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A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED PRAYERS OF A NIGERIAN PENTECOSTALCHRISTIAN CLERIC

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Abstract

Previous studies on Pentecostal Christian spirituality have focused largely on the theological and philosophical essence of its sermons. The sub-genre of prayer, together with the rhetorical strategies that give it out as persuasive discourse, has not received adequate attention from discourse analysts. The present study thus seeks to investigate the pragmatic function of rhetorical devices in selected prayers of William Kumuyi, founder of the Deeper Life Bible Church. Three recorded CDs of the sermons of the cleric randomly selected from the sermons he preached in2017 were transcribed and analysed using insights from Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principles. Findings reveal preponderant use of rhetorical devices by the cleric, through flouting of the cooperative maxims. The study thus demonstrates that although prayers are believed to be religious communion between man and an invisible God, Nigerian Pentecostal clerics deliberately deploy rhetorical strategies in their prayers to enlist the participation of their audience.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Rhetoric, Prayer, Pentecostal Discourse, Religion

Introduction

It could be argued that prayer constitutes one of the theological "universals" of religion. This is because since time immemorial prayer has remained a fundamental expression of religious experiences. Indeed, religions might differ in terms of their mode of worship, theological persuasion, and doctrinaire focus (Clements, 1986); however, devotees are either by instinct or obligation, constantly being inclined to engage with a transcendent unseen being who they believe not only deserves their allegiance, but also possesses the ability to solve all human problems, ranging from the spiritual, social, economic to even the medical. For example, there are reports that 84%of psychiatric patients in Bangladesh consult professional prayer leaders for healing before they seek medical help (Giasuddin, 2015). The same applies in Hinduism, where devotees use prayer to obtain powers, seek protection from enemies, cure diseases,

overcome adversity and ensure fame and success in life (Jayaram, 2020). In Catholic theology, prayers are offered for contrition of sins, adoration of God and gratitude to him (Bodhan, 1989). Among Pentecostal Christians, prayer which comes most times in form of prophetic utterances, are offered for material prosperity, breakthroughs and deliverance from evil spirits (Okpeh, 2017). Whether therefore it is written or spoken; pre-meditated or spontaneous, prayer as a religious phenomenon is generally considered as a spiritual communion between man and an unseen deity, with the intent of securing favour and benefits from the latter. The unseen deity and man are therefore supposedly the only two agents involved in the act of prayer, when prayer is conceptualized from this strictly theological perspective.

This theological conceptualization of prayer however fails to account for the role of both the human agents involved in prayer and the discourse potential of language as a medium through which prayers are offered. The strategic role of the clergy as "leaders" of prayer sessions vis a vis the expected participatory responses of the congregation gives prayer out as a discourse activity in which the potentials of language are deliberately utilised to achieve the desired effect. In Nigerian Pentecostalism especially, the clergy are constantly deploying rhetorical strategies during their prayer sessions in order to not only enlist the participation of their audience in the prayer, but to also make the prayer persuasive to them. The current study, thus, is an investigation of the pragmatic import of the rhetorical devices in the prayers of William Kumuyi, the founder of the Deeper Life Bible Church, one of the leading Nigerian Pentecostal churches. It is hoped that an analysis of the rhetorical devices deployed by William Kumuyi in his prayers will provide insight on the pragmatic principles that regulate the act of prayer among the Nigerian Pentecostal clergy.

A Survey of Nigerian Pentecostal Christian Churches

The Nigerian Pentecostal landscape is a huge assemblage of churches, ranging from mega denominations with branches outside the country, to the smaller ones, struggling for recognition and competing for members within the country. A mega Pentecostal denomination, according toRaina (06), is a denomination whose membership is beyond 2000. Based on the names, mode of worship and doctrinaire focus of Nigerian Pentecostal churches, the current study classifies them as follows:

(1) The Neo-Classical Pentecostal
(2) The Liberal Pentecostals
(3) The Modern Pentecostals

i. The Neo-Classical Pentecostals: These are churches whose doctrinaire focus tilts more towards the Weslyan notion of Christian Perfectionism. The most visible among these churches are Christ Apostolic Church, founded in 1930 by Apostle Joseph Babalola, the Deeper Life Bible Church, founded in 1973 by William Kumuyi, and The Lord's Chosen, established by Lazarus Muoka in 2002.Although churches under this classification may vary slightly in the degree and extent of their conformity to the Weslyan notion of perfectionism, doctrinairely known among the group as *Christian Sanctification,* one remarkable difference between them and theother two is their strict emphasis on inner purity, peculiar Christian dress code and adornment, "heavenly mindedness", and separation from "worldly things".

ii. The Liberal Pentecostals: Although these churches do not out rightly object to the doctrinaire teachings of their neo-classical counterparts, they exhibit liberality in their teaching and in the enforcement of these doctrines among their members, which the *neoclassicals* consider as "doctrinaire compromise". By their religio-social disposition and mode of worship, these churches bestride the other two extremes, with some of them trying to strike a doctrinaire balance. A major player in this group is Pastor E. A. Adeboye, the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God. Pastor Adeboye is believed to be the most visible figure among Nigerian Pentecostal preachers because his persuasion seems to cut across all the brands of Nigerian Pentecostalism (Fyanka, 14). Others in the *liberal* group are Bishop David Oyedepo of the Living Faith Church, Pastor (Dr) Paul Enenche of the Dunamis Gospel International Centre, and Apostle Johnson Suleman of Omega Fire Ministries, etc. Another feature of some of the churches in this group is their effort to "Nigerianise" Pentecostalism in order for it to have "local flavour", yet not losing its European coloration. This is why in most of the churches, praise and worship are taken in both English and Nigerian languages, with the congregation always dancing to a blend of both Western and African local musical instruments. This is one major strength they seem to have over their neo-classical counterparts in terms of their appeal to the indigenous Nigerian Christians**.**

iii. The Modern Pentecostals: This group of churches constitute another extreme in Nigerian Pentecostalism. In their doctrine, style of worship and dress code (which to some Nigerian Christians bother on the *sensual*), these churches exhibit a tendency that tilts largely towards postmodernism, a 20th century ideological movement that encourages skepticism and denial of absolute truth. And so in matters on which the Bible makes clear-cut statements of doctrine and on which both the neo-classical and the liberals will stick with the Bible (albeit with sometimes slight variations), the modern Pentecostals usually adopt a *truth- is- relative position*.

The Language of Religion

When situated within a discourse context, language use assumes characteristics within the genre that might not be obtainable in other discourse genres. Halliday (2007) notes that, depending on its context of use, language is usually structured in such a way as to reflect what the communication is all about (the field), the interpersonal relationship between the participants which is determined by the social roles and the relationship between the interlocutors (the tenor), and the role the language is playing in the interaction (the mode).

Concerning the language of religion, Crystal (2000)remarks that "the linguistic features which uniquely identifies texts as belonging to the single variety of religious English are concentrated on the vocabulary and in certain parts of the grammar", about which Taiwo (2005) cites interrogative sentences as strategies of control and sustenance of Christian religious discourse. Porter (1996) is a collection of scholarly essays on the nature of Christian religious language. Addressing such issues as the language of God, the language of Jesus Christ, the language of religious people, the language of the priest and the laity, the study focuses, among others, on the distinct features of Christian religious language when used by the various social actors in the broad area of study known as Christian Religious Discourse. Apart from its relevance to studies that propose to investigate the nature of Christian religious language, the study engages the mind by leaving the reader with such stimulating questions

as, "Is there a kind of language or language use which is specifically religious?", "Isn't religion and religious experience concerned with things that defeat language?".

On the ritualistic nature of religious language, Boyer (2003) remarks that listeners in a religious context often assume that those ritualistic forms trace their origin to divine sources and so constitute evidences of the workings of forces that are otherwise imperceptible. Within the context of religion, language, according to Keane (1997), serves as the medium by which the presence and activity of beings that are otherwise unavailable to the sense can be made pre-supposable, even compelling in ways that are publicly yet also subjectively available to members of social groups. Religious Language, according to him, alters certain aspects of everyday ways of speaking, and informs the worshippers' view of the "other world" and their assumptions about their daily experiences. This, in Kean's opinion, creates chronic tension between transcendence and the situated and concrete nature of verbal practices in religious discourse.

Methodology

Data for the study were sourced from the sermons of William Kumuyi, one of the leading Nigerian Pentecostal clerics. William Kumuyi is the founder of the Deeper Life Bible Church. Three recorded CDs of his sermons randomly selected between 2016 and 2017 were transcribed and analysed using insights from Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principles. Grice (1975) proposes that participants in a conversation conform to a general cooperative principle whenever a conversation unfolds: "*make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged."* This principle is hinged on four conversational rules/maxims which are the maxim of quantity (make your contribution as informative as is required; maxim of quality (make your contribution one that is true); maxim of relation (be relevant); maxim of manner (be perspicuous; avoid ambiguity). Eighteen (18) rhetorical devices were identified and subjected to analysis by contextualizing them in the light of the maxims flouted by the cleric.

Data Presentation

S/N	UTTERANCE	RHETORICAL DEVICE	MAXIM FLOUTED	PRAGMATIC FUNCTION
1	I pray Lord, where there is ***any pain, any sickness any infirmity***…. Deliver them in Jesus name.	Repetition/Parallelism	Manner	Emphasizing
2	And the ***threshold*** of history, here we stand, at the beginning of the future... Oh Lord, this day you'll **open the *windows*** of heaven, you'll ***shower* your blessings** upon us in Jesus name.	Metaphor	Manner	Directive
3	You're still in **the *business* of working miracles and wonders** in the lives of your people… I release you now, and set you ***free.***	Metaphor	Manner	Assertive & Declarative

4	Help us to be ***wise…wise*** about our salvation, ***wise*** about our destiny**…wise** about our relationship with you	Anaphora	Quantity	Emphasizing
5	The Bible Study will **enrich** everyone, **empower** everyone, is the backbone of the Christian.	Metaphor	Manner	Commissive
6	Lord, the Bible Study will enrich **everyone**, empower **everyone.** The revelation of the word will come to **everyone** today.	Repetition/Epistrophe	Manner	Commissive
7	Lord, you're the **backbone** of the church.	Metaphor	Relation	Expressive
8	All the things that are **broken down** in any body's life, **mend them, repair,** and **reconstruct** them.	Metaphor	Relation	Directive
9	Everyone without exception among us...**in the youth church**...**in the adult church**... **in the campus church**, and all over the nation and beyond the nation...nobody will miss your blessing in Jesus name.	Parallelism/Repetition	Quantity	Emphasizing
10	Miracles unprecedented... miracles unknown...things we've never seen and we've known, do it in our lives in Jesus name	Parallelism/ Repetition	Quantity	Emphasizing
11	You'll receive power, not fear; power, not weakness; power, not cowardice; power, not trembling; power not timidity!	Parallelism/ Repetition	Quantity	Emphasizing
12	The Spirit of power, have you received? The Spirit of fearlessness, have you received? The Spirit of the conqueror, have you received? That same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, have you received?	Parallelism/ Repetition	Quantity	Emphasizing

13	Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed? Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed?	Repetition	Quantity	Emphasizing
14	Lord, lead me higher! Lord lead me higher! Lord lead me higher!	Repetition	Quantity	Emphasizing
15	Lord, do something! Do something! Do something... higher than what I have...higher than what I ever got. Lord, do something!	Repetition	Quantity	Emphasizing
16	Resurrection...yes! Freedom...yes! Dominion...yes! Holiness...yes! Sanctification...yes! Holy Ghost, immersion in the Holy Ghost...yes! A new strength, a new power, a new energy...yes! Healing, deliverance, dominion...yes!	Parallelism/ Repetition	Quantity	Emphasizing
17	In this audience tonight, we reject sickness in every form! We reject infirmity in every form! We reject every work of the devil in every form!	Parallelism/Repetition	Quantity	Emphasizing
18	Ye shall receive power after you have received the Holy Ghost...You will be a bold witness, a courageous witness, a conquering witness on me.	Parallelism/Repetition	Quantity	Emphasizing

Discussion of Findings

In this section attention is focused first on the categorisation of the rhetorical devices deployed by the cleric in the text to determine which are more preponderantly used. The categorized rhetorical devices are further discussed with particular regards to their discursive and pragmatic properties.

Classification of Rhetorical Devices in the Text and the Pragmatic Import of their Use

The analysis reveals that five rhetorical devices are deployed in the text, with three being the most preponderant. These devices are i. Metaphor ii. Parallelism, iii. Repetition, iv. Epistrophe and v. Anaphora. What follows is a discussion of the meaning of the most preponderant

rhetorical devices with specific regards to their pragmatic function within the context of their use in the text.

i. Metaphor

Given their emotional and ornamental properties, metaphors are considered as potent strategies of rhetoric in discourse generally, and religious discourse in particular. An adequate understanding of their function in this regard should first account for their cognitive properties and then proceed to unveil the pragmatic import of their use as devices of rhetoric. See the following sample of utterance from the analysis:

"And the ***threshold*** of history, here we stand, at the beginning of the future... Oh Lord, this day you'll **open** the ***windows*** of heaven, you'll ***shower*** your blessings upon us in Jesus name". (2)

In utterance (2) above, the metaphorically used words are *threshold*, *showers, open,* and *windows*, whose conceptual domains are building, water, building, and building, respectively. In sum, therefore, **building** and **water** are the two main conceptual domains out of which the metaphors in this category are sourced. In its target domain, i.e. the domain of prayer wherein lies its metaphor city, the word *threshold* together with the words *window* and *open* are used to conceptualize the desire of the cleric for God to launch the members of his congregation to a new phase of a life of God's abundant blessings. The use of *shower* (which is sourced from the domain of water) with the other metaphors in the same utterance not only underscores the cleric's belief in God's generosity with his blessings, but also demonstrates their faith and expectation in it.

With regards to the pragmatic properties of the metaphors, the conversational maxim flouted in their usage is the maxim of manner which according to Grice (1975) outlines the need for the speaker to avoid obscurity and ambiguity, and to be direct and straightforward. The words threshold, *showers, open,* and *windows,* when literally interpreted within the linguistic context of the prayer, do not yield a direct and straightforward meaning, and so their usage on this literal plane could be said to obscure meaning in prayer. However, the congregation are able to rely on background insights provided by the situational context of the prayer (discourse) to uncover the speaker's intention in his use of these metaphors, which is to make the prayer persuasive to them, and consequently enlist their participation in the prayer.

In terms of their pragmatic function, the above metaphors within the context of their utterance, constitute a directive. Directives, from Searle's (1979) modification of the Speech Act Theory, are utterances that attempt to make the addressee perform an action. Within the context of their utterance, the metaphors under analysis altogether constitute a request from the cleric to God, the addressee, to perform the action of taking the congregation to a new dimension of his blessings which should come to them in form of *showers*.

Another set of metaphors in the analysis is provided in the utterance below:
"You're still in the ***business*** of working miracles and wonders in the lives of your people… I release you now, and set you ***free***" (3)

The metaphors in the utterance above are *business* and *free*, the source domains of which are marketing and warfare, respectively. In its source domain, the word *business* means an occupation or employment that one engages in for livelihood. Its use within the domain of religion (of which prayer is a subdomain) is an attempt to portray the commitment and determination of God to intervene in the lives of the people, in form of miracles which constitutes one of the recurrent themes of the discourse of Pentecostalism. In its source domain, the word *free* denotes liberty and emancipation from imprisonment. Its use by the cleric in the current discourse (of prayer) is a demonstration of the cleric's desire to have his congregation liberated from spiritual imprisonment.

The analysis reveals that the conversational maxim flouted in the use of the above metaphors is, like in the previous metaphors, the maxim of manner, the propositional requirement of which is the need for language users to avoid ambiguity and vagueness when they speak. When viewed from the linguistic context of their conceptual source domains, the meanings of the words *business* and *free* would be vague within the context of prayer. However, the congregation are able to elicit the meaning intended by the cleric by relying on the situational context of the prayer. The cleric's choice of the metaphors in question with the subsequent maxim flouted in their usage demonstrates his desire to make the prayer persuasive to his congregation, and consequently engage their participation in the prayer.

The analysis further reveals that the two metaphors (*business* and *free*) although used in a single utterance, perform separate pragmatic functions. The first, *business*, is an assertive which in the Sear lean taxonomy of Speech Acts "commits the speaker to something being the case" (Searle, 1979). In the utterance where the *business* metaphor occurs, the cleric makes a statement of conclusion by way of prayer which asserts and affirms that God is still committed to performing miracles in the lives of the congregation. Within the situational context of its usage, the second metaphor, *free*, constitutes a declarative. As a performative act, a declarative in the Speech Act Theory is said to be capable of changing the state of the world in an immediate way. Thus, the cleric's declaration of freedom for the congregation immediately alters their state of existence from being bound (in whatever form) to being free.

ii. Parallelism

As a rhetorical strategy in discourse, parallelism is a type of repetition in which similar linguistic structures in a text are reproduced to produce cohesion in a text. To fully grasp the pragmatic import of parallel structures in the analysed discourse, it is necessary to first account for the syntactic features of the structures before commenting on their pragmatic relevance as rhetorical devices. The findings of the study reveal that in terms of their syntactic properties, some parallel structures in the text are sentences whose subjects are only implied. See an example below:

"All the things that are in any body's life, ***mend them, repair them,*** and ***reconstruct*** them" (8)

In the above structure, the parallel units are the transitive verbs *mend*, *repair*, and *reconstruct* with the pronoun *them* serving as their objects in the three instances of their use. The pragmatic import of the entire structure in usage lies first in the deliberateness of their choice by the user. There is sufficient evidence to believe that the use of three synonymous transitive verbs in a single stretch of utterance is not only deliberate, but is intended by the cleric to achieve a

communicative intention, namely *persuasion*. Thus, although the cleric could be said to be talking to God in prayer, he is still mindful of the need to carry the congregation along.

Another syntactic feature of the parallel structures in the text is the use of nominal structures with rank shifted clauses. See the example below:
*"**Miracles unprecedented**... **miracles unknown**...**things we've never seen and we've known**,* do it in our lives in Jesus name"(10)

The first two structures, *Miracles unprecedented... miracles unknown...,* have *miracles* in the two instances of use as the head of the nominal structure. *Unprecedented* and *unknown* as the rank-shifted units with their complete form being *miracles* (which are)*unprecedented* and *miracles* (which are)unknown. The next two structures in the expression, *things we've never seen and we've never known* have a similar syntactic framework of being embedded with rank-shifted clauses. *Things* serve as the head of the first nominal and the implied head in the second. (*which*) *we've never seen* and (*which*) *we've never known...* are the rank-shifted clauses in the nominal structures.

The pragmatic relevance of the above parallel structures is determined first by the analysis of the maxim flouted in their usage in the text. In using the two parallel structures, the cleric deliberately flouts the maxim of quantity which requires language users to not say less or more of what is required in a conversation. In the present exchange, the cleric has said more than is required in his constant repetitive usage of the same syntactic structure in each of the two utterances cited above, to convey information that could be abridged in a single usage of the syntactic structure. Pragmatically, however, this is a deliberate attempt to make the prayer "appealing" to the congregation. Thus, in both the choice of the rhetorical device in question and the consequent flouting of the maxim (of quantity), the cleric is deliberately using language to enlist the participation of his congregation in the prayer.

iii. Repetition
Repetition is the re-mentioning of the same linguistic utterance in an exchange. Although, almost all the five linguistic units on the grammatical rank scale can be repeated in a discourse (excepting, perhaps, the morpheme), the most frequently repeated ones are the word, the phrase and the sentence. In the current study, it was found that the repeated linguistic units are the word and the phrase. What follows is first a grammatical description of these units as used in the text, and then a discussion of their pragmatic functions in the text.

The findings revealed that some repeated utterances are structured in interrogative form. The excerpt below is an example:

Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed? Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed?

The interrogatives above are structured in complex sentence forms, with the main clause being *Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed* and the subordinate clause being *since you believed?* The first hint of their pragmatic import is unveiled in the maxims flouted in their usage. The maxims flouted here is the maxim of quantity which outlines the need for interlocutors in a conversational exchange to not say more or less than is required.

Pragmatically, the repeated structures being rhetorical questions are intended to stimulate the congregation towards self-introspection regarding whether they have experienced the Baptism in the Holy Ghost or not. The repeated use of the structure is intended to emphasize the importance of the experience to the congregation and to encourage them to pursue the experience, which is highly priced among Pentecostal Christians.

The study further reveals that some repeated structures in the text are lexical words. The excerpt below clearly illustrates this:

*Help us to be **wise…wise** about our salvation, **wise** about our destiny…**wise** about our relationship with you*.

In the above utterance, the word *wise* occurs four times and is used as an adjective. Within the grammatical context of its repeated use in the utterance, the word, as an adjective, functions as complement to the verb *be* in its first usage and is implied in its subsequent usage. In all of its usages, the word is governed by a prepositional phrases begun with: "....about our salvation", "....about our destiny" and ".... about our relationship". Like other repeated utterances in the text, the current exchange flouted the maxim of quantity in that the cleric has said more than is required for the current exchange. Pragmatically, the use of the device not only foregrounds the importance of *being wise* as a Christian, but also demonstrates the cleric's desire for the congregation to possess this virtue, hence, his emphasizing it through repetition in the utterance.

Conclusion

The study examined the rhetorical features of selected prayers of a Nigerian Pentecostal cleric that give prayer out as a discourse activity. From the analysis, the rhetorical devices of metaphor, repetition and parallelism were found to be preponderantly deployed in the prayers. The analysis further revealed that in using these devices, the cleric flouts the Gricean conversational maxims to convey his rhetorical intentions in the prayer, whose interpretation by the audience makes the prayer a discourse activity. The study thus concludes that although prayers are believed to be religious communion between man and an invisible God, Nigerian Pentecostal clergy deliberately deploy rhetorical strategies in their prayers to enlist the participation of their audience.

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