

THE STUDY OF SEMANTIC AMBIGUITY IN SELECTED POLITICAL SPEECHES OF GOVERNOR MUHAMMADU INUWA YAHAYA OF GOMBE STATE

¹Adamu Usman Ph.D, ^{*2}Saleh Ahmad Abdullahi Ph.D, & ³Abubakar Alhaji Shuwa

^{1, 2&3}Department of Languages, Nigerian Army University Bui, Borno State, Nigeria

***Email:** salehmadbiri24@gmail.com

Abstract

Effective communication is a fundamental skill for academic success and personal development. In the context of speech writing, the ability to express thoughts clearly in writing is important. However, the presence of semantic ambiguities in writing poses a significant challenge to achieving this clarity. This study analyses selected political speeches of Governor Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya of Gombe State. The research looks at the theory of ambiguity as an aspect of semantics that deals with meaning, which can account for the language of political speeches. The data collected for the analysis were seven speeches which were randomly selected from Gombe State Government House. These were analysed using the concept of ambiguity to determine whether or not the language used can distort the meaning of the utterances as intended by the speaker. This was based on the realisation from the reviewed literature that ambiguity used either consciously or unconsciously, can affect how the listeners interpret the messages. In this regard, the research found out that, in the data collected, the speaker made use of such ambiguous statements in different forms and types such as lexical ambiguity and structural ambiguity. This was found to affect the interpretation of meaning as stated in the speeches which, by extension, might affect comprehension of government policies and programs which the speeches delivered were meant to convey.

Keywords: Semantic ambiguity; political speeches; context; meaning; interpretation; political discourse.

Introduction

This research examines the semantic ambiguity prevalent in selected political discourses of Governor Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya of Gombe state. Semantic ambiguities occur when sequences of words have more than one syntactic interpretation (Amshi, 2025). When we communicate, we most often do not state the meaning clearly, so that we make the listeners or readers interpret our meaning differently. To understand a written language is rather more difficult than a spoken language because if the listeners do not understand what we say, they can ask directly what we mean.

However, expressing meaning through written language is not always simple as it frequently entails linguistic nuances one of which is semantic ambiguities. Semantic ambiguities refer to instances in which expressions can have numerous interpretations due to the meaning of a word or phrases that can be misinterpreted (Alagbe & Joseph, 2009). Semantic ambiguity can occur in both lexical and structural contexts. However, Kreidler (1998) sees lexical ambiguity as when homonyms occupy the same location in an utterance. As a result, if such terms are employed in a communication, comprehension and interpretation of such texts may be hampered. Speakers frequently find it

difficult to manage the occurrence of ambiguous terms in their remarks. For example; the term ‘bark’ can refer to either the sound made by a dog or the outer coating of a tree (Kapadia, 2013).

However, as language a critical phenomenon that has continuity in shaping relationships between individuals, amongst groups, communities and nations (Adamu & Saleh, 2021). It uses can take diverse faces, depending on the context of communication. Through the use of language, many things are achieved all wrapped in sending or receiving a message in form of persuasion, education, exposition, enlightenment and entertainment. Therefore, it is the speaker’s manner of language use that determines whether a message is passed across or not.

In politics, language is a tool for either succeeding or failing, being the main tool for accomplishment in government, leadership, political rallies, campaigns, manifestoes, inaugurations, persuasions and others. It is on this note that some politicians, who have understood this notion, manipulate language to have their way into power through their speeches even when undeserving. Language is a very strong tool, because it has the power to send either a positive or negative message, based on the choice of words, method, manner of communication and the context.

The existing link between language and politics has been recognised (language is power). For instance, Aristotle, in *Politics*, is of the opinion that “man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals . . . and man is the only animal which is endowed with the gift of speech” (cited in Jowett, 1999). This is why it is important to study the language of politics because it enables us to understand how language is used by politicians. It is so because speeches are a vital part of the politicians’ role in announcing policies and persuading people to agree with them. Language of politicians, thus, is characterised by a key objective, which is to sell their political ideologies and manifestoes to the electorate. Language, therefore, is essential to politicians and all their activities, ranging from campaign, manifestoes, rallies, election, inaugurations, governance, etc, which are all carried out through the avenue created by language. This study looks at selected speeches of Governor Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya of Gombe State and to examine the ambiguities in his messages and the possible meanings that can be derived from them. This is to determine the different meanings an utterance can make, depending on the content, and the possible interpretations by listeners or addressees.

From the foregoing, effective communication is a fundamental skill for academic success and personal development. In the context of speech writing, the ability to express thoughts clearly in writing is important. However, the presence of semantic ambiguities in writing poses a significant challenge to achieving this clarity. This study explores the understanding of semantic ambiguity in the speeches of Governor Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya of Gombe State, thereby focusing on the unique linguistic features presented from the lexical and sentential length of his political speeches around the cultural landscape.

Literature Review

Ambiguity

Ambiguity is a concept extensively explored across various fields, particularly linguistics, communication and logic, referring to situations where a word, phrase, sentence or expression can

have multiple interpretations leading to potential confusion or misunderstanding (Amshi, 2025). Also, Okonkwo (2023) sees it as the presence of two or more possible meanings within a single linguistic expression, which can lead to different interpretations depending on the context. This definition emphasizes the inherent multiplicity in meaning that can arise even within a seemingly straightforward statement. Similarly, Nwosu and Alabi (2023) define ambiguity as a linguistic phenomenon where the meaning of a word or phrase is not immediately clear due to its capacity to be understood in more than one way. Their definition underscores the importance of context in resolving ambiguity, noting that without adequate context clues; the intended meaning may remain obscure.

In addition, Eze and Olayemi (2021) describe ambiguity as a feature of language that allows for multiple interpretations, often arising from the polysemous nature of words or from syntactic structures that can be parsed in different ways. They focus on how ambiguity can be both natural and challenging aspect of communication, especially in written texts, where the reader cannot immediately clarify the intended meaning with the authors. Umeh and Ibrahim (2022) offer a definition of ambiguity that highlights its impact on communication, defining it as the quality of a statement that allows for different interpretations, potentially leading to confusion or misunderstanding among the audience. They emphasise the communicative challenges posed by ambiguity, particularly in educational and professional settings, where clarity is essential. Adegbite and Akande (2022) take a sociolinguistic approach, defining ambiguity as the variability in meaning that arises when different cultural or linguistic backgrounds influence the interpretation of a statement. Their definition points to the role of language user's backgrounds in shaping how ambiguity is perceived and resolved. Collectively, these scholarly definitions underscore the complexity of ambiguity as a linguistic and communicative phenomenon, arising from the inherent flexibility of language and highlighting the critical role that context, culture and individual interpretation play in determining meaning.

Semantic Ambiguity

An important role of semantic ambiguity in speech is the delicate construction and delivery of messages. There is a myriad of studies that show the effect of ambiguous language and how it can be used to produce different interpretations (Aarons, 2012; Ritchie, 2004). It is difficult to communicate when there is no understanding of the intended meaning of the given speech. It is known that human language is characterised by diversity and creativity (Lasheiky, 2024)). As a result of this, we cannot expect to understand every word directly and clearly. In addition, some flaws in the linguistic system cannot be neglected, for example, the linguistic ambiguity that makes people lost and unable to deduce the meaning. Fundamentally, many linguistic utterances are not specific or linked to an explicit meaning. This is due to the ambiguity of words that require several explanations which make the listeners distracted and thus difficult to understand. In general, this phenomenon is a common feature in all languages all over the world.

However, semantic ambiguity in speech writing is a complex issue that affects communication clarity. This ambiguity occurs when word(s), phrase(s) and sentence(s) can be interpreted in multiple ways, often leading to misunderstandings. Lexical ambiguity, where individual words have multiple meanings and syntactic ambiguity, where sentence structure allows for multiple interpretations are two primary types (Okonkwo, 2023). The role of context is critical in solving

these ambiguities. Recent study by Nwosu and Alabi (2023) highlight that the meaning of ambiguous words or phrases often becomes clear when placed within a specific situational context, which includes both linguistic elements and the broader social or cultural setting. However, many speakers fail to provide adequate context in their speech, assuming that their hearers share the same background knowledge, which exacerbates the ambiguity (Adegbite & Akande, 2022).

In multilingual contexts like Nigeria, the influence of speakers' native languages on their speech further contributes to semantic ambiguity. The linguistic interference where structures or concepts from a speaker's first language affect their use of English is a common source of ambiguity in their speech (Adedoyin & Yusuf, 2023).

Lexical Ambiguity

This type of ambiguity creates confusion in both written and spoken language. In writing, it appears when words have multiple meanings. In spoken, it occurs when different forms of a word share the same sounds (Hurford & Heasley, 1983). Additionally, two key factors contribute to this multiplicity of meanings. The first factor is homonyms; words that show a completely different meaning, but appear to share the same letters and sounds e.g. the word bank is a good example of homonyms. The second factor is polysemy; words that share the same "meaning and sounds, but there is a slight difference in the literal meaning in one way or another e.g. the word captain includes multiple interpretations, but all refer to the leader (Cann, 1993). To follow up, the spoken form of ambiguity is caused by homophones which express different meanings; Gerald (2000) noted that different forms of words can share identical sounds, creating ambiguity. Lexical ambiguity is divided into two frameworks: in written language, it arises due to homonyms and polysemy; in spoken language, it occurs because of homophones.

Over the past 20 years, research on lexical ambiguity has focused on understanding how linguistic context influences meaning, especially since ambiguous words can impact comprehension (Fodor, 1983; McClelland, 1987; Simpson & Krueger, 1991; Small & Tanenhaus, 1988; Swinney, 1979; Tabossi, 1988).

In general, only four of these concepts are the frequently discussed issues by researchers in this field of semantics, because of their clear effect on ambiguity. The first one is a homograph. Homograph or heteronymy; includes words that appear the same with similar or identical letters, but at the same time, they are completely different in meaning e.g. the word lead as a verb and lead as a noun the word minute as a noun, and, minute as an adjective. Such words create ambiguity if they appear in a sentence without sufficient linguistic clues to clarify the intended meaning (Basil, 2011). The second one is homophones. This is demonstrated by the fact that the words have identical pronunciations but different spellings. This interpretation cannot include words that are not semantically related but still appear the same spelling and articulation such words should be treated as homonyms. For illustration, consider the following words as examples of homophones the word beer as (a kind of drink) and the word bier as (a stretcher) also the word cereal as (a kind of crop) and the word serial as (a part of the story) the word flour as (corn powder) and the word flower as (part of plant).

Generally, homophones are often not ambiguous in their usual nature, because the meaning can be understood through writing, but the ambiguous part is in the spoken language. The listener gets

confused in their understanding of the intended meaning. The third one is homonyms; many writers have made a mistake when they think that homonyms are words that have the same spelling (homographs) and words that have the same pronunciation (homophones). This interpretation is seen as failing to capture the true concept of homonyms. The idealistic theory distinguishes homonyms within the scope of polysemy. This theory is useful when recognizing that polysemy arises from the metaphorical use of words (Ndimele, 2007).

To illustrate, consider the following examples of homonyms: ball (a round object used in games) vs. ball (an evening party), bat (a flying animal) vs. bat (a piece of wood), date (a period) vs. date (a type of plant), and guy (happy and lively) vs. guy (a homosexual person). All these examples can create ambiguity, especially if the linguistic context that clarifies the intended meaning is absent. The four examples are instances of polysemy, which McArthur (1996, p.715) defines as “words or other items of language with two or more senses.”

The term polysemy comes from the Greek, signifying “multiple meanings”. In detail, poly means “many” and semeion means “sign,” so polysemy describes situations where a single word has two or more different meanings (Jackson & Amvela, 2001, p. 58). However, we must not forget that words (polysemy) often carry a meaning that is related or includes similarities, and this is what distinguishes polysemy from homonyms (Saeed, 2008). Notice the following words: you will find something in common in the meaning despite the difference in the literal meaning; the word head is (a leader of a group) or as (a part of the human body) the word mouth as (a part of the human body) or as (a part of the bottle, river, etc.) the word glass as (reading class) or as (a drinking vessel). Furthermore, the ambiguity increases when other words appear next to polysemous words and they do not provide enough information to convey the required meaning of the sentences. Examine the following sentence to see the extent of ambiguity and confusion; “my classes have broken” until the meaning becomes clear, there is an urgent need to add other words to become clear, see the following addition in the previous example “my classes have broken so I could not read or “my glasses have broken because the water is too hot.”

Structural Ambiguity

Hurford and Heasley (1983, p. 128) define “structural ambiguity as a sentence carries several meanings as a result of the words that are linked together in several syntactic structures despite the clarity of the meaning of each word separately”. Oaks (2010) also defined structural ambiguity which occurs when a sentence or phrase can be interpreted in multiple ways due to its syntactic structure. Structural ambiguity arises when a sentence can be understood in more than one way due to its syntactical structure, rather than the meanings of the individual words themselves. This type of ambiguity is a result of how the components of a sentence, such as words or phrases, are arranged. For example, the sentence “I saw the man with the telescope” can be interpreted as either (1) using a telescope to see the man, or (2) seeing a man who is holding a telescope.

Similarly, “The chicken is ready to eat” can mean (1) the food is prepared for consumption or (2) the bird is ready to eat something. In the case of “She found the book on the table,” the ambiguity could be (1) discovering a book located on the table or (2) finding a book and placing it on the table. These examples illustrate how word order and sentence structure can lead to multiple interpretations depending on how the sentence is parsed (Cook, 2004; Cruse, 1986). There is a type

that includes an ambiguity of meaning, which is created from the combination of structural and lexical ambiguities.

Usually, ambiguity is created as the result of words that have more than one meaning as well as the possibility of several grammatical structures of the sentence. As an illustration of the following example of the word “duck”, this word is an ambiguous one that can show more than one meaning and more than one syntactic category. This word is interpreted as a verb with a meaning of lower “one's head quickly” and it is also interpreted as a noun with the meaning of the well-known swimming bird Longman UK (1998, p.459). By changing the grammatical category of the word duck, the structure of the sentence is affected, thus creating problems in comprehension. This type of ambiguity is not considered one of the basic types of ambiguity for some linguists such as Cann (1993), Hurford and Heasley (1983) and, Saeed (2008). This type is considered an extreme example of structural or lexical ambiguity, but other linguists such as Chiechia and McConnell (1990) have a different point of view in their analysis as this type is mentioned as a basic type of ambiguity because it is not appropriate to classify this type under the heading of any other type (lexical or structural).

Empirical Review

Semantic ambiguity arises when a word, phrase or sentence is interpreted in multiple ways due to the meanings of its components. Recent studies offer updated insights into how semantic ambiguity impacts language processing and interpretation. Malt and Smith (2020) examines how cognitive processes handle ambiguous words. They discuss how human brain uses contextual information to disambiguate terms in real-time. Malt and Smith's research highlights the cognitive mechanisms involved in interpreting semantic ambiguity and the role of context in resolving it.

Gibbs (2021) examines how semantic ambiguity interacts with metaphorical language. Gibbs discusses how metaphors exploit semantic ambiguity to convey deeper meanings. For instance, the metaphor “time is thief” in a way that can be interpreted both literally and metaphorically. This use of ambiguity enriches the metaphorical expression and illustrates how semantic ambiguity can enhance meaning.

In the study of Saeed (2021) provides a contemporary perspective on semantic ambiguity by differentiating between polysemy and homonymy. Saeed argues that context is essential for resolving ambiguities. For instance, the word ‘pen’ can refer to either a writing instrument or an enclosure for animals and understanding the context helps clarify which meaning is intended. However, Levinson (2021) integrates semantic ambiguity into the broader field of pragmatics. Levinson emphasizes how semantic ambiguity interacts with pragmatic factors such as speaker intentions and conversational context. This interaction often requires listeners to infer the intended meaning based on contextual cues, illustrating the dynamic relationship between semantics and pragmatics.

Moreover, Crystal (2023) explores semantic ambiguity as a fundamental aspect of linguistic complexity. Crystal highlights that semantic ambiguity often results from polysemy, where a single word has multiple related meanings or homonymy, where a word has unrelated meanings. For

instance, the word ‘bank’ can refer to a financial institution or the side of a river. Crystal emphasizes the crucial role of context in resolving these ambiguities.

In another study, Lasheiky (2024) study semantic ambiguity in English; a review on lexical, structural and scope challenges in communication, due to the possibility of various meanings, semantic ambiguity, particularly in English presents a serious obstacle to efficient communication. This study investigates key types of semantic ambiguity linguistic, structural, and scope and their influence on comprehension. The study emphasises the intricate relationship between context and meaning by examining examples like homonyms, polysemy, homographs, and homophones. Findings indicate that while ambiguity can disrupt understanding, background knowledge and contextual clues often enable listeners and readers to grasp intended meanings. Additionally, ambiguity is sometimes purposefully employed in literature, highlighting the critical role of context in resolving semantic ambiguity in communication.

Also, Amshi (2025) examines the semantic ambiguities present in the essays of secondary school students. The study reveals that lexical ambiguity is the most prevalent, whereas the phonological and orthographical ambiguities are also common. It also highlights the challenges students face in producing clear and unambiguous written communication. The study suggests that targeted instruction in vocabulary, grammar and contextual language use is essential to reduce these ambiguities. The study contributes valuable insights into the nature of semantic ambiguity in student writing and provides a foundation for future educational interventions and studies, which portray a clear landscape with the present research that focuses on political speeches not student write-ups.

Finally, Ullah, Mukhtayar, Zahir, and Aziz (2025) explore the double meanings through semantic ambiguity, which contributes to humour in-jokes. The study aims to identify the dual role of ambiguity in facilitating humour while preventing communication failure. The study reveals that allowing semantic ambiguity serves to enrich humour with a playful untidiness regarding meaning yet can also prove problematic to miscommunication. The only reason is misinterpretation because of the ambiguity that leads listeners to interpret a message that is not meant or misinterpret what the words mean. One of the most important findings is that double meanings make for better comedy but then add confusion to communication, meaning that people cannot always tell what exactly the relevant message is. This demonstrates that the relationship between language, meaning and humour is complex and everyday communication.

The above related studies focused more on ambiguous expressions at lexical or sentential level, thereby checking out his choice of words and use of language. This research focuses on both the speaker’s intention and the hearers’ perception of the utterance and the meaning he derives from it. This study, therefore, analyses some selected speeches of Governor Inuwa Yahaya of Gombe state.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Galen’s (1977) theory of semantic ambiguity which provides a critical lens through which the study examines various forms of ambiguity found in the speech of Governor’s Inuwa Yahaya of Gombe State. According to Galen (1977), semantic ambiguity arises when a word, phrase or sentence can be interpreted in more than one way due to the presence of multiple

meanings or unclear reference points. This theory categorises semantic ambiguity into different types including lexical ambiguity, syntactic ambiguity and pragmatic ambiguity. These categories guide the identification and analysis of ambiguous instances in Governor's Muhammad Inuwa Yahaya of Gombe State. It is essential to ground the research in a robust theoretical framework that can provide the necessary lens through which to analyse and interpret data.

The justification for the choice of Galen's (1977) ambiguity theory in the investigation of Governor Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya is because duality and multiplicity of meaning operations in linguistic expressions offer a valuable perspective for understanding how speech navigate and produce ambiguous language in speech presentation. The Galen's theory of semantic ambiguity provides a structured approach to understanding and analysing ambiguous language.

Methodology

The research design for the study is qualitative approach. This methodology was chosen because it provides the viable method of achieving the main aim of the research. The data for this study were primary and secondary sources. The primary source is the collection of speeches from the repository of Gombe State Government House and from online news blogs. The secondary data are literature materials such as text books and journals on semantics and general linguistics where the researchers reviewed the general concept of semantics and the theory of ambiguity chosen for this study, where seven (7) speeches were scrutinised to achieve the stated goals, thereby weighing them on the categories of semantic ambiguity of Galen's. The study focuses on investigation, exploration and examination of ambiguous statements with a view of finding how effective ambiguity in the speeches of Governor Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya within the stated period under study and provides proper generalisation on political speeches.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This subsection focuses on the analysis of the data using the theory of semantic ambiguity by Galen (1977) to delineate the study. It analyses data based on the Galen's categories, starting from lexical ambiguity, structural ambiguity and pragmatic ambiguity.

Analysis of Lexical Ambiguity

Excerpt 1

"I am happy to note that there was a fair improvement in the results of the students who sat for the external examination in 2019/2020 **owing** to the re-introduction of the mock examination" (paragraph 5, lines 6).

From the above expression, the Governor used 'owing' as a concept that calls for different interpretation. The word 'owing' can mean "because of" something, "on account of" something, or to simply be in 'debt' but in this context the speaker used the word 'owing' to mean "as a result of", as we can see that he thinks the students passed the examination as a result of reintroducing the mock examination. At this juncture, the word owing may refer to have multiple meaning when used in an individual form, but having specification as to what it refers, when used in a particular context and to some extent is confusing that depends on the richness of vocabulary own by the hearer.

Excerpt 2

“Let me also call on the **vast** majority of our people” (paragraph 8 lines 8)

The above expression in excerpt 2 indicated the word ‘vast’ as open to multiple interpretations. The word ‘vast’ can mean something large, be it a space, a room a land a container or number of people or things etc. it can also mean something that has been wasted, a desolate place, or a lonely environment or person. But in this context, the speaker uses the word “vast” to mean number of people, denoting that, there are plenty of persons.

Similarly, it can also have another manifestation as to its interpretation which calls for *syntactic ambiguity*. The word vast and majority in some extent be regarded as unviable words that can be used together where ‘vast’ referring to much and ‘majority’ showing much number of a thing. This can also be seen as ungrammatical, which deviate from the standard.

Excerpt 3

“...the disputes lead to confrontations and constitute security risk to life, property and development” (paragraph 3, lines 6)

Another lexical ambiguity found in the Governor Yahaya’s speech is ‘confrontations’ this can mean ‘to talk’; meaning to have a conversation with a person or group of people, it can also mean to ‘attack something or someone’. It can also mean to quarrel. From the speech, the speaker uses the word ‘confrontations’ to mean quarrel since the word before it is ‘dispute’ and it entails risk of life and properties. Again, the word ‘security’ can mean an asset that is something or someone of value. It can mean a property (something owned) proof of ownership. It can mean an award e.g. a medal or trophy, or a protection body a police, a soldier etc. In the context of this speech, the speaker used the word security to mean something valuable.

Excerpt 6

“The security situation and its attendant humanitarian effects usher in a donor industry that has its pros and cons” (paragraph 5, lines 1).

To usher can mean an individual who directs sitting arrangements in gatherings, for example, a church usher. It can also mean a male escort at a wedding, example Best Man. The word usher can also mean a door keeper in a courtroom, or any school teacher. It can also denote the beginning of something new as depicted by the speaker in this context.

Excerpt 7

“The journey from 2015 when we first contested for elections has been both interesting and challenging” (paragraph 2, lines 1).

The word “journey” can be used to refer to progress so far, depicting the process of achieving success. It can mean a set of travelling, which is moving from one location to another. It can also mean a day, especially in an instance of recap at the end of a day or it can mean a day’s works or perhaps the weight of finished coins delivered at one time which is also called journey. But in this context, the speaker refers to the word journey to mean that of progress, that is the period of making efforts to achieve success.

“we are still battling with lack of portable drinking water” (paragraph 13, lines 2)

The word “battle” can mean a “fight which can be a physical combat or protest. It can also mean to struggle, that is striving to obtain something or to attain a position. It can also mean to contest meaning to compete with counterparts for a position or for a prize or award etc. In this context, the speaker refers to the word ‘battle’ to mean a struggle, as depicted in the statement that it's a battle for having portable water.

Analysis of Structural Ambiguity

As mentioned above, structural ambiguity refers to the state of a statement being ambiguous because of a structure in the utterance. Structural ambiguity occurs when larger units usually more than a word, cause utterances to be ambiguous. Structural ambiguities are found in the selected speeches as follows:

Excerpt 1

“it is in the light of these that we are gathered here today” (page 67, paragraph 4, lines 1)

The utterance “in the light of this, can be interpreted as first, signifying “brightness” referring to light that enhances visibility, or it can mean “in accordance to something” this is when more details will be given to something that has been said already. It can also mean an “achievement” meaning when something is achieved and there is there a need to go further or say something

Excerpt 2

“In the same vein we are flagging off the enrollment” (page 71, paragraph 6 lines 13). The utterance “in the same vein” is ambiguous it can mean in the same order, maybe in a series of activity, it can mean the same topic e.g. when something is being linked to the topic under discussion. It can mean in the same blood vessel, because vein is a blood vessel biologically. But in this context, the speaker uses the utterance “in the same vein” to mean in the same order of activity or program. “...our administration’s approach to overhauling the health system is a holistic one geared towards the achievement of universal health coverage” (page 71, paragraph 7, lines 2).

“Geared towards” can simply be “to direct meaning to follow a particular method, path, guidelines, etc.” The word ‘gear’ can be in relation to equipment especially in the mechanical world which is used to regulate speed. Or, it can be related to garments or cotton. But in this context, the speaker used the utterance “geared towards” to mean in the direction as commenced.

Excerpt 3

“this theme is particularly suitable, given me that We now have many new hands in the affairs of boundary management in the state” (page 73, paragraph 5, lines 7). The whole structure is ambiguous because “many new hands” can mean a pair of brand new hands. It can mean a set of experts specialized in a particular thing. It can also mean a group of inexperienced people, or perhaps a group of experienced people involved in a particular thing. It can also mean external bodies that have been probably included in a thing or an inclusion of non-regular or non-usual bodies. Here, the speaker used the utterance to mean that of experts who will help in the affairs of the boundary management.

“you are assembled here in pursuit of relevant knowledge that will position you to execute your mandates timely and appropriately” (page 73, paragraph 9, lines 2). To execute can mean “to accomplish, that is to get to the end of a matter or task successfully. It can mean to carry out

something whether completely or not. It can also mean to implement, that is to actualize something perhaps a mission or goal. To execute can also mean to kill meaning, to take away life from a person or it can mean to end something totally. In this context, the speaker used the word execute to mean implementation.

Excerpt 4

“continue to train more Nigerians and by so doing etch the name of the organization in gold.” (page 77, paragraph 9, lines 2). By gold here, many interpretations can be given to the utterance. Possible interpretation includes; to etch the name of the organization with pure gold as to mean the mineral resource, to make it of a high standard or to place high value on it because gold symbolizes anything of value, cost and importance. This utterance is ambiguous.

Excerpt 5

“All praises be to Allah (SWT) for sparing our lives to witness yet another milestone in the life of this administration” (page 78, paragraph 1, lines 1). The statement can mean a physical contact with a milestone which is a stone marked at the road side to indicate intervals. It can mean witnessing an important event in person’s life, mostly for the first time in history e.g., in a career, project etc. It can also mean marking of another beginning. The speaker here used the utterance to mean marking of another beginning.

“Our administration has proved (sic) to be a break from the past, progressively moving from a culture of administrative recklessness, financial mismanagement and political apathy” (page 79, paragraph 5, lines 3).

This utterance can mean disconnection from things that occurred in the past, a success from a problem formed from the past that is reflecting or affecting the present, or a breeze or rest from things back firing from the past, meaning a slow progress. Thus, in this context, the speaker refers the statement to mean a success from problems arising from the past.

Excerpt 7

“Our unending gratitude goes to the good people of Gombe State who clearly spoke through the ballot and entrusted us with the onerous task of steering the affairs of the State” (page 91, paragraph 3, lines 1).

The statement actually means making a choice of candidate by casting a vote. However, it can also mean to use the ballot or voting process to manipulate decision or choice of voters. It can also literally mean to speak through the ballot, as if the ballot were some kind of amplifier.

Findings

From the analysis of the seven (7) selected speeches out of many, only Ten (10) ambiguous statements were sampled among which (5) are lexically ambiguous and (5) structurally ambiguous. Thus, it can be said that governor Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya uses such semantic elements in his speeches, as mentioned in the objectives. Furthermore, from the interpretations in the analysis, it could be argued that ambiguous statements do alter the meaning of utterance, as it reflected in the different interpretations given to the ambiguous statements in the analysis section. Therefore, with the different interpretations, except in the right context, the real intention of the speaker can be misunderstood or misinterpreted. In this regard, it is trite to posit that ambiguity as a semantic

element obscures the meaning of utterances because of the numerous interpretations the audience will subject the statements into.

Conclusion

Language is one of the vital tools for communication and phenomenon that distinguishes humans from other beings. With the use of language, humans are able to communicate their emotions, ideas, opinions, acceptance and rejections. The communication of messages and revelation of intentions are very important in our everyday endeavors as seen in the speeches rendered. Thus, the effective use of language brings about effective communication. While ineffective use of language brings about ineffective communication. From the analysis, it was found that both written and spoken speeches can encompass ambiguous utterances which may be deliberately or unconsciously. In most cases, it is the latter because most speakers, especially political actors or those writing speeches on their behalf, hardly found to be language specialists, this will actually be reduced if such experts are considered. What they are always after is the flow of the language.

However, such anomalies can result to misinterpretation of the speaker's intentions, thus bringing about lack of comprehension in the messages and assumptions of wrong meaning contrary to the speaker's intention. Therefore, in order to avoid misconceptions, speakers should endeavor to avoid conscious use of ambiguous utterances.

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Appendix

Excerpt 1

The Flagging off Campaign on Development of Behavioral Change Communication Messages and Materials for Gender Responsive and Inclusive Enrolment Drive for Back-to-School Campaign Speech which held on 6th July 2021 At Pantami Township Stadium, Gombe State.

Excerpt 2

Speech at the Official Handing Over Of Renovated Primary Health Care Centre and Fag Off of Basic Healthcare Provision Fund (BHCPF) Enrolment at PHC Daban Fulani on 18th March.

Excerpt 3

Speech on the Occasion of the Interactive Session of the National Boundary Commission and the Boundary Committees of States in the North-East Zone, Holding in Gombe, Gombe State On Thursday 15th-16th October, 2020.

Excerpt 4

Speech at The Closing Ceremony of the National Industrial Skills Development Program (NISDP) On 12th April 2021, Held at the ETF Community Education Resource Centre Gombe, State.

Excerpt 5

Second Year Anniversary Speech of His Excellency, The Governor of Gombe State, Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya Delivered On Saturday May 29, 2021 at the Pantami Township Stadium, Gombe.

Excerpt 6

Full Text of Governor Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya's Speech at the 1st North East Governors Consultative Meeting Held in Gombe.

Excerpt 7

Inaugural Address By His Excellency, Alhaji Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya, On The Occasion Of His Swearing-In As Governor Of Gombe State On Wednesday, 29th May, 2019.