifiers) and linguistic approximators (here described simply as approximators). Natural languages quantify. Whilst English portrays quantification through determiners and noun phrases, other languages do so differently (Peters & Westerstahl, 2006, p. 11). The English quantification words come under quantifiers. They include words such as: *some*, *no*, *both*, *(a) few*, *(a) little*, *several*, *enough*, *many*, *most*, *each*, *every*, and *all*. They are part of the noun phrase and modify nouns to provide countability in terms of quantities, degree and amounts in sentences. They are subcategorised as determiners that quantify both countable and uncountable nouns. Broekhuis, *et. al.* (2012), compare them with cardinal numerals because they “indicate the size or the cardinality of intersection” but say they differ as they are imprecise (p. 895). In Dutch, because of their indeterminacy, they are taken as “indefinite cardinal numerals”; and “indefinite pronouns” (p. 896). This helps drive home the point that quantifiers are vague elements that do not make explicit their quantifications. They are generality terms in philosophy (Glanzberg, 2009) due to their inexplicitness. Unlike formal languages that abhor vagueness and imprecision, natural languages thrive in them because of their imprecision.

Quirk & Greenbaum (1987) take quantifiers as members of two small groups of closed-system: those that co-occur only with plural count nouns: *many*, *(a) few*, and *several*; and those that co-occur only with non-count nouns: *much* and *(a) little* (p. 64). In traditional grammar, quantifiers function as *pronominal* (they occur alone or form part of the prepositional phrase with *of*) “some (of the men)” and as *adjectival* that precede nouns, “some men” (Jackendoff, 1968).

Here are some examples of quantifiers from our corpus:

- i) Some of their successors behaved like spoilt children breaking everything and bringing disorder to the house (President Buhari, Inaugural speech, May 29, 2015).
- ii) ... the past few years have witnessed growth in some aspects of South-South cooperation. (President Obasanjo, Independence Day speech, 1 October 2002).
- iii) In Nigeria, the threat of terrorism in a few States in the North Eastern part of our country (President Jonathan, UN General Assembly, 24 September 2013).
- iv) We acknowledge that our elections had some shortcomings (President Yar'adua, Inaugural speech, 29 May 2007).

At the same time, we have instances where quantifiers are used without *of* (that is they function as *adjectival*) in our corpus:

- v) Nigeria will continue to partner with the WHO and some countries to ensure accelerated development and manufacturing... (President Buhari, Address to the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. 22 September, 2020)
- vi) These changes were bound to cause some anxiety among various sections of our

national community (President Obasanjo, Independence Day speech, 1 October, 2002).

- vii) Unfortunately, despite the free, fair and transparent manner the elections were conducted, a senseless wave of violence in some parts of the country ... (President Jonathan, Inaugural speech, 29 May, 2011)

Approximators are part of linguistic hedging elements used to shield attention or beam the spotlight in discourse. They come with different headings in academic discourse because of their diverse functions in human interaction (Mihatsch, 2010, p. 93). According to Lakoff (1972), hedgings “make things fuzzier”. To Caffi (1999), hedgings fall under *mitigation* elements synonymous with *attenuation*, which “is the result of a weakening of one of the interactional parameters, and a downgrading when the parameters involved are scalar”. Fraser (1980) adds that *mitigation* is not a type of speech act rather it reduces some unwelcome effects speech acts might have on the hearer.

To Fraser, hedgings are not in any exclusive class of words but are from different word classes. It is thus not surprising that some approximators are also part of quantifiers. Prince, *et al.* (1982) classify approximators as hedging devices into: adaptors (with examples from our corpus as: *almost*, *some*, and *little*) whose function is to “apply to class membership and contribute to the interpretation of the utterance”, and rounders (with examples from our corpus as: *about*, and *around*) that “indicate a range, within which a notion is approximated” (Gribanova & Gaidukova, 2019). The general function of approximators in discourse is to semantically modify a discursual proposition (Mihatsch, p. 94). Approximators make guess and make communication flow easier, as the precise quantification is not important since the essence of the information in the interaction can be understood without the exact details. In the view of Channell (1985b), approximators “are understood by hearers as designating a continuous sequence of numbers (=INTERVAL) which contains the exemplar number”.

From another angle, linguistic hedgings are viewed as a “discourse strategy that reduces the force or truth of an utterance and thus reduces the risk a speaker runs when uttering a strong or firm assertion or other speech act” (Kaltenböck, *et. al.*, 2010, p. 1). This is very common in scientific reporting, as scientists (speakers) are expected to present their claims and themselves, humbly. This means it is not in all cases that approximators act as vague elements. Some approximators “are indeed used when exact figures are irrelevant or unavailable or when the state of knowledge does not allow” (Salager-Meyer, 1994) the speaker to be more exact. Thus, if a speaker does not know the exact information and they used an approximator, this is not to be taken as vague but because the exact information is not within reach or unknown. The bottom line is that approximators could make the speaker’s claim vague and tentative thus presenting the claims made by the speaker to be acceptable thereby reducing the chances of face-threats (Fand, 1989).

Let us take a look at some examples in our corpus to prove these claims:

- 1) With the railways, we plan to concession some existing routes including the Western and Eastern rail lines ... (President Yar’Adua, Independence Day speech, 1 October, 2008)

- 2) I am pleased to report that the yielded results include an increase in our proven reserves from about 25 to almost 32 billion barrels of oil (President Obasanjo, Independence Day speech, 1 October, 2002).

We would see that in (1), it would be a wasted effort for President Yar'Adua naming the "existing routes" that would be concessioned as everyone familiar with the Nigerian railway, who the president is addressing, knows the routes in question.

In (2), we would see that President Obasanjo did not mention the exact amount. In the first instance, he gave a rough estimate of the reserve; *from about 25*. That amount could be 24.1 to 25.4 billion barrels. Then he gives another estimate, which could be from a little above 31 to something above 32 billion barrels of oil. We can see here that President Obasanjo realises that giving an exact figure would not be ideal as he might not have that and if he gives one that was not correct, there would be a face-threat as he could be accused of under or over reporting the true situation of the Nigerian oil reserves. To counter this, the President uses vague quantifying expressions which put everyone's mind at ease. He uses the two approximators, *about*, and *almost* to "express some degree of qualification or uncertainty". With this, we would see that linguistic hedging are discourse elements of "protection and defence" (Wibowo & Yusoff, 2014), to propositions.

From the grammatical perspective, Quirk et al. (1985, p. 597), take approximators as a subcategory of the intensifiers, from the downtoners sub-category. As downtoners, approximators have a lowering effect on the force of the verb or a predication and many of them apply a scale to gradable verbs. It is in this light of lowering the effects of the verb, that scholars take approximators as mitigation discourse elements. Quirk, et al. go on to say that: "approximators serve to express an *approximation* to the force of the verb, while indicating that the verb concerned expresses more than is relevant". According to Prince, et al., one of the options available to the speaker in the use of an approximation is to "... use the closest relevant term but indicate in some way that perceived reality is not prototypical with respect to that term". They (speakers) thus choose a term that would suit the object of discourse.

In discourse, Channell (1994, p. 42) claims that "speakers have the option of either adding something to a precise number or numbers, or using a round number, or using a vague quantifier". This means both quantifiers and approximators are vague linguistic elements that make things "fuzzy or less fuzzy".

Some of the VL usage found in the corpus of four Nigerian presidents include:

1. The difference will be that in the past sacrifices were made and patience exercised with little or no results (President Obasanjo, Inaugural speech, 29 May, 1999).
2. ... the Governor of Plateau State has travelled out of the country more than four times without bothering to notify me (President Obasanjo, Declaration of Emergency Rule in Plateau State, 18 May, 2004).
3. ... a terrifying force taking tens of thousands of lives and capturing several towns and villages covering swathes of Nigerian sovereign territory (President Muhammadu Buhari, Inaugural speech, 29 May, 2015).

4. ... our determined efforts on several fronts notwithstanding, our country still faces a number of challenges (President Jonathan, Independence Day speech, 1 October, 2012).
5. ... Nigerians, our economy is on a strong footing with an average growth rate of about 6.9%, a single digit inflation rate, external reserves of about 63 billion dollars ... (President Yar'Adua, Independence Day speech, 1 October, 2008)
6. A few people have privately voiced fears that on coming back to office I shall go after them (President Buhari, Inaugural speech, 29 May, 2015).
7. I had the benefit of a university education myself, and without doubt, it has been responsible for much of my personal success (President Yar'Adua, UN General Assembly speech, 24 September, 2009).
8. ... we affirm that much more needs to be done (President Yar'Adua, Address to the 62nd Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, 18 September, 2007).
9. Apart from the First Lady of Africa, my dear Turai, women are dispensable, and are worth far less than all the trouble they manufacture (President Yar'Adua, 64th General Assembly of the UN address, 27 September, 2009).
10. We have made remarkable progress in almost all segments of the agriculture value chain... (President Buhari, Independence Day speech, 1 October, 2019)

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study is the relevance theory, which is a pragmatic cognitive linguistic theory, by Sperber & Wilson (1986). The relevance theory criticises "one of Grice's central claims: that an essential feature of most human communication is the expression and recognition of intentions" (Wilson & Sperber, 2006, p. 607). The bottom line of the relevance theory is that "the expectations of relevance raised by an utterance are precise and predictable enough to guide the hearer toward the speaker's meaning" (p. 607) which goes against the Grice's Cooperative Principle. We must understand that Grice never meant the maxims as guidelines to be observed (Nunn, 2006).

The basis of the theory is that the understanding and interpretation of utterances is predicated on the contextual background information available to the receiver(s). To understand this is to compare the theory to the code model of human communication. In the *code model* of communication, a person who has a message *encodes* it into a *signal (code)* for the receiver who in turn *decodes (interprets)* the initial signal of the sender, through "an identical copy of the code". This means the sender's and the receiver's signal must match for communication to take place. The inferential approach to pragmatics under which the relevance theory comes holds that the linguistic meaning of words decoded by the receiver is just one of many inputs and not the sole one that can affect interpretation. It stresses that a signal or input from the sender is important to the receiver because of the relevance of such input to the receiver. From the point of view of the theory, "other things being equal, the greater the positive cognitive effects achieved by processing an input, the greater its relevance will be" (p. 609). Thus, when the communication intent of the sender reaches the receiver, the receiver sieves through it to see which of the intents is relevant to them. To Sperber & Wilson (1995, p. 124), therefore, "relevance" is a "a comparative concept" as the receiver compares efforts.

The comparative concept which is predicated on the cognitive background on which the inferential communication is foregrounded is brought about by the processing effort of an input as compared to others. In this, there is a cost/benefit analysis brought to bear as humans consider

the cost of processing versus the conceivable positive cognitive benefits. The theory therefore concludes that in talking about relevance, there are two principles that must be borne in mind: the first relate to cognition and the other to communication. Sperber & Wilson propose that:

- (1) Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance.
- (2) Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance (1995, p. 260).

Humans do not only take in information that comes their way during the communication process, they also use context of the inferences to arrive at what the speaker says which helps them arrive at the meaning. This is subsumed under the communicative principle of relevance as “every ostensive stimulus conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance” (p. 612). Elsewhere, they stress that *relevance* is a matter of degree and that inference is context determined (1995, p. 123) as “... an input (a sight, a sound, an utterance, a memory) is relevant to an individual when it connects with background information he has available to yield conclusions that matter to him” (2006, p. 608). A servant of a wicked ruler, for example, could give a wink to someone who the servant knows does not know how horrible his master is to warn the person because it is not in the servant’s capacity to say anything in that circumstance. The input, the wink, is relevant to the receiver based on human knowledge to warn such a person that there is need for them to be careful. When the average Nigerian hears their presidents make these speeches, they do not rely on the words of the presidents alone, but rely on their background knowledge, the use of vague language, to know that the use of the quantifying expressions do not make the speeches a falsehood but rather that their presidents do not totally commit to the truth value of the statement as they have given escape routes in the speech. In the following:

- (3) “Infrastructure - Water Supply, Energy, Telecommunication, Ports, Airways, National Shipping, Nigerian Railways, etc.” (President Olusegun Obasanjo, Inaugural speech, May 29, 1999)

President Obasanjo could have gone ahead to list further examples of the infrastructure he was talking about but because he did not want to bore his audience and make his speech monotonous, he has used a vague linguistic device, etc. to tell the audience that he could go on but with the little he has mentioned, the audience should have in the mind the picture he was trying to paint. The audience, on the other hand, do not need to bother with other examples of the infrastructure the President had in mind as they and the president both have a common background knowledge of the Nigerian situation.

4. Methodology

The study built a specialised corpus of 16 speeches of the four Nigerian presidents. Olusegun Obasanjo (29 May 1999 and 29 May 2007). Umaru Musa Yar’Adua (29 May 2007 to 9 February 2010), Goodluck Jonathan (6 May 2010 and 29 May 2015) and Muhammadu Buhari (29 May 2015 to Date). For representativeness, each president has four speeches: their inaugural speech as president; an Independent Day (October 1) speech delivered during their tenure as presidents; an address to the UN and any other speech. The study considered 15 quantifying expressions, that were purposively selected: *less than, the majority, little, almost, often, within, about, more*

than, several, (a) few, some, most, much (more), over and many. The study employed the broader concept of corpus linguistics that applies to different aspects of linguistic enquiry (Koteyko, 2006). To be considered in the study, a quantifying element must have at least, one instance of use by two presidents. All the speeches were downloaded from the HTML/PDF/Word formats then converted to the plain text format for (Anthony, 2019) *AntConc* (Version 3.5.8) *concordancer* to process them. The concordancer identified the sub-categorisations of the quantificational expressions under focus. The percentage of the use of the items is then determined for comparison on president-by- president. For ease of identification, the president's name, the occasion and the date the speech served as metadata.

5. Results/Findings

The 15 vague quantifying expressions were used 194 times by the four Nigerian presidents. This is presented in table 1 below.

Table 1: Vague Language in Nigerian Presidents' Speeches

| quantifiers | Buhari | Jonathan | Obasanjo | Yar'Adua | TOT | % VAL |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|--------------|
| less than | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1.55% |
| the majority | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 2.06% |
| little | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 2.58% |
| almost | 1 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 3.09% |
| often | 1 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 7 | 3.61% |
| within | 3 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 8 | 4.12% |
| about | 1 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 9 | 4.64% |
| more than | 0 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 9 | 4.64% |
| several | 1 | 8 | 2 | 0 | 11 | 5.67% |
| (a) few | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 14 | 7.22% |
| some | 4 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 17 | 8.76% |
| most | 7 | 3 | 6 | 3 | 19 | 9.79% |
| much (more) | 3 | 5 | 9 | 3 | 20 | 10.31% |
| over | 4 | 9 | 7 | 2 | 22 | 11.34% |
| many | 6 | 11 | 17 | 6 | 40 | 20.62% |
| TOTAL | 38 | 50 | 77 | 29 | 194 | 100% |
| % of use on individual basis | 19.59% | 25.77% | 39.69% | 14.95% | 100% | |

There are three patterns of use of the items in the corpus. The lowest use of the items was used three to nine instances. Eight items are in this category (*less than, the majority, little, almost, often, within, about, and more than*). The next was 11 to 19 instances and four of the quantifying elements are in this category (*several, (a) few, some, and most*). The last covered those items used 20 instances and above: (*much (more), over, and many*).

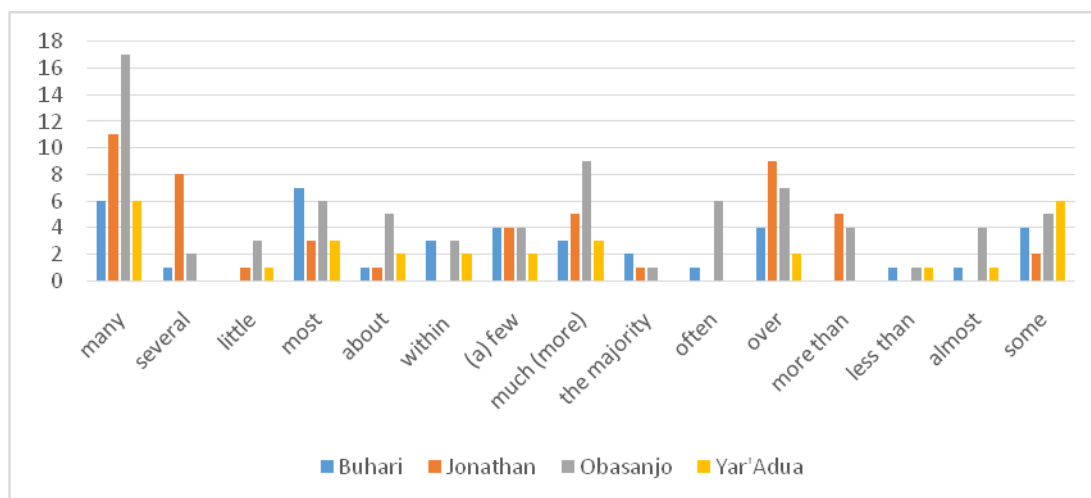
Of the eight items in the group of three to nine usage, *about* and *more (than)* were used with nine instances. Only *about* of the two highest used items in the group was used by the four presidents: Buhari (1), Jonathan (1), Obasanjo (5) and Yar'Adua (1) with 4.64% usage of the corpus. *About* however, shared the 4.64% position with *more (than)* which was used by two presidents: Jonathan (5) and Obasanjo (4). *Within* was used next with eight instances by three of the presidents: Buhari (3), Obasanjo (3) and Yar'Adua (2) with 4.12% usage in the corpus. *Often* followed with 3.61% usage to *within* and used by Buhari (1) and Obasanjo (6) in their speeches. Buhari (1), Obasanjo (4) and Yar'Adua (1) used *almost* with a 3.09% of the corpus. *Little* was also used by: Jonathan (1), Obasanjo (3) and Yar'Adua (1). The five instances of usage by the three presidents gave the item a 2.58% of the corpus. With a 2.06% of use *the majority* was used by Buhari (2), Jonathan (1), and Obasanjo (1). *Less than* was used on three occasions by Buhari (1), Obasanjo (1) and Yar'Adua (1) with a 1.55%.

The 11 to 19 instances of usage had four items: *several*, *(a) few*, *some*, and *most* form the next group of items in the 15 quantifying expressions used in the Nigerian presidents' speeches corpus. It is important to note that only *several* of the four items in the group was not used by the four Nigerian presidents. The other three items, *(a) few*, *some*, and *most* were used by the four Nigerian presidents. Of the four items in this group, *several*, and *(a) few* were used 11 and 14 instances respectively. The 11 instances, Buhari (1), Jonathan (8), and Obasanjo (2) gave the item 5.67% of the corpus. With 7.22% of use by the Nigerian presidents, *(a) few* was used 14 times by Buhari (4), Jonathan (4), Obasanjo (4), and Yar'Adua (2). *Some* was used 17 instances: Buhari (4), Jonathan (2), Obasanjo (5), and Yar'Adua (6) with an 8.76% of the corpus. The last item in this group, *most* was used 19 times by Buhari (7), Jonathan (3), Obasanjo (6), and Yar'Adua (3) with a 9.79% usage in the corpus.

Of the three items used 20 and above instances has *much (more)* (20), *over* (22), and *many* (40) With 20 instances *much (more)* was used by: Buhari (3), Jonathan (5), Obasanjo (9), and Yar'Adua (3) with 10.31% of the corpus. *Over* was used by: Buhari (4), Jonathan (9), Obasanjo (7) and Yar'Adua (2) which resulted in 11.34% of the corpus. The last item, *many*, was the most used: Buhari (6), Jonathan (11), Obasanjo (17), and Yar'Adua (6). With 40 instances it had 20.62% of the corpus.

The usage of the items is presented in fig. 1 below:

Fig 1: Usage of Vague Language in Nigerian Presidents' Speeches



6. Discussion of Findings

The 15 quantifying expressions (quantifiers and approximators) were used differently in the corpus. *Less than* had 3 instances of usage with 1.55% of the corpus. It was used by three of the four presidents, Buhari, Obasanjo and Yar'Adua who used it once, respectively. The next to *less than* is *the majority* that was used four times by three of the four Nigerian presidents also. Buhari used the item twice while Jonathan and Obasanjo used it once respectively. The item had 2.06% of the corpus.

With 2.58%, *little* had five instances of usage: Jonathan (1), Obasanjo (3), and Yar'Adua (1). *Almost* had six instances of use which gave it 3.09% of the corpus by: Buhari (1), Obasanjo (4), and Yar'Adua (1).

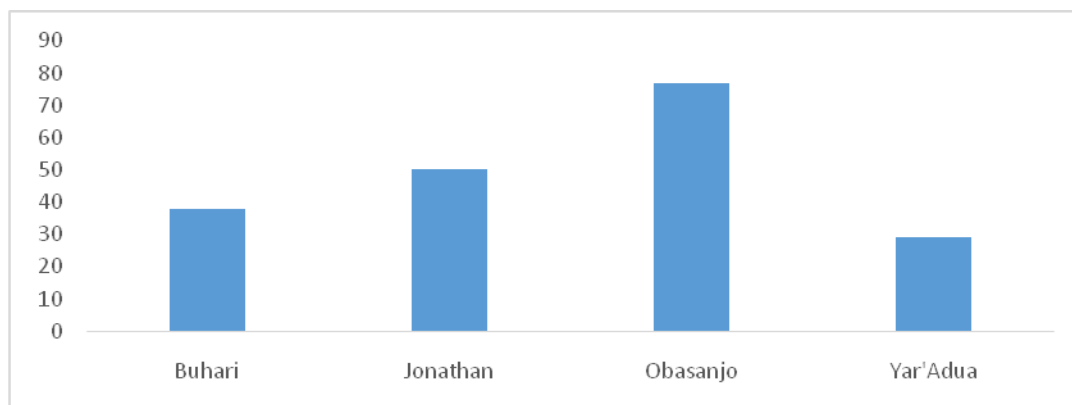
With 3.61%, *often* was used seven times by Buhari and Obasanjo who used it once and six times, respectively. *Within* is used eight times by, Buhari (3), Obasanjo (3), and Yar'Adua (2) with 4.12% in the 16-speech corpus. *About* was used nine times, Buhari (1), Jonathan (1), Obasanjo (5), and Yar'Adua (2), with a 4.64%.

With nine instances, Presidents Jonathan (5), and Obasanjo (4) used *more than* with 4.64%. Buhari (1), Jonathan (8), and Obasanjo (2) used *several* 11 times with 5.67% in the corpus. *(A) few* was used 14 times by: Buhari (4), Jonathan (4), Obasanjo (4), and Yar'Adua (2) with 7.22% of the corpus. *Some* was used 17 times: Buhari (4) Jonathan (2), Obasanjo (5), and Yar'Adua (6) that gave it 8.76% of the corpus. 9.79% was the result of *most* being used 19 times by: Buhari (7), Jonathan (3), Obasanjo (6), and Yar'Adua (3) in the corpus. *Much (more)* was used 20 times: Buhari (3), Jonathan (5), Obasanjo (9), and Yar'Adua (3) with 10.31% usage of the corpus. With 22 instances of use, Buhari (4), Jonathan (9), Obasanjo (7), and Yar'Adua (2), *over* had 11.34% of the corpus. *Many* is the most used of the 15 items. It was used 40 times: Buhari (6) Jonathan (11), Obasanjo (17), and Yar'Adua (6). The 40 times gave it 20.62% which is the highest of the 15 quantifying elements.

In proving whether the 15 quantifying items were general language rather than informal language specific elements in the corpus, the study agrees with Fraser's (2010, p. 3) opinion who stresses that though studies on hedges, an aspect of VL had been on casual spoken language, interest has expanded to embrace spoken, written formal and informal discourse. The study thus concludes that with the 194 instances in the corpus, the elements are general human language rather than informal-language specific elements.

On the statistical usage of the element on president-by-president basis, Yar'Adua uses 11 out of the 15 items (*less than* (1), *little* (1), *almost*(1), *within* (2), *about* (2), (*a few* (2), *some* (6), *most* (3), *much (more)* (3), *over* (2), and *many* (6)), 29 times (14.95%) which is the least used by the four Nigerian presidents of the 15 items. Jonathan also used 11 of the items (*the majority* (1), *little* (1), *about* (1), *more than* (5), *several* (8), (*a few* (4), *some* (2), *most* (3), *much (more)* (5), *over* (9) and *many* (11)) on 50 instances with 25.77% out of the 194 occasions that the items were used in the corpus. Buhari used 13 of the 15 items (*less than* (1), *the majority* (2), *almost* (1), *often* (1), *within* (3), *about* (1), *several* (1), (*a few* (4), *some* (4), *most* (7), *much (more)* (3), *over* (4), and *many* (6)), 38 times with 19.59% of the corpus. Obasanjo used the items the highest: *less than* (1), *the majority* (1), *little* (3), *almost* (4), *often* (6), *within* (3), *about* (5), *more than* (4), *several*(2), (*a few* (4), *some* (5), *most* (6), *much (more)* (9), *over* (7), and *many* (17) 77 times with 39.69% usage of the 194 instances the 15 quantifying items were used (see Fig. 2 for the individual usage of the quantifying items by the four Nigerian presidents).

Fig. 2: Usage of the Quantifying Elements by the Four Presidents



Commentators ascribe various functions in discourse to VL. One of the functions of vague quantifiers, an aspect of the quantification expression that this study covers is to make the quantification inexact. Here are some examples of use from our corpus:

- a) Our Rebrand Nigeria scheme is now in motion, and our Minister for Information, a very persuasive woman, will soon be coming to as many as 150 countries to tell you what a wonderful country Nigeria is (President Yar'Adua, 64th General Assembly of the UN, 29 September, 2009).
- b) With less than ten ratifications needed for the TPNW's entry into force ... (President Buhari, 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (22 September, 2020)

- c) We have a programme by which we expect to become self-sufficient in the production of cement - within four years ... (President Obasanjo, Independence Day speech, 1 October, 2002)
- d) Several government programmes and projects are creating wealth and millions of job opportunities for our youth and general population (President G E Jonathan, Independence Day Speech, 1 October, 2012).

In all the examples of *several*, *within*, *less than*, and *many*, at no time the expressions were used did the presidents mention the exact figure (quantity, amount). This points out that the elements were deliberately used so as not to disclose the exact amount (quantification) involved.

Another function of quantifying expressions is to convey a range of vague proportions (Moxey, 1986) rather than being specific. Here are examples from the corpus to illustrate this:

- e) ... I wish to thank God Almighty for the bountiful blessings he has continually bestowed on us as a people, in spite of the many challenges that we have had to face (President Yar'Adua, Independence Day Speech, 1 October, 2008).
- f) This is particularly important as the current pace of globalisation has made it extremely difficult for most developing countries ... (President Obasanjo, G-77 South Summit, 12 April, 2000).
- g) Over the years, several leaders have built on the foundation laid by our Founding Fathers (President Jonathan, Independence Day Speech, 1 October, 2012).
- h) Some of their successors behaved like spoilt children breaking everything and bringing disorder to the house (President Buhari, Inaugural speech, 29 May, 2015).

From the examples (e-h), we can see that the Nigerian presidents use the items to give rough estimations and none of them disclosed exactly the quantity they had in mind. Linguistic quantification elements are also used to make things general rather than specific. Just as in being inexact, the elements also make things general instead of being specific.

- i) With less than ten ratifications needed for the TPNW's entry into force, we urge other member states who have not done so to quickly ratify the Treaty for the actualization of its important objective (President Buhari, United Nations General Assembly, 22 September, 2020).
- j) As of now, the majority of Nigerians do not have direct access to this national cake (President Obasanjo, Independence Day Speech, 1 October, 2002).
- k) I am determined with your full cooperation, to make significant changes within a year of my administration (President Obasanjo, Inaugural address, 29 May, 1999).
- l) While applauding the successful outcome of the High Level Event on Climate Change, which was held here two days back, we affirm that much more needs to be done (President Yar'Adua, General Assembly of the United Nations, 18 September, 2007).

In the above examples, none of the presidents was specific in their speech. They all used generality instead of specificity.

7. Implications of the Study

The implication of this is that VL is a human interaction's device used in both formal and informal communication. The presidential speech is the most formal of any speech as it involves the image of not only the President presenting it but that of a country, at large. As much as possible, a President does not do this alone as they have presidential advisers and speech writers who work on their speeches with them. The advisers make sure the appropriate language, tone and register are used in the speeches. That the quantifying elements are found in the Nigerian presidential speeches further buttresses the fact that the elements are general human language elements. The presence of the elements in the presidential speeches also debunks the earlier held notion as exemplified by Carter & McCarthy (2006, p. 928) that "purposefully vague language is very common in informal spoken language". The "informal spoken language" notion does not hold as VL is found in the 16-speech corpus which is a written formal language. Thus, corroborating the "integral component" of the human language (Channell, 1994, p. 5), in general, irrespective of formal or informal, spoken or written or any particular language use or language situation.

8. Conclusion

We can see that the four Nigerian Presidents whose speeches were sampled in the study used the quantificational expressions (vague quantifiers and linguistic approximators) in different forms and for different purposes. Categorising the elements as spoken, informal speech elements used among familiars does not arise as shown in the study; as there is no formality than a nation's presidential address. If the argument comes up that the presidents used the elements because they could afford to be casual with their nationals; a counter argument would be, does this casual use by the Nigerian Presidents extend to the United Nations forum where all the four Presidents presented their speeches and the elements were present in their addresses to the UN. This proves that the vagueness in general and the VL in particular are human language specific elements. Humans are comfortable with vague quantifiers than with exact numbers as comprehensibility is easier and communication flows freely when they are used.

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