

# USE OF VAGUE LANGUAGE ELEMENTS IN SPOKEN DISCOURSE

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**Abstract:** Vague language exists in almost every culture and it denotes vague items, for example vague clauses, general extenders, general verbs, and general nouns, as well as vague modifiers such as, epistemic vague stance markers and vague quantifiers. Vague language in other words denotes phrases and words that are neither exact nor precise. This paper analyses the various definitions and theories of vague language and examines its use in the English language, in spoken discourse. There are some examples are provided in English context with Russian and Uzbek translations. It examines the ways in which vague language is used to convey subtle meanings and identifies it as a huge area of ongoing linguistic research. This paper explores vague language: connotative and denotative meaning of vague language, its social role, how people can interpret vague language in different contexts, use of vague language elements in the Russian and Uzbek languages.

**Key words:** vague language, ambiguity, intercultural communication, informal, discourse analysis, spoken English.

## **INTRODUCTION**

It is accepted that maintaining good relations between the speaker and hearer is important in casual face-to-face conversation, particularly in intercultural communication. O’Keeffe, McCarthy, and Carter (2007) propose the term “relational language” to refer to language that serves to “create and maintain a good relationship between the speaker and hearer” (p. 159). One such device is vague language, which is found to be particularly common in daily conversation as speakers are often cautious not to sound over definite, which might be perceived as

threatening or over-educated (Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Cheng & Warren, 2003; O’Keeffe et al., 2007). Vague language, therefore can have an informal, “socially cohesive function” (Cutting, 2007, p. 3). O’Keeffe et al. (2007) also note that one central function of vague language is to hedge assertions or to make them fuzzy by allowing speakers to down tone what they say. In this regard, vague language softens expressions, so the speakers “do not appear too direct or unduly authoritative and assertive”; the use of vague expressions is therefore a conscious choice by speakers and is not a product of careless thinking or sloppy expression (Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p. 202).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

What is vague language? Language that is not precise and therefore allows speakers not to commit themselves or not to sound too definite. ‘Loads of’, ‘that sort of thing’, ‘stuff’ and ‘whatsit’ are all examples of vague language (<https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/vague-language>).

Vague language is very common, especially in speaking. We often add words and phrases such as about, kind of, sort of, and that kind of thing to make what we say less factual and direct (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/ru>).

Vague language is words and phrases that are not very exact or precise. You might want to use these phrases if you are not sure of all the details of something, to speak informally in a friendly way, or perhaps just to save time in a conversation. Vague language is just one in all the numerous aspects of English. However, we cannot disregard the very fact that vague language plays a crucial part in our daily lives in communicating with others. In fact, we see no reason why we have to discourage its usage; instead, we have to create a deliberate try to encourage all interested parties and those intellectuals to form further research resulting in vague language acceptance. To be able to appreciate vague language usage we have had our goal to expound how the linguistic theories and well-founded methodology would serve its purpose. You would later realize that

analysis of vague expressions showed that their meanings were themselves vague. By this, we meant that it was not possible to show them into something precise but just for the aim of clarification and analysis.

There have been various reasons for vagueness as vague expressions occurred more frequently in spoken English, which some were highly unfavoured in written English. So, vague expressions have different social roles:

- a) It is important to set good relations between the speaker and the hearer.
- b) Relational language serves a creator of good relationship between the speaker and his or her audience (hearer) avoiding social status. Vague language is an example of relational language and can be found in daily conversations, as speakers tend to avoid the notion of sounding over definite, which might sound as over-educated and threatening.
- c) Vague language can act as a socially cohesive function as per Cutting et al. (2007).
- d) It makes assertion fuzzy or hedge them by allowing speakers down tone what they are communicating.
- e) It is seen as an expression softener so that the speaker does not appear as being too direct or unduly assertive or authoritative.
- f) The use of vague language by the speaker, is a conscious decision and for that matter, it is not a sloppy expression or a product of careless thinking.

Vagueness occurs in almost every society and there are different ways in which a newbie in a new culture can learn vague language in their new localities. Firstly, it is paramount for the new individual to learn the language of the new location. Secondly, it is essential to learn the culture of the new location because different cultures have different approaches to events and by learning how people in those cultures behave, a person gain a few insights on how to use vagueness in

such a location. That would prove to be very helpful because some vague expressions are seen as a lack of respect or rudeness or impoliteness.

### Use of vague language items in English.

#	Use	vague expressions	examples
1	Making things sound less factual	<i>about, kind of, sort of, and that kind of thing</i>	<p>1. There were <b>about</b> twenty people at the meeting.</p> <p>2. It's <b>kind of</b> cold in here.</p> <p>3. Did you see lions and giraffes <b>and that kind of thing</b> when you were in South Africa?</p>
2	being not sure of the name of something	<i>what do you call it?, what's it called?, it's a kind of X, it's a sort of X, it's a type of X, or something, thing, stuff</i>	<p>1. She's got a small dog, a kind of poodle, <b>or something</b>.</p> <p>2. What's that <b>stuff</b> you use when your lips get dry?</p> <p>3. Where's the <b>thing</b> for cleaning the window?</p>
3	to make groups or categories	<p>1. <i>and that kind of thing and stuff like that</i></p> <p>2. <i>and that sort</i></p>	<p>Where are all <u>the knives and forks</u> <b>and that kind of thing</b>?</p> <p>I need to buy <u>cards and wrapping paper</u> <b>and stuff like</b></p>

		<p><i>of thing and stuff</i></p> <p>3. <i>and that type of thing and so on</i></p> <p>4. <i>and things like that and this, that and the other</i></p> <p>5. <i>and the like</i></p>	<i>that.</i>
4	vague category expressions in formal speaking	<i>and so forth, et cetera, and so on, and so on and so forth</i>	<p><i>The book has often been looked at from a <u>feminist perspective</u> and so forth but I want to look at it from a political perspective today.</i></p> <p>[from a university lecture on communication]</p> <p><i>If you use <u>an advertisement in the newspaper, a thirty-second ad on television et cetera et cetera</u>, it will receive quite a wide audience but there's relatively little you can say in it. (ad = advertisement)</i></p>

5	to be vague in an impolite way	<i>stuff</i> and <i>whatever</i> , <i>whoever</i> , <i>whenever</i> , <i>whichever</i>	<p>[a father to his son]</p> <p><b>A:</b> <i>What did you do at school today?</i></p> <p><b>B:</b> <i>Stuff.</i> (This is not a polite reply. It can mean ‘I don’t want to talk to you’.)</p> <p>[parent to teenage daughter]</p> <p><b>A:</b> <i>You spend too long on the phone.</i></p> <p><b>B:</b> <i>Whatever.</i> (This is a very impolite response and means ‘I don’t care’.)</p>
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## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Lastly, some vague language expressions may have close equivalents in the Russian and Uzbek languages. Therefore, there some examples are provided in the article for interpretation of vague language in different contexts, the use of vague language elements in the Russian and Uzbek languages. In the English language there are similar words and expressions with the help of which native speakers translate ambiguity in live speech. In tutorials and reference books, they are grouped together under the name vague language. The word “thing” is quite difficult to translate into Russian or Uzbek, because it makes sense only in specific situations, in context. For example: "Give me that thing from the table". There is an object on the table, you and your interlocutor understand what it is about, but you are too lazy to choose the word (and you don’t need it, because it’s already

clear). "Give me that thing on the table over there," you say. Communication took place.

**Vague nouns.** The word *thing* refers to objects which aren't described - we don't know what the objects are, only that they exist! So in the example sentence we don't know what the speaker is unhappy about.

- There are a few *things* I'm not happy about.
- Menga yoqmaydigan bir nechta *narsalar* bor.
- Есть несколько *вещей*, которые меня не устраивают.
- Give me that *thing* from the table!
- Stoldan menga *anavini* bering!
- Дай мне вон ту штуку со стола!

*Bit* often refers to a part or section of something. Both *bit* and *thing* can be used if we don't know the English word for something or if we've forgotten it.

- I've broken my stapler... I dropped it and the *bit* which holds the paper in place snapped.
- Men staplerimni sindirib qo'ydim ... Men uni tushurib yubordim va qog'ozni joyida ushlab turuvchi *narsachasi* uzilib qoldi.
- Я сломал степлер ... Я уронил его, и *кусочек*, удерживающий бумагу на месте, сломался.

The word *stuff* refers to more than one object. It is an uncountable noun.

- There's loads of *stuff* in the attic - can you have a look and see if any of its yours?
- Boloxonada *har xil narsalar* bor-qarab ko'ringchi ulardan birontasi siznikimi?
- На чердаке куча *всяких вещей* - можешь посмотреть, не твое ли это?

- What are you doing tomorrow? (Что ты делаешь завтра?)
- Just some *stuff* (Да так, *всякие дела*).
- I hate yoghurt, it's just *stuff* with *bits* in it
- Ненавижу йогурт, это просто *фигня* какая-то с кусочками.

## Quantifiers

Most quantifiers are quite vague. In this program we looked at how the words *one* or *two* can refer to *three, four or five things*.

- I expect the meeting will be quite short. We only have *one or two things* to discuss.
- Uchrashuv juda qisqa bo'ladi deb o'ylayman. Faqat *bir -ikkita narsani* muhokama qilamiz.
- Ожидая, что встреча будет довольно короткой. Нам нужно обсудить только *одну или две вещи*.

Other quantifiers include: *a few, a couple of, a lot of, plenty of, loads of*.

**Vagueness and numbers.** Some words allow you to give more detail than a quantifier but are still vague. You can use *around* and *about* to give a vague idea of a number. They can be used to give an idea of time or age too.

- There's about two hundred people outside.
- Tashqarida ikki yuzga *yaqin* odam bor.
- Снаружи *около* двухсот человек.
- ✓ It must be around three o'clock now.
- ✓ Hozir soat uchlar *chamasi* bo'lishi kerak.
- ✓ Сейчас должно быть *около* трех часов.
- He's *about* fifty, fifty-five maybe.
- U *taxminan* ellik, ellik besh yoshda.
- Ему *около* пятидесяти, может быть, пятьдесят пять.



You can use the word **odd** to give an idea of a number (but not to indicate age or time). This is informal English.

Did you know there are loads of people outside? Must be **200-odd** out there.

**Slightly** more formal, you can use **or so** in the same way.

- There are thirty **or so** leaflets there.
- U erda o'ttizga **yaqin** varaqalar bor.
- Там **около** тридцати листовок.

Note that the phrase **more or less** is not usually used with numbers. It means '**almost**', and we often use it to indicate if something is finished. I'm more or less done here... I just need to double-check these sums before I print it off.

### **-ish**

You can add **-ish** to give a vague indication of the time:

- I usually get home **about sixish**, maybe half-six, depending on traffic.
- Tirbandlikka qarab, odatda uyga **oltilarda**, ehtimol olti yarimlarda boraman
- Я обычно возвращаюсь домой **около** шести, может быть, полшести, в зависимости от пробок.

You can also add **-ish** to some adjectives. Used like this, it means '**a little**' or '**slightly**'.

- She has **reddish** hair.
- Uning **qizg'ish** sochlari bor.
- У нее **рыжеватые** волосы.
- He was wearing a greenish jacket.
- U **yashil sifat** kurtka kiyib olgan edi
- На нем была зеленоватая куртка.
- Clara's hair turned **bluish**.

- • Klaraning sochlari *ko'kimtir* rangga aylandi
- Волосы Клары стали *синеватыми*.

*-ish* is informal English and you can use it creatively. It can even be used on its own to mean 'a little bit'.

A: Are you hungry yet?

B: *Ish*. I could eat, if you're hungry.

(*Shunaqaroq(Biroz)*). Agar siz och bo'lsangiz, men ham ovqatlanishim mumkin).

### **sort of, kind of**

These are useful phrases for giving a description of someone. They qualify a statement slightly, so if someone says “She has sort of reddish hair”, it is understood that this person's hair is not completely red - it might be a little bit brown. It is not the description that is vague here, but the colour itself!

In some contexts, the phrase means 'in some ways':

It's *kind of* crazy how they advertise jobs you can't actually apply for.

Hech kim ariza yozmaydigan ishlarni reklama qilishlari *qandaydir* aqlsizlik.

Это *какое-то* безумие, как они рекламируют вакансии, на которые на самом деле нельзя подать заявку.

### **and stuff, and everything, and so on**

These phrases can save you from giving a long list of things. If someone says “She's a typical little girl really - into dolls and pretty dresses and stuff” the speaker is saying that the girl is interested in dolls, pretty dresses and things similar to dolls and pretty dresses. The speaker has used two examples of her interests with and stuff to give us a vague idea of her personality.

- They sell loads of really cool stuff - all vintage dresses *and everything*.

- Ular juda ajoyib narsalarni sotadilar - barcha vintaj liboslar *va boshqa shu kabi narsalar*.
- Они продают множество действительно крутых вещей - все винтажные платья *и все такое*.

In this example, the shop sells vintage dresses and other related things - possibly, antique jewellery, shoes and hats.

This notwithstanding, vague language is pervasive in everyday talk, serving interpersonal and pragmatic functions in discourse. Generality, vagueness and ambiguity can be resolved with knowledge of the details surrounding language use but no amount of background knowledge about the speakers and the context can pin down deliberately fuzzy language. The human condition is open-ended and uncertain, and so it is entirely appropriate that there are dimensions of vagueness in language that cannot be fully determined. The evidence reviewed above demonstrates that vague language is a huge topic and one that is likely to be the subject of research for many years to come. Wherever and whenever vague language is used, it provides an astonishing variety of options for varying the subtle meanings that can be exchanged in all kinds of discourse genres and contexts. Far from being a negative feature of language, it is a very great strength and scholars are still exploring the potential that lies within it for subtle variations in its use not only in English but also in the Russian and Uzbek languages.

## CONCLUSION

The evidence reviewed above demonstrates that vague language is a huge topic and one, which is likely to be the subject of research for many years to come. Wherever and whenever vague language is used, it provides an astonishing variety of options for varying the subtle meanings that can be exchanged in all kinds of discourse contexts. Far from being a negative feature of language, it is a very great strength and scholars are still exploring the potential that lies within it for subtle variations in its use. To sum up, if we go through the title, it is bold, yet we cannot

deny the fact that vague language is right here to live with us. The superiority of vague terms has validated that we need to include its presence in spoken discourse whenever there is possibility, and no longer to avoid utilizing them when we find it irresistible in spoken English.

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