

English Usage Pattern in Nigerian Religious Settings: Perspectives from Selected Worship Centers in Imo state

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Abstract

The study is a comparative analysis of the English language used in Orthodox and Pentecostal churches in the Nigeria community. In Nigeria, Christian religion plays integral roles in the lives of the people. It helps to inculcate good moral values in the lives of the members of the community through the use of language. The aim of this research is to identify the language usage pattern of different religious sects in Nigeria with particular reference to that of the Orthodox or Mainline Churches and the Pentecostal denominations. The motivation of this research is from the need to analyze the different language styles used in the Orthodox and Pentecostal Churches. Some of the highlights of this study entailed the concept of religious discourse, discourse analysis, and stylistic analysis of religious language. The theoretical framework for the study is Seale's Speech ACT Theory which deals with what human beings do with words with special reference to locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. The population of the study comprised a deliberate selection of two Catholic Churches, two Anglican Churches and two Pentecostal Churches within Owerri metropolis. The study is significant because it showed the way the two denominations which belong to the same religious register use the English language.

Key words: English usage, Religious Pattern, Hegemony, Evangelism, Ideology, Pentecostalism

I. INTRODUCTION

Language forms an integral aspect of human beings. It expresses the uniqueness of a social group. Njemanze (2010) asserts that, "a creative teacher (preacher) uses a variety of inter-related resources to achieve qualitative instruction and communication. The nature of man is largely influenced by language. Language has been a great instrument to the enhancement of the common ties of society. Any time we speak, we are involved in an act of communication or interaction. In a further expression by Obiegbu and Njemanze (2015), language does not only distinguish man from other creatures but also endowed man with authority to communicate. With language, man controls his entire environment. Language is not only an instrument for conveying ideas; it is also an instrument for working on the feelings of others and for self-expression. Thus, the language of religion is a kind of language which a speech community uses for expression of its religious beliefs. Although the language of religion is not far removed from the language of everyday use, but religious language transcends physical reality. Crystal and Davy (1969) identify different shades of language of religion: the language of liturgy, sermon, theological discourse and biblical translation. They reiterate that the linguistic features which uniquely identify texts as belonging to the single variety of religious English are concentrated on the vocabulary and in certain parts of the grammar (p. 159).

Therefore, there are certain factors that need to be put into consideration when analyzing meaning and choice of language in any particular communication. The different aspects of communication namely: addresser, addressee, context, message, contact and code, centre on languages functions. Gillingham noted that religious language has a reference point beyond this world. It describes a reality or truth which is not literal, spirit and transcendental. According to Pescke (1999), Christian religion is an organized approach to human spirituality. Uhumwangho (2000) summarizes the general characteristics of the language of religion thus: "it employs a deliberate, evocative use of terminology and phraseology which we must be alert to in order to appraise the primary purpose and meaning of the language".

Orthodox Churches are the world's largest Christian Church with more than a billion members. In the case of the Roman Catholic Church, its leader is the pope who holds a supreme authority in concert with the collage of Bishops. The church defines its mission as spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, administering the sacraments and exercising charity. It operates social programmes and institutions throughout the world including schools, universities, hospitals, missions and shelters (930). It teaches that it is "one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church" founded by Jesus Christ. The belief of the Roman Catholic is based on the Holy Bible and sacred traditions interpreted by the church's teachings and they are detailed in the catechism of the Catholic Church.

The Pentecostal churches equally adhere to the doctrine of biblical teachings and they believe that the Bible has divine authority in matters of faith. However, they differ from other evangelicals by rejecting Colossians' teaching. They believe

that spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues and prophecy did not cease after the New Testament times and they are still in existence. Pentecostal teachings centre on the fact that Christian's can still receive the same spiritual gifts that the apostles received. In spite of the fact that the Orthodox churches and Pentecostal churches strongly believe in Jesus Christ, the way in which the two denominations preach and profess faith differs. Achunike (2004) asserts, "the fulcrums of any church worth its salt are located in its polity, doctrine, ethics and liturgy". These four cardinal features which characterized any church help to unravel how the Pentecostals have been influencing the Orthodox churches' style of prayer, preaching, healing, liturgy and choruses. The present research will unveil those areas that show remarkable difference in the Church's use of the English language.

In view of the above, it could be stressed that the motivation for this research arises from the need to consider the different language styles used in Orthodox and Pentecostal churches. This work investigates the effect and usefulness of such styles in the spread of the gospel of Christ. The research identifies the language of Christian religion with particular reference to that of the Orthodox Churches and Pentecostal denominations in order to bring out the differences and similarities in their use of language. This researcher seeks to achieve this purpose through the examination and analysis of their spoken and written forms of language.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for the study is Searle's Speech Act Theory which deals with what human beings do with words with special reference to locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Speech Act Theory arose in philosophy as a tool to interpret the meaning and function of words in different speech situations. It concerns itself with the symbolism of words, the difference between a meaningful string of words and meaningless ones, the truth value or falsity of utterances and the function to which language can be put. According to the theory, a speaker can perform three acts simultaneously: a locutionary Act, an illocutionary Act and a Perlocutionary Act. Locutionary Act is the act of saying something in the full sense of 'say' -the production of sounds and words with meaning: a purely linguistic act. Illocutionary Act is the act performed in saying something. It is the act identified by the explicit performative. Perlocutionary Act is the act performed by or as a result of saying something. It is the actual effect achieved in 'the saying' of the utterance. It must be stressed that to perform a locutionary act is also to perform an illocutionary act, but whereas the interpretation of a locutionary act is concerned with meaning, the interpretation of an illocutionary act is concerned with force. Religious activities are carried out in the church and other religious gatherings using language. The English language has indeed become the language of the church in addition to other indigenous languages and Latin. There are locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts performed in religious activities while using the English language.

The Problem

In Nigeria, there are exists one universal Church, that is, believers in Christ. Christian churches use diverse methods and styles in their preaching and operations. Christian religious discourses adopt certain stylistic and discourse features in their churches. There are also ideologies, manipulative tendencies and deceit that need to be exhumed in the Christian religious discourse and such manipulative tendencies are targeted towards affecting the attitude and behavior of the audience. Such devices employed by ministers are aimed at achieving certain goals such as helping in reawakening Christian's' enthusiasm in spiritual matters. Again, there are also issues of ideologies inherent in Christian religion, where there are cases of the super-ordinate and subordinate. Such cases of ideology have come to bear positively or negatively on the audience in particular and society at large. In addition, different churches adopt different language styles in their operation and this work equally investigates the effect and usefulness of such styles in the spread of the gospel of Christ.

Research Questions

The research is aimed at providing answers to the following research questions:

- (a) What is difference between the language of Orthodox and Pentecostal churches?
- (b) To what extent are the audience's lives affected by the language of the Christian religion?
- (c) What ideologies do such language strategies encode?

III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

This work is unique in the sense that it explores and brings out the language of Christian religion; a branch of register that people have been neglecting or putting little or no effort in researching. It will also be a stimulant and reference point to future researchers in the area of language and Christian religion. This work, will in addition, serve as a means of enlightenment on how language is manipulated or used, especially during worship services in the two Christian denominations. Finally, it will further help to situate the fact that there could be slight differences even within the same register.

IV. THE SCOPE AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The language of Christian religion will be examined by analyzing the spoken and written forms of the language of two

Orthodox Churches, namely the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church and selected Pentecostal denominations. The churches are:

St. Mary's Catholic Church, Owerri

St. Theresa's Catholic Church Orji, Owerri

St. Mary's Anglican Church Egbu, Owerri

St. Andrew's Anglican Church Orji, Owerri

Living Faith Church (Winner's Chapel) Uratta, Owerri

Watchman Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement Amakohia, Owerri.

The justification for the selection was based on the fact that Owerri is the seat of administration of Imo state and the residents are mostly enlightened people whose language of communication is largely English. The language of Christian religion was examined by analyzing the spoken and written forms of the language of the Roman Catholic, the Anglican and selected Pentecostal churches within the state. The methods that were used in gathering data include: participant observation, and worship reading texts, (Christian literatures, bulletins and devotional books). The researchers, in the course of data collection for this study, recorded some expressions used in the analysis.

V. LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS, DISCOURSE AND STYLISTIC FEATURES OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

Language forms an integral aspect of human beings. Any time we speak, we are involved in an act of communication; therefore, there are certain factors that need to be put into consideration when analyzing meaning and choice of language in any particular communication. The language of religion is a kind of language which a speech community uses for the expression of its religious beliefs. Although the language of religion is not far removed from the language of everyday use, but religious language transcends physical reality. Gillingham (1998) noted that religious language has a reference point beyond this world. It describes a reality or truth which is non literal, spiritual and transcendental. Peseke (1999) has this to say: Christian religion is an organized approach to human spirituality which encompasses a set of narrative, symbols, beliefs and practices. It may expressed through prayer, ritual and meditation. It may focus on specific supernatural, metaphysical and moral claims about reality which may yield a set of law ethics and a particular lifestyle (p.256).

The language of Christian religion entails a discourse. Discourse, in Collins Dictionary of English, is defined as 'verbal communication; talk or conversation' that shows the discipline's-discourse analysis - major concern with analyzing real conversation. Discourse analysis being a relatively social phenomenon solely depends on a wide range of disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, cognitive and social psychology, philosophy, for knowledge and methodologies and it is difficult to draw a clear line of demarcation between certain linguistic fields, such as anthropological linguistics, psycholinguistic, discourse analysis and cognitive linguistics, as approaches to the study of language in use are borrowed from these sub fields and most of the times, the findings are independently supported by the fresh evidences. The Christian religious language embodies such features as: sermonic discourse, pre-sermonic discourse, grammatical, lexical, metaphorical and typographical features.

VI. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The relevant data are used to answer the research questions formulated for the study.

Research Question 1

(a) What is the difference between the language of Orthodox and Pentecostal churches?

The English language plays a pivotal role in Christian Churches. Prayers and sermons are said in Christian churches. However, Orthodox and Pentecostal churches differ in their mode of operations and preaching. Both denominations use language to carry out such religious practices. There are practices like offertory, communion, sermon delivery, special songs delivery, baptism, confession etc. These practices usher in different stages that are observed in the church. While the Orthodox churches teach the adherents seven corporal works of mercy such as: to feed the hungry, to give drinks to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to harbor the harbourless, to visit the sick etc. Although these things are not scribbled down in the Pentecostal churches, they are however carried out. Orthodox churches use such words as Eucharist, penance, confession, confirmation and sign of the cross. The last one is predominantly used because firstly, it puts us in mind of the Blessed Trinity and secondly, it reminds us that God the son died for us on the cross. According to the doctrine of the Catholic Churches, there are three kingdoms established by our Lord: the kingdom of Truth and Life, the kingdom of Holiness and Grace and the kingdom of justice, love and peace.

The Orthodox churches use such terms as laity, holy week, holy orders, genuflection, kyrie etc. The excerpts below typify

such differences:

Priest: The lord be with you

Congregation: And with your spirit

Priest: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (5:38-48).

Congregation: Glory be to you Lord

Repetition is a stylistic tool used in Orthodox churches. Consider the excerpts below:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;

Where there is hatred, let me sow peace;

Where there is injury, let me sow pardon;

Where there is doubt, let me sow faith;

Where there is despair, let me give hope;

Where there is darkness, let me give light;

Where there is sadness, let me give joy;

This tool is also used in the prayer below:

O divine master, grant that I may

not try to be comforted but to comfort;

not try to be understood, but to understand,

not try to be loved, but to love,

because it is in giving that we receive,

it is in forgiving that we are forgiven,

and it is in dying that we are born into eternal life. Amen.

However, Pentecostal churches do not use such concepts but they are usually involved in forceful and ejaculatory prayers. Such prayers typify the belief of such groups. Pentecostal churches usually begin with expressions like: Praise God, Hallelujah, Amen and other words that can elicit the audience's responses as exemplified in the excerpt below:

Pastor: Praise the Lord!

Congregation: Hallelujah

Pastor: Our topic today is: Have God kind of faith 2 kings 4:1. From today, you are going to move from a debtor to a creditor.

Audience: Amen

Pastor: Miracle is coming your way. Miracle of increase is coming your house.

Audience: Amen

Pastor: What is in your house? What is remaining in your house? What is remaining in your warehouse? What is in your office? What is in your store? It will increase from now. That money, that food, that material that is remaining in your house, God will touch it now. It will never finish up in the mighty name of Jesus Christ.

Audience: Amen.

Pastor: Do you believe the word of the prophet?

Audience: Yesoooooh!

Pastor: The lord is coming to pay your debt.

Audience: Amen

Pastor: Every widow here, the lord is coming to visit you. All your debts are cancelled today.

Audience: Amen

The excerpt above typifies the style and pattern used in a Pentecostal church. The pastor, in the course of delivering his sermon says ejaculatory prayers and makes declarative statements. The preacher uses the English language in such a way that prayers are intermittently said. Repetitions of words abound in such speeches so as to lay emphasis and drive home the central idea of the speech. Again, rhetorical questions are predominantly used and such questions help to make the sermon forceful and interactive, unlike that of the Orthodox churches that are highly monolithic. Again, the issue of recitations and chanting of canticles which abound in Orthodox churches buttress the fact that differences exist in the way Pentecostal and Orthodox churches use the English language. Examine the sermon of the Orthodox and Pentecostal churches below:

Priest: know ye this day that we are in the evil days and these evil days will swallow, destroy and terminate the

appointment of anyone who is not hooked to the Lord Jesus Christ. There are a lot of people who are in the domain of fake pastors; they are the ones that the evil days will swallow. Even some of us Catholics have forgotten our faith and catechism and now patronize fake prophets because we are in search of miracles. Beware, if you are one of these people, for there is no shortcut to heaven. So long as we are in this world, we can never run away from sufferings and pains. God has given us power as children of God, let us be faithful and fervent and always pray consistently as he has commanded us. He will always be there to assist and see us through. My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, may we now stand up to profess our faith as we call on the angels and saints of heaven. May we now ask our blessed mother Virgin Mary to assist and take us to her son as we pray: Hail Mary——

A close examination of the sermon above reveals that the tone of the sermon is sublime, gentle and highly monolithic. Again, there is perlocutionary force made on the audience as a result of what the priest's choice of words. There is also an invocation and reference made to invisible bodies like God, angels and saints and Virgin Mary. The clergy man reiterates that "so long as we are in this world, we can never run away from sufferings and pains". But this view is hardly accepted by Pentecostal pastors who usually try to convince their members that hardship, trials and sicknesses are not meant for them. The Pentecostal sermon below depicts a great contrast in the sermon of Orthodox churches:

Pastor: Our topic today is: Have God kind of faith. This is taken from 2 kings 4:2

From today, you are going to move from debtor to creditor.

Audience: Amen

Pastor: Miracle is coming your way

Audience: Amen

Pastor: A miracle of abundance is coming your way.

Audience: Amen

Pastor: Say after me: O Lord, I need a miracle of increase (the audience repeats each statement after the pastor).

Increase my finance

Increase my supply

Increase my knowledge

Increase my store

Increase my capacity

Increase my favour

Increase the number of my days

Pastor: Make it your prayer point. Ask God for a miracle of increase in your life in the mighty name of Jesus Christ

Audience: Amen

Pastor: I command that your money to increase

I command that your connection to increase

I command that your production to increase

I command that your favour to increase

I command that your promotion to increase. Let there be miracle of increase, miracle of increase.

The words: 'command', 'that', 'miracle' and increase are highly repeated in the discourse above. However, it must be pointed out that there is a redundant use of the determiners 'that' and 'your' in the text.

(b) **To what extent are the audience's lives affected by the language of Christian religion?**

Language is the tool with which religious activities are carried out. The language of Christian religion may be likened to political discourse since both aim at influencing the audience. Based on the motive of the cleric/the super-ordinate, the audience is affected either positively or negatively. There are certain language styles adopted by clerics and such discourse styles affect the behavior of the church members. Some churches in the Nigerian community are now means of acquiring massive wealth. The cleric uses his position (as one who has been vested with some levels of authority) to work on the psyche of the audience. The pastor uses words that would seriously arrest the interest of the audience. The audience becomes highly influenced as nobody would like to miss out the blessings of God. However, the people may become richly rewarded as a result of the innate tendencies of the cleric (positive or negative) and disposition of the listeners at the time of delivery. The cleric uses certain linguistic terms due to issues of falsehood or truthfulness hidden in his/her mind. The excerpt below buttresses some of these points:

Pastor: Miracles shall abound in your life today.

Audience: Amen

Pastor: Repeat after me: Miracles shall abound in my life today.

Audience: Miracles shall abound in my life today.

Pastor: Say it again.

Audience: Miracles shall abound in my life today.

Pastor: Do you believe the word of the prophet?

Audience: Yesoooh

Pastor: Come now and claim your blessings.

At this juncture, the audience is required to sow 'a seed of faith' so as to claim what the pastor has said. The audience's motivation to claim their blessing/miracles rests on the pastor's choice of words and faith on the word of God. Data collected shows that the language of the Christian religion has a great impact on the church. For instance, the English language used in the church performs diverse roles like exhortation, persuasion, conversion of sinners etc. The church therefore uses the English language in such a way that the congregation ultimately responds to the desired behavior.

(c) **What ideologies do such language strategies encode?**

Issues of ideology and hegemony as stipulated by Halliday's systemic functional linguistics are prevalent in religious organizations. Both the Orthodox and Pentecostal churches operate through a form of hierarchy with the highest position occupied by the pope. There are also Arch Bishops and priests. Pentecostal churches equally have General Overseers, Pastors, Evangelists and elders of the church. Such religious setups have come to bear on the language of the church.

In religious discourses, formal structures are often influenced by socio-functional goals of the speakers. Utterances may take one form and be interpreted as performing diverse roles. Directives given in the church could be interpreted in different ways. The hierarchy of the organizations in the church depicts different levels of power exercised in the church. There are also manipulative tendencies in the church. The aim of such is to extort and exegete. In such cases language is manipulated to achieve such inherent tendencies. This is seen in some of the sermons observed in some of the churches used for data collection. Worthy of mention is the fact that some religious leaders use different methods to make impressive orations. Such methods include: good introduction, adequate mastery of the Bible, paralinguistic elements, for instance the use of gestures and gesticulations.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study examined how the English language is used in the church. The researcher succinctly examined the English language use of Orthodox and Pentecostal churches in the Nigerian environment. Language expresses the uniqueness of a social group. Linguistic features used in a particular social group make such a group identifiable with or different from other social groups. An understanding of language is important in view of the fact that varieties of language are associated with particular social groups. The study has helped to establish the fact that variations could exist within the same language register. Even though Orthodox and Pentecostal churches belong to the same language register, there are remarkable differences in the way the two denominations use the English language to pilot the affairs of the church. The English language therefore performs a pivotal role in carrying out church activities.

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