

PATRIOTISM OR PATRONAGES: THE PRAGMATICS OF INTENTIONAL VAGUENESS IN FIRST-TERM INAUGURATION SPEECHES BY SELECTED NIGERIAN PRESIDENTS

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Abstract

This paper explores how presidents-elect construct vagueness in first-term inauguration discourse. As presidents-elect, the pragmatic analysis of vagueness provides profound insights into their leadership reflections. The two presidents are President Muhammadu Buhari, 2015 and President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, 2023. The selected speeches resonated with “I Belong to Everybody; I Belong to Nobody” by General Buhari; and “Fuel Subsidy Is Gone!” by Senator Tinubu. This study is underpinned by Jef Verschueren's (1999) Linguistics Adaptation Theory (LAT). Using LAT as basis for analysis, findings reveal that there are intentional vague constructions that instantiate four leadership stances in the selected inaugural speeches. Through intentional vagueness, the linguistic choice-making by the selected political leaders adapt to one of the three worlds: physical, social and mental worlds of adaptability so as to index theistic leadership (i.e., an adaptation to the face-saving accentuation of divine authority and self-abased humility), visionary leadership (i.e., an adaptation to the impracticality of an unusual discernment for improved living standards and opaque merging of the past to the present), democratic leadership (i.e., an adaptation to the illusion of liberalism, participatory civic engagements and reversal of anti-democratic deeds), and empathetic leadership (i.e., an adaptation to the questionable enunciation of fellow-feelings, good manners and appeal for solidarity building). This paper however argues that inauguration speeches by presidents-elect are discursively structured to attract patronages, rather than instil patriotism. It is concluded that the adaptability of intentional vague linguistic resources in inauguration discourse expands the frontiers of knowledge in political discourse.

Keywords: *Inauguration speeches, Leadership discourse, Linguistic Adaptability Theory, Presidential discourse, Vague language*

1.0. Introduction

The relationship between language and politics can simply be described as symbiotic. Symbiotic in the sense that language is the oily grease that wheels the attainment of political ambitions, strategic policy constructs and implementation frameworks. As noted by Beard (2000), politics is a struggle towards gaining or retaining power in order

to access and control public resources (p.35). Among other imperatives, language resources are therefore deployed by political actors to discursively construct the superiority of *Self* identity, beliefs and knowledge; to express messages of hope and intuit the moods of the masses; to make strategic pronouncements; to negotiate social roles; to assert (a)symmetric power relations; and to project cognitive values in a way that aligns with the expectations of citizens and favours the (new) government (Ajibiye, 2021, 2019; Odebunmi and Oni, 2012; McGregor, 2003; Kaid, 1999).

Besides, the use of language resources is beyond mere self-expressions. McGregor (2003:7) opines that “our words are never neutral. They convey how we see ourselves... our identity, knowledge, values and beliefs, and our truths. Our discourse permeates everything we do.” Since language plays inextricable roles in articulating, propagating and (re)constructing Self and Others in political engagements, the use of language reflects what roles are assigned to each individual, and identifies who occupies leadership positions. It is often said in local parlance that: “When a leader speaks, others listen.” Using Jef Verschueren's (1999) Linguistic Adaptation Theory, this paper therefore explores how President Muhammadu Buhari (henceforth, PMB) and President Bola Ahmed Tinubu (henceforth, PBAT) - two presidents-elect of Nigeria - construct intentional vagueness with ideological embellishments in their first-term inauguration discourse, as leaders of their political party – All Progressives Congress (APC).

1.1. Leadership Discourse

Leaders are people with in-born traits, or superior knowledge and experience, holding special privileges, and uncommon capacities to assemble a group of people in order to achieve a common goal or complete a joint task (Randell and Yerbury, 2020). Most times, leaders are probably thought of as ineffable and highly enlightened individuals, with greater influence, special knowledge, and consequently having enduring impacts on their followers. Thus, the words of these 'special' people have power. Little wonder that their words – talks or texts – inspire change and transform prevailing situations, either for better or worse. For these reasons, Maxwell (1998:11) asserts that “the true measure of leadership is influence – nothing more; nothing less.”

Leadership discourse therefore relates to institutional talk and text properties that enact material realities, making followers think or act in certain ways or sometimes, change the course of things. For instance, popular coinages and slogans in Nigeria's political discourse, associated with names of heavyweight political actors such as 'Awoism', 'Zikism', 'OBJ', 'Buharist (also known as *Sai Baba*)', 'BATified', 'ATIKUlate', 'OBIdient', 'Mazi KANU' among others have asymmetric power to make their ardent followers act in certain ways like dressing or speaking in a peculiar way that aligns with the leaders' values. Such coinages connect the apologists to the cognitive values and practices of leaders they follow with intention to affirm their unflinching faith in the leader(s) in particular contexts. These apologists believe in their leaders with great

vehemence and loudly silence anyone who challenges 'Us' or 'Our' leader. Sometimes, they attack viciously those who see through the less-than-moral actions of the leaders.

Interestingly, the ideological use of language plays a significant role in mind controlling of discourse participants in such a way that serves the interests of 'those' in power or holding leadership positions (van Dijk, 2006). van Dijk (1985) opines that language users, [including leaders], are able to influence the cognitive values, knowledge systems, attitudes, and indirectly control the (habitual) actions of the addressee(s) in a way that foregrounds the ultimate form of asymmetric 'power' relations. In so doing, leadership discourse strategies are often deployed, covertly or overtly, to discursively enact self identity, assert power, enact particular ideological leanings or dissociate from outgroup political affiliations (Akinola and Imam, 2020; Al-Gublan, 2015). Thus, this paper aims at deploying the pragmatic model of Jef Verschueren's (1999) Linguistic Adaptation Theory to analysing the ideological constructs of intentional vagueness by two heavyweight political leaders in Nigeria - PMB and PBAT, with a focus on their first-term inauguration speeches as democratically-elected presidents.

1.2. Inauguration Speeches

An inauguration speech is a form of political discourse often delivered by a newly-elected political leader to signal the cessation of an outgone leader or a re-elected leader to indicate the continuation of a tenure. Once a new leadership is being sworn-in, the citizens would look forward to hearing what the president-elect has to offer the nation. Thus, the speech is carefully crafted to meet the communicative expectations of the citizens by highlighting the leader's dreams, hopes, expectations and ideologies (Chung & Park, 2010).

Interestingly, presidential inauguration speeches are basically intended to evoke heightened optimism towards the change of political leadership within a democratic country. These speeches often set the tone and enumerate the agenda for the new leadership. Within the political context of Nigeria, inauguration speeches have become parts of the colourful ceremonial 'triumphant-entry' for a newly-elected occupant into the Aso Rock Villa Office of the Presidency. Once a presidential election has been won, the president-elect must, in line with principle of political traditions, address the nation in order to unveil his or her intended plans and policies, as contained in the party's campaign manifestoes. While delivering the speech, the newly-elected president would highlight his/her dreams, aspirations, the strategies to addressing national problems, and unveil the new vision(s) as a new occupant of the Aso Rock Villa within the upcoming four-year tenure.

The narrative architecture of a presidential inauguration speech is therefore delivered with subliminal messages of heightened optimism, promise of salutary transformations and positive progress. A day of presidential inauguration is a day of calm reflections for the citizens as they reflect on the past and look ahead with optimism towards national

redemption. In so doing, inaugural speeches are conceived as parts of historical antecedents of the nation's socio-economic vagaries and political trajectories clearly understood by the president-elect, and in which the new president make linguistic choices that re-echo his/her stance throughout his/her tenures and beyond (Whissell and Sigelman, 2001). Thus, a presidential inaugural speech is not merely political; it's often structured discursively to intuit the moods of the national audience, retain public interests in his/her initiatives, and shift their cognitive values by constructing identities and creating perspectives that the national audience accept as realities, as a democratically-elected leader.

1.3. Nigerian Presidential Leadership

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Section 131, Subsections 1 – 4) as amended, states that the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be “(a) a citizen of Nigeria by birth; (b) has attained the age of forty; (c) a member of a political party and is sponsored by that political party; (d) and has been educated up at least [a] School Certificate level or its equivalent.” In other words, for a person to become the President of Nigeria, he/she must fulfil these constitutional requirements. Based on historical antecedents, Nigeria, as a country, has had sixteen (16) presidents. The sixteenth and current president is President Bola Ahmed Tinubu (PBAT), who succeeded the fifteenth and immediate past president, President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB). The two political leaders are members of the same political party – All Progressives Congress (APC).

Throughout pre-election campaign trails of presidential flagbearers, statements of promises, commitments and roadmaps for future agenda are often made in the conventional media, social media and public fora. Once a presidential election is concluded and a winner is declared publicly by the electoral umpire, the president-elect must present formally those promises and commitments to Nigerians on the inauguration day. Cheng (2006:585) argues that a presidential inaugural speech seeks to establish unity among the citizens from diverse ethnic extractions, revalidate primordial communal values and set forth political agenda for the new administration. Since it is the first nationwide address to Nigerians as a President, the speech would help Nigerian citizens to understand and assess the leadership reflections of the President-elect. Generally, statements expressed by presidents are perceived as representations of visions and voices of Nigerians. For this study, our focus is the analysis of linguistic choices by two political leaders with massive followers – PMB and PBAT - during their first-term inauguration addresses.

1.4. The Notion of Vague Language

Vague language is a pervasive property of considerable daily conversational encounters, both spoken and written (Cutting, 2007; Carter and McCarthy, 2006; Fairclough, 2003; McCarthy, 1998). Vagueness occurs when language users provide insufficient details or inexact information regarding a person, a topic or a situation

within a discourse context. What makes an expression vague is the fact that it cannot be assigned intrinsically an exact meaning in relation to the speaker's intentions or propositions within the discourse situations (Jucker, Smith & Lürdge, 2003; Channell, 2000, 1994). For example, when a lecturer says: 'One student (*person*) should come to my office quickly', there is no specificity regarding the physical feature of male or female, tall or short, young or adult. The intrinsic imprecision in the speaker's linguistic choice results in a sense of indeterminacy (i.e., vagueness) in language use (Channell 2000, pp. 196-198). Thus, there is a sense of explicit inadequacy that characterises human language (Jucker, Smith & Lürdge, 2003). In so doing, vague expressions create difficulties in understanding the speaker's intentions or intended propositions.

Vague language is classified into three major categories: 'hedges', 'vague words' and 'vague implications' (Channel, 2000). The term 'hedge' was first mentioned in linguistics by Lakoff (1972:195) as a discourse marker that makes things 'fuzzier or less fuzzy.' Thus, hedges are words or phrases whose meanings are implicitly fuzzy. Fuzziness means that there is a degree of uncertainty; their meanings are inexact to the hearers (Khalil, 2017; van Deemter, 2010). There are two subtypes of hedges: *approximators* and *shields* (Prince, *et al.* 1982). *Approximators* are words and phrases that affect the truth value of propositions by referring vaguely to numerals, percentages, dates, and indefinite modifiers that make utterances near reality or close to factuality. Some examples of approximators are *kind of*, *a little bit*, *sort of*, *something*, *around*, within which a proposition is approximated. *Shields* are words and phrases that affect the speakers' commitment to and degree of their involvements in the truth propositions, especially when information provided is half-truth (i.e., plausibility shield) e.g. *As far as I know...*; *I suppose*; *It seems to me that...* or is attributive (i.e., attribution shield) e.g. *It's well known that...*; *Presumably, the possibility would be that...*; *according to somebody's knowledge* etc. Being unsure of the accuracy of provided information and mentioning the source of information is a 'shielding' strategy of face-saving mechanism.

Based on existing literatures, vagueness occurs more in political discourse, especially when politicians communicate directly with members of the public in order to convince the people to accept their intending policies or woo voters during pre-election campaign sprees (Gruber, 1993; Wilson, 1990; Jucker, 1986; Lerman, 1985). According to Wilson (1990:7), "meanings may be derived beyond the contexts of what has been said" in political communicative encounters. Suffice to mention it here that there is an explicit or implicit preponderance deployment of vague expressions in discourse communities for both negative and positive reasons, particularly in advertising discourse and political communicative situations (see Chen, 2018; Carter and McCarthy, 2006; Cutting, 2000 and 2001; Gruber, 1993). For instance, the information and facts presented in first-term inauguration speeches are dynamic, and the situations are susceptible to change over time. More often than not, the new president is unable to receive in details all the facts

immediately due to one reason or another. Thus, he/she resorts to the linguistic realisation of vague language to avoid face threatening acts (FTAs) against other politicians as a way of constructing ideologically an image of self as selfless, rational and transparent.

Therefore, the aim of the study is to explore intentional vagueness which occurs by choice, and ascertain the underlying ideological stance arising from the linguistic choices in the 2015 and 2023 first-term presidential inaugural speeches. Thus, this present study contributes to the expanding frontiers of knowledge in relation to the ideological constructions of vague language in political discourse through the linguistic investigation of two presidential inaugural discourse.

2.0 Review of Literature

Historically, studies on vague language (henceforth, VL) were relatively rare, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. The few studies by linguists include Lakoff (1972:195), who mention VL as phrases whose meanings 'implicitly involve with fuzziness.' Also, Crystal and Davy (1975:111-112) argue that 'vague collectives' lack precisions as 'one of the most important features of the vocabulary on informal vocabulary.' Since the 1990s, however, language scholars and researchers have developed soaring interests in studying the social relevance of VL (Cutting, 2007, p.8). For instance, Channell's seminal book titled: *Vague language* (1994) opines that words and expressions are vague when 'it is apparently impossible to describe their meanings independently of consideration of context and inference (p. 198). In other words, the meanings associated with VL are often contextually contested.

Presidential inaugural speeches in Nigeria have been analysed and explored by different scholars using diverse theoretical orientations and conceptual perspectives: from lexico-grammatical analysis, (critical) discourse analysis, pragmatics to stylistics. For instance, El-Kanemi and Gada (2022) investigates deictic terms in 2015 and 2019 inaugural addresses by President Muhammadu Buhari from a critical discourse perspective of Fairclough's *Dialectical-Relational Approach*. Their study shows that Buhari uses more of person deixis in 2019 than in 2015 to signal his loyalty, readiness for teamwork and solidarity. Aremu (2017) examines the pragmatics of conceptual mappings in presidential inaugural speeches between 1979 and 2015. He concludes that mappings are pragmatic strategies for appealing, remembering, thanking, warning and promising. Using the Speech Act theory as theoretical basis, Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere (2012) claim that President Umar Musa Yar'Adua, in his 2007 inaugural speech, deployed sentences that perform assertive acts, especially vindictives and directives, to assert his authority and exercise his power as the President. Similarly, Abuya (2012) submits that President Goodluck Jonathan relied more on sentences that performed commissive acts in his 2011 inaugural speech to show appreciation to the citizens for his electoral victory.

Other similar studies have largely focused on power relations in a democracy, recurrent lexicalisation of national gloom, rhetorical devices, ideological nuances of victimisation and self-glorification (Olusola, 2020; Odebunmi and Oni, 2012; Biria, & Mohammadi, 2012; Taiwo, 2010; Adetunji, 2009; Babatunde and Odepidan, 2009; Yusuf, 2003) to the exclusion of how Nigerian presidents use language to construct intentional vagueness in their inaugural discourse. Since presidential inaugural speeches have become a significant subject matter in the field of language and linguistic enquiry in Nigeria's political space, there is, however, a paucity of studies focusing on the analysis of intentional vagueness in presidential inaugural speeches using the pragmatic model of Jef Verschueren's Linguistic Adaptation Theory.

Interestingly, extant studies have argued that there are intentional and unintentional vague language. Discourse participants deploy intentional vague language (VL) as in-group membership code in order to show solidarity and exclude out-group members (Cutting, 2001; 2000). Besides, it is used to save face by mitigating direct authoritative or unduly assertive stance (Carter and McCarthy, 2006). Since VL can be used to achieve insiders-and-outsiders dichotomy and set those in positions of power apart from the ordinary citizens, the field of political discourse becomes a fertile ground for the preponderant utilisation of VL. This study therefore aims to explore ideological effects of VL in the inauguration speeches, and their pragmatic functions using Jef Verschueren's Linguistic Adaptation Theory.

3.0. Theoretical Framework: Jef Verschueren's Linguistics Adaptation Theory

The Linguistic Adaptation Theory (henceforth, LAT) was propounded by Jef Verschueren, who was the founder and Secretary General of the International Pragmatic Association (IPrA). According to Chen (2018:1069), Verschueren first conceived “the notion of the Adaptation Theory in 1987 when he wrote the paper: *Pragmatic as a Theory of Linguistic Adaptation*. After that, he elaborated this theory in his book: *Understanding Pragmatics*, which was published in 1999.” With the publication of the book, LAT has received wider acceptance as an extended pragma-linguistic theory, that provides significant pragmatic insights into linguistic analysis.

The LAT offers a wider pragmatic perspective into the analysis of language with particular emphasis on the physical environments, social conventions and cognition in connection with language use within specific communicative contexts. Thus, the linguistic choices that discourse participants make during communicative events have to be inter-adaptable (Huang, 2019). This is represented in figure 1.1. below:

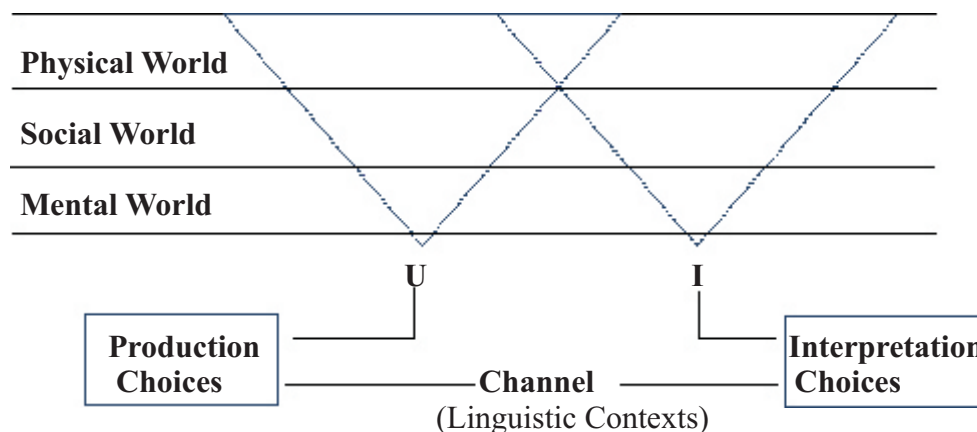


Figure 1.1. Contextual correlates of adaptability (Verschueren, 1999:76)

The human world is peopled with those who have diverse needs to be met; beliefs to be expressed and (re)affirmed; and desires and aspirations to be fulfilled. The LAT is therefore centred around what Verschueren (1999) describes as “using language must consist of the continuous making of linguistic choices, consciously or unconsciously, for language-internal (i.e., structural) and/or language external reasons” (pp.55-56). In other words, language users are under an obligation to make choices that 'adapt' continuously to the contextual imperatives of communication events. Besides, the process of linguistic choice-making is of equal importance to all discourse participants in order for the communication to be successful, and the participants, fulfilled.

According to Verschueren (1999:59-61), the use of language is a function of choice making, based on three linguistic properties, namely: *variability*, *negotiability* and *adaptability*. Variability is the property of language that provides various alternatives from which linguistic choices can be made. In other words, the scope of possible selections from diverse linguistic forms is open-ended. Language users can consciously communicate a message with similar perceptions using different selected linguistic forms. Negotiability is the property of language that affirms that linguistic choices are not mechanically fixated or limited according to restricted rules, but rather based on suitability strategies. It therefore means that speakers and addressees can (re)negotiate form-function relationships based on existing pragmatic principles of negotiation in order to achieve mutual communicative needs in specific contexts.

Adaptability is the property of language that allows language users to make negotiable linguistic choices from a wide range of possibilities in order to meet or satisfy their communicative needs. In other words, adaptability is the ultimate outcome in language use. Suffice it to mention that these three conceptual properties of language as enunciated in LAT are complementary and correlated in terms of linguistic analysis

from a pragmatic perspective. For instance, variability and negotiability are the basics of linguistic choice-making, while adaptability is the main result of communicative needs.

Political discourse is not just about struggle for power; it also involves using language to woo the electorate during pre-election campaigns, and convince the citizens on how to address their basic necessities and collective aspirations (Ajibiye, 2021; 2019). An inaugural speech is one of the ways to convince and raise the people's confidence in the new government is by mapping out intending agenda and policies that would make their lives and living conditions better. Thus, selecting the appropriate linguistic forms is crucial for a successful inaugural speech presentation. This is known as an adaptive inauguration discourse. An adaptive inauguration discourse emphasises the importance of building trusts, encouraging partnerships and making promissory commitments in a way that satisfies the needs and aspirations of the citizens. Being adaptable to the communicative world of the physical, social and mental increases the possibilities of the outcome.

4.0. Research Methodology

The first-term inauguration speeches by PMB (2015) and PBAT (2023) have been purposively selected because they are worth researching due to the increased tensions and gathering clouds of political uncertainties that characterised the two quadrennial presidential elections and the electoral twists and turns that preceded them. Interestingly, the 2015 presidential elections have been described by local and foreign observers as the most credible since 1999 (Sule, *et al*, 2018). Besides, the purposive selection of the two presidential inauguration speeches (2015 and 2023) was determined by the similarities in the strength of purpose, the degree of formality, the topical focus, level of commitment, audience involvement and the heightened goodwill associated with presidential inaugural speeches. Thus, the pragmatic analysis of intentional vagueness in the two speeches is worthwhile.

The speeches were downloaded from the Internet and analysed using a pragmatic theory. Situated within the scope of pragmatics, this study is underpinned by LAT as a theoretical basis. This study aims at exploring descriptively how the linguistic choice-making by PMB and PBAT reflect their leadership dispositions in a way that seeks to entrench vaguely deepening democracy and court heightened patriotism among the citizens and impact the belief systems of the Nigerian public. The data are therefore analysed in line with conceptual postulations in Verschueren's LAT using categorisations and sub-categories under the three communicative worlds. Thus, this study adopts a triangulated approach of LAT variables: *physical* (i.e., environmental context), *social* (i.e., conventional context) and *mental* (i.e., state of mind) of the communication event.

5.0. Data Analysis

Using Jef Verschueren's LAT as a theoretical basis, the data were analysed with a triangulated approach, starting with the lexical choice-making to syntactic realisations of vague language in the physical, socio-cultural and mental worlds. With the ideological constructions of intentional vagueness, *theistic leadership*, *visionary leadership*, *democratic leadership*, and *empathetic leadership* are evidently instantiated in the physical, socio-cultural and mental worlds of the two inauguration speeches.

5.1. Intentional Vagueness in President Buhari's 2015 Inauguration Speech

This section focuses on the analysis of intentional vagueness in the 2015 inauguration speech by President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB).

5.1.1. Intentional Vagueness as an Indicator to Theistic Leadership

Since Nigeria is a secular nation predominantly peopled by Christians and Moslems, religion is one of the potent ideological weapons deployed by politicians to sway the minds of Nigerians. PMB thus uses intentional vague expressions to publicly profess his belief in God as typified in excerpt one below:

Excerpt 1: *I am immensely grateful to God Who Has preserved us to witness this day and this occasion. Today marks a triumph for Nigeria and an occasion to celebrate her freedom and cherish her democracy.*

5.1.1.1. Theistic Leadership as Adaptation to the Physical and Social World

PMB's linguistic choice-making of an approximator of quantity: 'I am immensely grateful to God' reveals a heightened sense of gratitude to God, who owns human lives and, through His immutable powers, controls all human affairs, including 'win-or-wither' elections in Nigeria. Using the inclusive pronoun: 'us', PMB's gratitude to God bothers on how God has kept him and his followers alive after his hard-earned victory at the polls, following the 2015 fiercely-contested elections. Expectedly, he adapts his linguistic choice-making: 'I am *immensely* grateful to God' to the prevailing situations in a way that projects himself as a theistic leader, who still believes in the supreme Leader of all nations (i.e., God). The approximators of time "this day" and "today" are deployed to adapt to the vague distinction between the painful past of previous governments, and the imminent progress, which the new government represents. PMB's use of temporal time markers is intentionally vague because it does not particularly symbolise the exact date of the event, but marks the desired difference, a situation that God "has preserved us to witness."

5.1.1.2. Theistic Leadership as Adaptation to the Mental World

Since he presents himself as a theistic leader, PMB sways cognitively the minds of

Nigerians to believe in his leadership capacity as a symbol of 'triumph for Nigeria... her freedom and cherish her democracy.' Expressing elevated gratitude to God, through an approximator of quantity, is intentionally vague in order to shift the people's perception of him as a new leader for it bears an implication on his professional antecedents: an ex-military general in a civilian garb. As common with politicians, PMB uses the ingroup pronoun 'us' to signal a shared value in expressing heartfelt appreciations when one enjoys unexpected favours.

5.1.2. Intentional Vagueness as an Indicator to Visionary Leadership

Nigerian political leaders are known for projecting themselves as visionary. Visionary leadership is marked by superior foresights and novel inventions. PMB uses intentional vagueness to project himself as a visionary leader, who has identified the nagging problems and prepared to salvage the battered situations in excerpt two below:

Excerpt 2: *Our neighbours in the Sub-region and our African brethren should rest assured that Nigeria under our administration will be ready to play any leadership role that Africa expects of it. At home, we face enormous challenges. Insecurity, pervasive corruption, the hitherto unending and seemingly impossible fuel and power shortages are the immediate concerns. We are going to tackle them head on. Nigerians will not regret that they have entrusted national responsibility to us. We must not succumb to hopelessness and defeatism. We can fix our problems.*

5.1.2.1. Visionary Leadership as Adaptation to the Physical and Social World

In excerpt 2, PMB deploys vague expressions with approximators of quantities: "our neighbours", "our African brethren", "any leadership role", "enormous challenges" so as to adapt his speech to suit the present dire situations as a leader with the clarity of vision and purpose. Instead of mentioning the exact 'neighbours', 'African brethren' and 'leadership role', the use of intentional vagueness by PMB is a convincing way of attaching greater importance to the tasks at hand as a new leader with an open-door policy.

5.1.2.2. Visionary Leadership as Adaptation to the Mental World

Indicating that Nigeria is confronted with 'enormous challenges' and can overcome these challenges: "At home we face enormous challenges... we are going to tackle them head on. Nigerians will not regret that they have entrusted national responsibility on us... we can fix our problems", PMB seeks to be perceived as a responsible agent of change. As a visionary leader, he shows no hesitation to 'fix our problems' by his intention of carrying out salutary changes as a visionary leader in times of change.

5.1.3. **Intentional Vagueness as an Indicator to Democratic Leadership**

Since Nigeria practices unitary federalism, the discourse constructs of political leaders have been marked with fostering national unity and reinforcing consultations and consensus, thereby encouraging civil engagements in decision-making. PMB's use of intentional vagueness to project his democratic leadership stance is exemplified in excerpt three below:

Excerpt 3: *I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody. A few people have privately voiced fears that on coming back to office I shall go after them... There will be no paying off old scores. The past is prologue.*

5.1.3.1. **Democratic Leadership as Adaptation to the Physical and Social World**

In excerpt 3, PMB uses vague words and phrases such as 'everybody and nobody', 'a few people' and 'old scores' to adapt intentionally to his democratic leadership stance. Using the approximator of numbers, PMB intentionally wishes to associate with 'everybody', and 'a few people' with 'no paying off of old scores.' PMB's linguistic choice is thus vague in self-defining by asserting: "I belong to *everybody* and I belong to *nobody*" in order to gain the trust of Nigerians. Since many Nigerians are aware of his antecedent: Buhari is nomadic Fulani by birth, Moslem fundamentalist by religious inclination and ex-military General by profession, this vague statement is intentional so as to adapt with the socio-cultural realities of all Nigerians, regardless of ethnic extractions, religious convictions and political affiliations as their newly-elected leader. Thus, he wishes to be perceived as a democratic leader, who is ready to abide by democratic tenets of equity, justice and rule of law, and avoid the short-sighted pursuit of cronyism and bigotry.

5.1.3.2. **Democratic Leadership as Adaptation to the Mental World**

Based on his marginal culture, rich professional experience and sterling political career, PMB is motivated to make Nigerians believe in his capacity and intended to allay the fears of Nigerians, by establishing a closer proximity with all Nigerians through the bond of shared experiences and communal values. In order to achieve this goal, he deploys the intentional vague expression "I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody" and 'no paying off of old scores' so as to adapt to the complementary claim of "belonging" to all Nigerians in his capacity as the newly elected democratic leader.

5.1.4. **Intentional Vagueness as an Indicator to Empathetic Leadership**

Empathetic leadership represents strength in kindness, fostering unity and inclusivity in the face of political uncertainties or national crises. In other words, an empathetic leader is sensitive to the moods and needs of the citizens, able to respond to unpredictable events, and offer compassion and reassurances. PMB thus employs intentional vagueness to present himself as an empathetic leader, who feels the pains and share the fears of Nigerians in excerpt four below:

Excerpt 4: *Nigerians have shown their commitment to democracy and are determined to entrench its culture. Our journey has not been easy but thanks to the determination of our people /.../ and strong support from friends abroad we have today a truly democratically elected government in place.*

5.1.4.1. **Empathetic Leadership as Adaptation to the Physical and Social World**

In excerpt 4, PMB employs vague expressions: “Our journey has not been easy, but thanks to the determination of our people” and “...strong supports from friends abroad” which raise the questions about the identities of the human agents responsible for 'the uneasy journey' and the 'friends abroad.' As a political leader, the intentional deployment of an approximator of numbers: 'our people' and 'friends abroad' adapts to hedging the disclosure of the identities and spatial-locations of “our *faceless* people”, whose journey has been made difficult, and “friends abroad” who provided “strong supports” to Nigeria's elected government. Using the approximator of numbers results in vagueness that signals Buhari's intention to mention with passing interests those “friends abroad”, who had provided “strong support” for him to become a “truly democratically elected” President of Nigeria. Thus, Nigerians are in the dark regarding the identities and locations of foreign alliances and foreign foes in matters connected with putting “a truly democratically elected government in place.”

5.1.4.2. **Empathetic Leadership as Adaptation to the Mental World**

Emotionally-charged hedges are deployed by PMB to create a mental picture of resilience, praising the Nigerian citizens including himself, whose *commitments* and *determination* towards the entrenchment of democracy in Nigeria is not in doubt. Relying on the principle of appreciation, PMB adapts his linguistic choice to foreground the salience of his gratitude to 'our people' and hope to make them believe in the sincerity of his appreciation. Using the ingroup identity marker: 'our people' is a persuasive technique to winning cognitively the people's trust. The linguistic choices of nominal phrases: “Nigerians”, “our journey” and “our people” in this discourse context do not infer political leaders. Note that vagueness in these phrases result due to the way PMB, a retired military general and Head of States, deliberately withheld information on political leaders' *commitment* and *determination* in entrenching democracy. Thus, vagueness in this context is intentional to signal a high-involvement for self-asserting ingroup solidarity and praise-singing the Nigerian people, including himself, as a way of appealing to their emotional needs for compliments, but mitigating the roles and contributions of the political class. Apparently, this complimentary construct of appreciation but mitigation of roles by the political class is an adaptation to the mental world of the citizens.

5.2. **Intentional Vagueness in President Tinubu's 2023 Inauguration Speech**

This section focuses on the analysis of intentional vagueness in the 2023 inauguration speech by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu (PBAT).

5.2.1. Intentional Vagueness as an Indicator to Theistic Leadership

While delivering an inauguration speech, it is common for a newly-elected political leader to make allusion to spirituality, that demonstrates their belief in God's intervention in terms of electoral victory. This is evident in PBAT's inaugural speech below:

Excerpt 5: *I stand before you honoured to assume the sacred mandate you have given me. My love for this nation is abiding. My confidence in its people, unwavering. And my faith in God Almighty, absolute. I know that His hand shall provide the needed moral strength and clarity of purpose in those instances when we seem to have reached the limits of our human capacity.*

5.2.1.1. Theistic Leadership as Adaptation to the Physical and Social World

In excerpt 5, PBAT's linguistic choice-making of “the sacred mandate”, “my faith in God Almighty, absolute” and “His hand shall provide the needed moral strength ... when we seem to have reached the limits of our human capacity” adapts to the sensibility of a theistic leader. His acknowledgement of God Almighty is a tactical ideological construction of shared belief systems, and serves to index his *advertised* theistic stance, as a leader who beliefs in God, Almighty. In so doing, he describes his victory and the attendant responsibilities as “the sacred mandate.” What is seen here is the case of a president-elect, who interprets his emergence as a call to highly-valued responsibility, worthy of religious devotion. Another adaptation to religious sensibility lies in the publicly declared “my faith in God Almighty, absolute,” which is a good strategy to front his theistic stance.

5.2.1.2. Theistic Leadership as Adaptation to the Mental World

The people's moods and hopes are important cognitive cues to be considered, especially when a newly-elected president is delivering his inauguration speech to citizens, whose voices have been grossly suppressed, hopes dampened and aspirations ignored with impunity by the immediate past political administration. Expectedly, since PBAT is a leader and member of the same political party with his immediate predecessor, his linguistic choice of linking the national responsibility bestowed on him with religious devotion: “the *sacred* mandate” and “my *love* for this nation is abiding. My *confidence* in its people, unwavering” is a discursive strategy of intentional vagueness to enable him gain the people's trust and confidence. Using the modal verb of assurance: 'shall' and an epistemic verb 'seem', PBAT's adaptation to the people's religious sensibility in the discursive construction: “His hand *shall* provide the needed moral strength ... when we *seem* to have reached the limits of *our* human capacity” indexes his sense of piety, and places the speech at the heart of metaphysics. The reference to metaphysics is an appeal to both rational and emotional needs of Nigerians, who are predominantly

religious. Note that the ground for shirking responsibility has been prepared earlier through the deployment of intentional vagueness through the use of first-person plural pronouns: 'when *we* seem to have reached the limits of *our* human capacity.' Cognitively, it is a suggestive disclaimer that *we are humans, and every human is fallible*.

5.2.2 Intentional Vagueness as an Indicator to Empathetic Leadership

The discursive constructs of intentional vagueness that emphasise an empathetic leadership style is also evident in PBAT's inauguration speech as shown below:

Excerpt 6: *This day is bold and majestic yet bright and full of spirit, as is our precious nation. As a nation, we have long ago decided to march beyond the dimness of night into the open day of renewed national hope. The question we now ask ourselves is whether to remain faithful to the work inherent in building a better society or retreat into the shadows of our unmet potential. For me, there is but one answer. We are too great a nation and too grounded as a people to rob ourselves of our finest destiny. This nation's journey has been shaped by the prayers of millions, and the collective sacrifices of us all. We have endured hardships that would have made other societies crumble. Yet, we have shouldered the heavy burden to arrive at this SUBLIME moment where the prospect of a better future merges with our improved capacity to create that future.*

5.2.2.1. Empathetic Leadership as Adaptation to the Physical and Social World

In excerpt 6, PBAT's linguistic choice of commendatory adjectival phrases: 'bold and majestic', 'precious', 'too great and too grounded', 'finest', 'collective', 'heavy and sublime' adapts to the tradition of elevated commendations. His heightened commendations of the people's resilience and sacrifices: "We have endured hardships that would have made other societies crumble. Yet, we have shouldered the heavy burden to arrive at this SUBLIME moment..." is a deft deployment of an ideological stance of consensus, which serves to index the continuing sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. This 'advertised' democracy is linked up with his emergence as the President-elect with all powers to direct the socio-economic and security affairs of Nigerians. Thus, he describes his inauguration as "This day is bold and majestic" and "This SUBLIME moment." Graphologically, the word 'sublime' is used in uppercase by the incoming president to indicate a practical shift from outgoing degeneration to incoming regeneration because, as an empathetic leader, he feels the protracted pains, relates with the realities and shares the burdens of the people. His emergence would signal a departure from the painful past: "The shadows of our unmet potential" to the beginning of a new era in which "...the prospect of a better future merges with our improved

capacity to create that future.” Besides, the use of first-person plural pronouns *we*, *our* *us* signals self-inclusion as someone who has “...long ago endured hardships and shouldered the heavy burden to arrive at this sublime moment.” Note that PBAT's preponderant deployments of vague expressions: “bold and majestic”, “precious nation”, “finest destiny”, “the shadows of our unmet potential”, “sublime moment”, “open day of renewed national hope”, the approximator of quantity: “too great and too grounded”, the approximator of number: “the prayers of millions” and the approximator of time: “we have long ago...” are intentionally vague for their abstractness and imprecisions. *These expressions are as good as saying much in nothingness.*

5.2.2.2. **Empathetic Leadership as Adaptation to the Mental World**

Cognitively, PBAT's linguistic choices of profuse abstract adjectives adapt to the sensibility of the people's needs for commendations and appreciations, particularly given the unpalatable experiences that the people have suffered in the hands of successive democratic governments in Nigeria as captured in excerpt 6: “This nation's journey has been shaped by the prayers of millions, and the collective sacrifices of us all. We have endured hardships that would have made other societies crumble... we have shouldered the heavy burden...” These cognitive verbs: “shaped”, “endured” and “shouldered” are intentionally vague because they index emotionally-charged hedges for creating a mental picture of the dire situations. Praising the people to high-heavens is an adaptation of swaying the people's moods towards his self-portrayal as an empathetic leader, who is compassionate towards their painful plights, and has come to lead them to the 'dreamland', marking a projected difference between 'our' electoral victory, representing pervading light as against 'their' lingering darkness.

5.2.3. **Intentional Vagueness as an Indicator to Democratic Leadership**

Using intentional VL, PBAT vaguely project himself as a democratic leader in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 7: *Our administration shall govern on your behalf but never rule over you. We shall consult and dialogue but never dictate. We shall reach out to all but never put down a single person for holding views contrary to our own. We are here to further mend and heal this nation, not tear and injure it. /.../ The outcome reflected the will of the people. However, my victory does not render me any more Nigerian than my opponents. Nor does it render them any less patriotic. They shall forever be my fellow compatriots. And I will treat them as such. /.../ They have taken their concerns to court. Seeking legal redress is their right and I fully defend their exercise of this right. This is the essence of the rule of law.*

5.2.3.1. Democratic Leadership as Adaptation to the Physical and Social World

Using promissory declarations as evident in campaign speeches, PBAT's linguistic choices, in excerpt 7, adapt vaguely to the political tradition of being democratic by emphasising the inglorious past (i.e., history) of Nigerians and their waning hopes for a better future (i.e. present physical conditions) in the vague constructions: “shall govern...but never rule over you”; “shall consult and dialogue, but never dictate”; “reach out to all but never put down a single person”; “mend and heal this nation, not tear and injure it” as a polarised strategy of self-assertiveness as a leader, who upholds the tenets of democratic ideals, unlike his predecessors who had 'ruled' as dictators. The ideological reference to 'painful past' and acknowledgment of the 'present dire conditions' is intentionally vague because these expressions convey inexact information regarding the vivid realities within the social space and fail to provide adequate evidence to support these 'damaging' statements so as to avoid responsibility for the information about the situation. For instance, the expressions: we shall govern... but never rule; consult and dialogue but never dictate; mend and heal, not tear and injure are approximators of occurrence and degree indexed with modal verbs, through which PBAT mitigates the responsibility of his predecessor, a member of his own political party. Such expressions are intentionally vague because he explicitly fails to mention or name one of those responsible for the successive anti-democratic leadership styles.

5.2.3.2. Democratic Leadership as Adaptation to the Mental World

Since inauguration speeches are monologues, PBAT's linguistic choice of intentional vague language, especially hedging (i.e., approximators of occurrence and degree) in excerpt 7 signal Face Threatening Acts avoidance (FTA) in order to minimize interactional risks (i.e., misunderstanding and misalignment) and avoid interpersonal tensions with his predecessors and opponents. As a leader, his linguistic choice adapts to the tenets of democracy in the excerpt: “The outcome [of the election] reflected the will of the people. However, ... They [my opponents] have taken their concerns to court. Seeking legal redress is their right and I fully defend their exercise of this right. This is the essence of the rule of law.” Such self-protective behaviour is a cognitive mechanism that explicitly adapts to the level of shared knowledge (i.e., glaringly past failures and growing contentions over his electoral victory) and sustain the speaker relationship in the vague expression: “They [my opponents] shall forever be my fellow compatriots. And I will treat them as such.” Note that the expressions are intentionally vague due to PBAT's deployment of an approximator of number: “the will of the people” as a strategy of overgeneralisation that signals Face Saving Act (FSA), and his unwillingness to publicly disclose the information about these incompetent predecessors responsible for 'the painful past' and those opponents contending in courts over his emergence as the new leader.

5.2.4. Intentional Vagueness as an Indicator to Visionary Leadership

The 2023 inauguration speech by PBAT also features intentional vagueness that indexes visionary leadership as demonstrated in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 8: *First, budgetary reform stimulating the economy without engendering inflation will be instituted /.../ Second, industrial policy will utilize the full range of fiscal measures to promote domestic manufacturing /.../ Third, electricity will become more accessible and affordable to businesses and homes alike /.../ We will encourage states to develop local sources as well /.../ I have a message for our investors, local and foreign: our government shall review all their complaints about multiple taxation and various anti-investment inhibitions /.../ We shall ensure that investors and foreign businesses repatriate their hard-earned dividends and profits home /.../ We shall honour our campaign commitment of one million new jobs in the digital economy...*

5.2.4.1. Visionary Leadership as Adaptation to the Physical and Social World

In excerpt 8, PBAT's linguistic choice of epistemic modals “will/shall” adapts to the political tradition of monological campaign discourse in which futuristic manifestations of great visions are vigorously articulated. On the part of PBAT, this linguistic choice of epistemic modality represents visionary dispositions of what are material necessities based on the power of foresights. However, such modals implicate a ground for absolving his administration from taking full responsibility over a possible non-performance that might characterise his leadership. In so doing, he deploys epistemic modals: “*will be instituted*”, “*We will encourage*”, “*We will utilise*”, “*We shall review*”, “*We shall honour*”, “*We shall ensure*”, “*Our government shall work*” as intentional vagueness of plausibility shield in order to practically protect the incoming administration, under his leadership, from taking absolute responsibility in case of poor or non-performance. Thus, the deployment of intentional vagueness is the prepared ground for shirking responsibility for the lofty 'campaign' promises, which contrast with what is expected of an inaugural discourse.

5.2.4.2. Visionary Leadership as Adaptation to the Mental World

Since the administration is just starting, PBAT conjures cognitively the personae of a visionary leader, who embodies an unusual discernment and a strength of character to do the needful through the deployment of epistemic modals. With such colourful promises on a Day of inauguration, PBAT uses intentional vagueness of epistemic modals to adapt to creating a mental picture of his political vision and self-will towards national regeneration after protracted years of degeneration, occasioned by maladministration and ineptitude of past successive governments. Since an inaugural

speech highlights the policy agenda, goals and priorities of an incoming leader, the repeated emphasis on future plans is however vague because it is possible that PBAT is aware of the impracticality of his proposed 'future' plans but use them to deceive the people in order to attract goodwill. Besides, it creates implicitly a sense of mental confusion regarding the precise timing for the fulfilments of these colourful promises.

6.0. Discussion of Findings

It is often said that, 'Politicians have sugar-coated tongues', especially given the manner with which they discursively manipulate the cognitive values and the material realities of the masses. The analysis reveals that the deft deployment of intentional vagueness by selected political leaders instantiate misleading constructions. The findings of this study reveal that the inaugural speeches can be categorised as the adaptation to the salience of three worlds: *physical world* of intentional vagueness (i.e., adaptation to theism, foresights, democracy, empathy and lofty ideals); *social world* of intentional vagueness (i.e., adaptation to the political traditions of servant-leadership, protection of democratic ideals, representation of epistemic authority, mitigations of anti-democratic deeds, social esteem of veracity and citizens-centric agenda); and *mental world* of intentional vagueness (i.e. adaptation to the need for appreciating the people's resilience for sustaining nascent democracy, the desire for solidarity-building and empathy, the assurance of responding to the emergent needs of the time).

Conclusion

This study has explored the pragmatic imports of intentional vagueness in first-term inaugural speeches by selected presidents of Nigeria. Through the pragmatic lens of Jef Verschueren's LAT, this study examines the contextual motivations for the imports of intentional vagueness with reference to the *physical*, *socio-cultural* and *mental* worlds of adaptability. Situating the analysis within the ambit of Jef Verschueren's LAT, we could see how power dynamics play in first-term inaugural discourse and how first-term presidents-elect express intentional vagueness to index messianic leadership reflections. More evident is the unprecedented rise in intentional vagueness in inauguration discourse that promotes patronages and propaganda rather than patriotism and nationalism in Nigeria, a consequence of the divide-and-rule of party politics.

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