# ANTI-LANGUAGE IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS: A SOCIO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

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**Abstract**
The study examines variety of the anti-languages used in the synoptic gospels to determine the social functions of those anti-languages and what they mean in the context in which they are used. The overriding objective in the investigation is to have a broad understanding on the socio-cultural and semantic value of those anti-languages by different players in the synoptic gospels. The study uses survey-descriptive as its research design. Socio-linguistic theory of language code by Bernstein (1973) was adopted for the research. The study uses New King James Version (NKJV) as mean for data gathering. The data gathered were analyzed using descriptive and interpretative tools. The study uses socio-semantic methodology of this work to uncover Jesus' teaching and movement as anti-societal tendency as recorded in the synoptic materials in other to dissect the early years of the Jesus movement from the social prospective. The study concludes that what is called as anti-languages in the synoptic gospels were actually meant to fulfill what was spoken by the prophets
**Keywords:** Anti-language, socio-semantic, synoptic gospels

## Introduction

All speech occurs in an interactive context in which interactants – speakers and hearers – make choices from the linguistic system available to them. These choices include lexical and grammatical choices that express appropriate experiential meaning, that is, meaning concerned with the construal with the word experience (McGregor, 156). Research has established that a person's membership in a social group correlates with the use of certain linguistic forms and pattern of behaviors in preference to others. Some linguistic forms and behaviours the interactants use represent part of the relatively stable aspect of a person's social identity; these forms indicate who the speakers are. On this strength, it is obvious that variation in the language is according to the speaker.

Every community of people is identified with a language or a language that is why a speech community is defined by McGregor (158) as a coherent group of people who share the same language or languages and more or less the norms of language use. The member of speech community forms a network of interacting with individuals

who communicate linguistically with one another frequently and more intensively than they engage with outsiders. With this, it is germane that language cannot be used in isolation. It is always used with a community where it is used, but a system by which a social group operates. Trudy (74) confirms this when he states that language varies not only according to social characteristics of the speaker such as social class, ethnic group, age, sex etc but according to social context, this means that it is used by different groups and in different contexts and domains. Anti-languages, a form created by the linguist M.K.A Halliday, are a way of communicating within a language that excludes outsiders. The context uses the same grammar and words as the main speech community uses but uses them in a different way so that they can only be understood by insiders. The early discourse of Jesus and disciples as recorded by the synoptic authors Matthew, Mark and Luke was characterized with anti-societal thoughts and values exemplified in some of his speeches and addresses as these violated the Palestinians Jewish milieu as they struggled to retain their unique identity within the overwhelming syncretism of the Hellenistic parent culture. The synoptic authors tell of a Jesus who demonstrated messianic claims and re-socialized his disciples in the counter cultural praxis of God's kingdom proclamation. Thus our study attempts to carefully make a socio-semantic analysis of the anti-language in the synoptic gospels.

**The Objectives of the Study**
The objectives of the study shall include the following;
1. Examine the concept of anti-language
2. Identify expressions characterized with anti-language in the synoptic gospels
3. To make a socio-semantic analysis of the anti-language in the synoptic gospels

**Theoretical Bases**
To back this study, the research adopts the socio-linguistic theory of language code by Bernstein (1973).The theory shows how the language people use in everyday conversation both reflects and shapes the assumptions of certain social group. The theory defines code as a set of organizing principles behind the language employed by members of a given social group. According to the history, the relationship established within the group affects the way that the group uses language and the type of speech that is used. The theory states that there are two types of language codes and they are open code and restricted code. According to the theory, the open code spells out everything not because it is better, but because it is necessary so that everyone can understand it. The theory further states that the open code works well in situation where there is no shared understanding and knowledge, where thorough explanation is required.

On the other hand, according to the theory, the restricted code is suitable for insiders who share assumptions and understanding on the topic. The theory further states that within the restricted code, speakers draw on background knowledge and shared understanding, thus the restricted code creates a sense of inclusiveness, a feeling of belonging to a certain group. According to the theory, restricted code can be found among friends, families and other intimate kit group.

The theory is suitable for this study because the anti-language as recorded in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) falls within the components of socio-linguistic theory of language code by Bernstein (1973).

**Anti-language: An Overview**
Anti-language is the jargon or language of a group, often employed to exclude or mislead people outside the group. It may also be called a cryptolect, argot, a cant or secret language. Each term differs slightly in meaning, and their use is inconsistent (Halliday, 14). The concept of the anti-language was first defined and studied by the linguist Michael Halliday, who used the term to describe the lingua franca of an anti-society. He defined an anti-language as a language created and used by an anti-society (Halliday, 8). An anti-society is a small, separate community intentionally created within a larger society as an alternative to or resistance of it. For example, Adam Podgorecki studied one anti-society composed of Polish prisoners; Bhaktiprasad Mallik of Sanskrit College studied another composed of criminals in Calcutta.

According to Halliday (29), anti-languages are developed by the societies as a means to prevent outsiders from understanding their communication, and as a manner of establishing a subculture that meets the needs of their alternative social structure. Anti-languages differ from slang and jargon in that they are used solely among ostracized or rebellious social groups including prisoners, criminals, homosexuals, and teenagers. Anti-languages use the same basic vocabulary and grammar as their native language in an unorthodox fashion. For example, anti-languages borrow words from other languages, create unconventional compounds, or utilize new suffixes for existing words. Anti-languages may also change words using metathesis, back formation or by substituting their consonants. Therefore, anti-languages are distinct and unique, and are not simply dialects of existing languages.

In his essay "Anti-Language", Halliday synthesized the research of Thomas Harman, Adam Podgórecki, and Bhaktiprasad Mallik to explore anti-languages and the connection between verbal communication and the maintenance of social structure. For this reason, the study of anti-languages is both a study of sociology and linguistics. Halliday's findings can be compiled as a list of nine criteria that a language must meet to be considered an anti-language: an anti-society is a society which is set up within another society as a conscious alternative to it; like the early records of the languages of exotic cultures, the information usually comes to us in the form of word lists; the simplest form taken by an anti-language is that of new words for old: it is a language relexicalised. The principle is that of same grammar, different vocabulary; effective communication depends on exchanging meanings which are inaccessible to the layperson.

The anti-language is not just an optional extra, it is the fundamental element in the existence of the "second life" phenomenon; the most important vehicle of reality-maintenance is conversation. All who employ this same form of communication are reality-maintaining others. The anti-language is a vehicle of re-socialization; there is continuity between language and anti-language. Anti-languages are sometimes created by authors and used by characters in novels. These anti-languages do not

have complete lexicons, cannot be observed in use for linguistic description, and therefore cannot be studied in the same way that a language that is actually spoken by an existing anti-society would. However, they are still used in the study of anti-languages. This language is often referred to as an argot, but it has been argued that it is an anti-language because of the social structure that it maintains through the social class of the populace.

## Synoptic Gospels

The New Testament of the Holy Bible begins with the four gospels. Author of these different gospels gives independent and separate accounts of the life of Jesus from different perspective. Out of the four, three of these gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke have so many similarities. The fourth gospel being the gospel of John shows a wider gap of disparity from the gospels. As a result of this, scholars usually treat the first three gospels separate from the fourth gospels. Because of the materials found in the "Matthew, Mark and Luke", they are called the synoptic gospels. "Synoptic" according to McCain (7) simply means 'seeing together'. The synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke have so much information on the account of Jesus in the common. Though each have its distinctiveness, they all seem to agree on several historical account of the life and teaching of Jesus.

According to Goodacre, it has been generally accepted that the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are referred to as the synoptic gospels because they include many of the same stories often in the same sequence and in similar and sometimes identical wording (18). These gospels according to him stand in contrast of John, whose contrast is largely distinct. This strong parallelism among the three gospels is content, arranged and specific language is widely attributed to literarily interdependence. The question of the precise nature of their literary relationship- the synoptic problem has been a topic of lively debate for centuries and has been described as "the most fascinating literary enigma of all time. The long standing majority view favors Marcan priority, in which both Matthew, Mark and Luke have made direct use of the gospel of Mark as a source, and the further holds that Matthew and Luke also drew from an additional hypothetic document as presented by Mark.

## Socio-Semantic: An Overview

The concept of socio-semantic subsumes development in which social interaction leads to the creation of explicit and semantically rich knowledge representation, the socio-semantic concept can be seen as a collective knowledge of systems, which are able to provide useful information based in human contributions and which gets better as more people participate (Weller,14). The socio-semantic concept aims to complement the formal semantic vision by adding a pragmatic approach relying on descriptive languages for semantic investigation using Heuristic classification and semiotic ontologies. A socio-semantic concept according to Tom (37) has a continuous process of eliciting crucial knowledge of a domain through semiformal ontologies, taxonomies or folksonomies. He further stressed that a socio-semantic approach to linguistic analysis emphasizes the importance of humanly created loose semantic as means to establish relationships between society meaning instead of relying entirely on automated semantics with formal ontology of meaning, humans are collaboratively building semantics aided by socio-semantic information system.

**Methodology**
In this study, the researchers adopted the study-descriptive research design, with bible and library materials as means for data gathering. The data gathered were analyzed with the use of descriptive and interpretative tools. The data analyzed were done in relationship to the research objective.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**
**Social Identity in the Synoptic Gospel**
The synoptic gospels are characterized with the issue of social identity. Jesus original intention for the people he came to save was to establish any kind of lasting impact on the larger culture, as a way to both create and to maintain the base level of his own differentiated social identity across the various cultural and spares within the Palestinians environment which he strove to convert. The people joining in the crusade would have to face the social consequences that would come and be able to deal with the cost.
**The social identities of synoptic gospels**
> *Jesus teaching in their synagogue (Matthew 4:33; Mark 1:39; Luke 4: 15)*
> *The teaching in the temple (Matthew 2:23; Mark 11:-18; Luke14:45-7)*
> *Jesus dialoguing with the Jewish religious authorities (Matthew 12:10; Mark 3:4; Luke 14:3)*
> *Jesus answer to Jewish high priest for his activities (Matthew 26:57; Mark 14:53-65, Luke 22:54)*

Jesus established his Galilean ministry originally to benefit the proletariat and the average people of the Jewish environment. Jesus action according to the triple synoptic traditions moved without the approval of and often in direct conflict with the traditional lines of rabbinic authority. According to (Matthew 21:23; Mark 11:-28; Luke 20:2), the synoptic accounts also picture Jesus as using miracle as means to accomplishing the larger messianic functions of social integration (Matthew 9:6; Mark 2:11; Luke15:24). This created major problem though; the more social outcast joined the movement, the more the religious authorities felt pressure to resist. In other words, the Jesus activities from inception, according to Justin (22) were designed to gather and unite the people of God, but as Jesus stepped over more Jewish religious taboos.
Semantically, there are various elements of semantics in the synoptic gospels where the crowd and even the disciples of Jesus find it extremely difficult to understand the teaching of Jesus.
The examples are:
> *The parables of the sower*
> *Matthew 13:1-12; Mark 4:1-11; Luke 8:5-8*

The synoptic gospels account that the crowd and religious leaders as well as Jesus' disciples are frequently painted as not understanding his use of language until they are given the proper explanation by Jesus to aid them. Jesus also confirms that there are also semantic components in his messages when he says in (Matthew 13:13; Mark 14-12; Luke 8:10).

> *That unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but to other in the parables, that seeing they might not understand. NKJ.*

The samples above show how some of the disciples of Jesus most times were naturally like every other Jew as they also did not get it either. **And the disciples came, and said to him**. Not only the disciples, but others that were about him, as Mark says, who else his disciples and believed in him: these, when he was alone, came nearer to him. To the Jewish Palestinian authorities as well as others believed that the words Jesus used his narration and preaching are colloquial and informal in nature as they are not used to them neither understood by the generality of the Jews.

**Elements of Re-socialization in the Synoptic Gospels**
The Jesus' teachings in and outside the Jewish synagogue has established him as something more than an invention from the mind of his audience, otherwise it could provide no cultural competition against the longstanding Jewish system already in the place. Re-socialization as a socio-linguistic component is the process by which one senses of social value, beliefs, and norms, are re-engineered. The process of re-socialization according to Conley (44) is deliberately coined out in a variety of settings such as in the society, clench and other public places. Conley(45) further stressed that re-socialization is a process by which individuals defines as inadequate according to the norms of dominant institution, a subjected to a dynamic redistribution of those values, attitude and abilities allow them to function according to the norms of the same dominant institution.

> *(Matthew 5:17; Mark 10:19; Luke16:16-17) think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill (NKJ).*

From the statement of Jesus as stated above, is an example of re-socialization, but the key issue is the extract of what was considered as a "lawful" practice. Some of the most important practices of the Jewish laws are "Civil laws, Temple, Circumcision, Sabbath and the Dietary law". In the synoptic account, it was revealed that Jesus the main objection or corrective measures of Jesus focus primarily upon these practices, in other words, attacking practices were more along the lines of taboos. Practices that served to reinforce an artificial social stratification that excluded the less fortunate, Jesus is recording as attacking frequently and vociferously. One of the most prominent practices of the Jewish law were the synoptic shows Jesus as regularly "on the offensive" was during the Sabbath, observance according to Justin (56), Sabbath appears 39 times through the synoptic materials (Matthew 17:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11). In the second temple period, Sabbath observance was known for increasing tight restrictions on what the Jewish authorities considered acceptable behaviors. It was known throughout the ancient world as a distinctive Jewish practice that influenced in much aspect of life and reaped in heavy social impact on the people.
Jesus has a mission and mandate to re-socialize the people against the practice have no direct bearing on their relationship with God and to establish a new way to live and please the almighty God.

**The Semantic Items in Jesus' Preaching and Teaching in the Synoptic Gospels**

| Semantic Items | Possible Meaning |
|---|---|
| Sower | Farmer who sows a seed |
| Seed | The word of God on the leap of his servant |
| Field | The human heart |
| Sun | The tribulation, trials and challenges |
| Bird | The enemy of the word |
| Rocky | Hardened heart |
| Thorn | The enemy within |
| Good soil | Fertile heart, obedient heart |
| Teras | Bad seed |
| Wheat | Good seed |
| Landowner | God almighty |
| Sleeping | Careless, unwatchful |
| Sower of the good seed | Son of man |

The samples above showed the semantic items used by Jesus as recorded by the synoptic authors also their semantic composition (Meaning). Meaning according to McGregor is the content conveyed in communication by language, the message in thought in the mind of speaker that encoded in language and sent to a hearer who decodes it (129). This is admittedly an imprecise and simplistic characterization. But rather, instead of Jesus using the language of the people, language of the society, the language of the low class, he chooses the language that is characterized with semantic issues. It is worthy of note that the language used by Jesus in the synoptic gospels are mostly restricted codes because they are not mostly understood by Jewish communities, religious authorities and even his disciples, thereby making his language as an anti-language and his movement as an anti-cultural and anti-society.

**Conclusion**

The study has surveyed what has probably been the main growing point in the socio-semantic studies, which is "qualitative socio-semantics" the central notion is the socio-semantic components, a list of sociolinguistic variables and semantic components. The study has demonstrated evidence of the Hallidiayan criteria for anti-language: a parent culture, re-socialization, social influence, linguistic ambiguity, and an anti-language ethos. Going by the presentation of data, the synoptic authors portray the Jesus' teaching, movement and message as operating through and anti-language symptomatic and an anti-society. Moreover, Jesus also did operate within a vacuum of isolated expression and concern, but find itself squarely placed within both the historical setting and cultural milieu of others belief not unlike itself, attacking many of the same concern that were common to the address indeed, the evidence does suggest that a movement and teaching such as the one Jesus began could have been so surprise to his audiences. From the accounts of the synoptic authors, what is called as anti-languages in the synoptic gospels were actually meant to fulfill what was spoken by the prophets.

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