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DISCOURSE FEATURES AND PATTERNS IN SERMONIC TEXTS: AN ANALYSIS OF A NIGERIAN PENTECOSTAL CHRISTIAN SERMON

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Abstract

This paper examines the discourse features and patterns in a Nigerian Christian Pentecostal sermon. The selected sermon is analyzed structurally into clauses. Discourse categories as well as discourse strategies employed by the speaker in communicating biblical truths are identified. The study establishes that sermonic discourse is a highly structured speech event consisting of linguistic categories such as transactions, members and acts. It also reveals that formal structures are influenced by socio-functional goals of the speaker, one of which is to exhort and persuade hearers to right thinking and right living.

Key Words: Sermonic Text, Pentecostal Christian Sermon.

Introduction

Pentecostalism has become an increasingly prominent feature of Nigerian religious spirituality in the past few decades. The dramatic growth of the Pentecostal movement and the universality of their activities are clearly visible in Nigerian socio cultural discourse in recent years. Ojo (2004, p. 2) asserts that ‘Pentecostalism in Nigeria presently constitutes a major social movement and Pentecostal spirituality continues to affect millions of citizen in various ways.’ This development is clearly aided by several peculiarities of the Nigerian socio culture, such as political instability, economic recession, social tensions and uncertainty. Indeed in the words of Bloom and Ottong (1987, p. 157), ‘religion offers protection against four major classes of uncertainty: contingency, powerlessness, scarcity, frustration and deprivation.’

The reliance on English as the dominant medium of communication in Pentecostal discourse in Nigeria is also significant as it unites the multilingual congregations often found in urban cities, thus giving the movement social prominence nationally, and providing it access to the international arena. One of the most apparent contexts of use of religious language in Pentecostal ethos is in the delivery of sermons.

In this paper, we examine the features and patterns of discourse in a Christian Pentecostal sermon in Nigeria. Examination of religious genres and sub genres such as Bible texts, radio sermons, church choruses / songs have been carried out by Osakwe (1991), Dzameshie (1992), Burton (1997) and Daramola (2006), among others. These studies examined some pragmatic and stylistic functions of language in these religious discourses. Osakwe (1991), for instance, concludes that the style of a preacher is dictated by situational and contextual factors, one of which is the tenor of discourse or participant relationships. For Burton (1997), the persuasiveness of religious

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language, as revealed in his study of public address and oratory in Twentieth century Mormonism is achieved through ornamentation, the use of rich figurative language that helps to communicate religious thoughts. Daramola's (2006) analysis of Nigerian church choruses, on the other hand, identifies some pragmatic features of that discourse, one of which is the marked shift in thematic preoccupation. This study analyses a Nigerian Pentecostal sermon in order to present the features and patterns of discourse in sermons as a subtype of religious discourse. A structural analysis of the selected sermon is provided as a descriptive apparatus for examining discourse features and strategies in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons.

Sermonic Discourse Analysis: A Descriptive Framework

Discourse analysis is often conceived of by linguists in various ways, first as a sub-discipline of linguistics with a variety of research topics, as a group of theories or approaches used to analyse discourse (Schiffrin, 1994) or as a research method or heuristic consisting of a set of procedures for analysing discourse (Johnstone, 2002). Much of the early contributions of scholars to the analysis of discourse as a sub genre of linguistics have been made by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). In an attempt to produce a linguistic description of interaction in the classroom, the scholars offer an analytic framework comprising categories, description of units within classroom discourse. A rank scale of four ranks: lesson, transaction, exchange and move were suggested as typical of classroom interaction. Further studies of exchange structure in classroom and other types of interactions were also carried out in Stubbs (1983), Olateju (1998), Fakoya (1998), among other studies, the last two being examinations of classroom discourse in the second language environment, Nigeria. As seminal as their work is and as significant as their contributions to discourse analysis are, Sinclair and Coulthard's 1975 model has not been able to account for other types of talk which do not exhibit features of formal, reciprocal and collaborative speech as classroom discourse does, and attempts to apply their descriptive units to other types of talk have encountered problems. The Sinclair-Coulthard model therefore may not be suitable to the current study of sermonic discourse. Stubbs (1983, p. 43) for instance, confirms, "... teacher's talk is different from preacher's talk." In a bid to tackle these kinds of utterances therefore, that is, utterances that "institutionalise the suspension of the turn-taking machinery," Coulthard and Montgomery (1981) propose a descriptive framework for the analysis of monologues. While acknowledging the infancy of their categories, opining that they are still pre-theoretical, the ranks and units proposed by the scholars are considered useful in our examination of sermons as a speech event. This is because sermonic discourse is traditionally assumed to be non-reciprocal and monologic in form, though the dynamics of face-to-face interactions and the rhetoric of Pentecostal spirituality in Nigeria significantly re-shape this assumption, often influencing the form that the sermon takes.

Data Collection and Analysis

The Pentecostal movement, upon which this study focuses, is a fundamentalist / revivalist movement within Christianity that emphasizes holiness and spiritual power initiated by an experience of Holy Ghost baptism. It is distinct from the orthodox churches in Nigeria in liturgy, polity and ethos. According to Turner (1967) and Sheldrake (2005), a unifying factor among churches within this movement and their distinguishing feature is their pneumatological view of God and their emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, characterized by experiences such as baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, public prophetic utterances and fervent and ecstatic prayer modes.

Pentecostalism as a religious movement began in Nigeria at the close of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. (Hildebrant, 1990; Josiah-Amata, 2002). Today, Pentecostal spirituality constitutes a major social movement in Nigeria. Recent reports (Ojo, 2004; Murphy, 2006) suggest that Pentecostals equal the combined numerical strength of Roman Catholic / Anglican churches. The Pew Forum's (2006) Pentecostal survey also estimates that 1 in 10 Protestants are Pentecostal in belief. From an estimated number of 2,000 independent organizations in 1997, Pentecostal churches have increased to about 5,000 in year 2000, with many of them having single nucleus and mega congregations of between 6,000 to 10,000 and even 50,000 (Ojo, 2004). These churches are usually concentrated in major Nigerian cities such as Lagos, Ibadan, Abuja, Benin, Port Harcourt, Aba, Calabar, Uyo, Warri, Kaduna and Jos.

Data for this study were drawn from a sermon from the Pentecostal movement. The sermon, 'Overcoming your World' was preached by Pastor Chris Oyakhilome of Christ Embassy, a rapidly growing church in Lagos, Nigeria. The church has branch networks within and outside Nigeria and this, together with their appropriation of media technology for local as well as international cable networks has enlarged the congregation base of the church, while also making the church and its pastor highly visible. Pastor Chris' message is heavily laden with rhetorical and emotional appeals with which he passionately connects with his listeners. The style of preaching is exuberant,

enthusiastic and charismatic, interspersed with songs, questions, declarations and folk style, strategies which connect and identify speaker with hearers. The sermon is a topical one, which employs the exhortatory technique to develop its theme. The title of the sermon creates a mental picture of antagonism, warfare and battle. This image is reinforced through the repetition of the word ‘overcome’ and other synonyms – win, conquer, be victorious. A subtle image of two opponents locked in battle is presented and believers are exhorted to overcome their world.

The data from the sermon were analysed clauseally identifying the discourse structure of the sermon: the type of discourse members, the classes of transaction and the classes of acts in the discourse. These descriptive categories are adapted from Coulthard and Montgomery (1981) and Mekiliuwa (2009). Transactions, according to Olateju (1998), are equivalent to paragraphs in written discourse, for they express one main point or theme. Mekiliuwa (op.cit.) identifies four classes of transactions in sermonic discourse namely informing, eliciting declaring and directing transactions. These begin with ‘frames’ and ‘focus’, a set of items that initiate and show the direction of discourse. Discourse members are distinguished into main and subsidiary discourses. The main discourse informs or comments on the subject matter while the subsidiary discourse expatiates and illustrates this. Acts are the lowest category on this scale. Twenty seven acts can be used in sermonic discourse namely: starter(s), frame (fr), metastatement (ms), focus (fo), informative (inf), comment (com), elicitation (el), reply (rep), directive (d), react (rea), evaluation (e), restate (res), check (ch), prompt (p), clue (cl), loop (l), asides (as), qualify (q), accept (acc), prayer (pr), declaration (decl), additive (add), adversative (adv), causative (can), recall (rec), conclusion (con), and admonition (adm).

ANALYSIS OF SERMON: OVERCOMING YOUR WORLD

Type of Discourse	Classes of Transaction	Examples	Classes of Act
Pre Sermonic Discourse	Opening Transaction	Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. Thank you holy spirit of God. We worship, we honour you. Thank you for your grace. Thank you for your love. Thank you for your presence, we worship thee. Thine O Lord is the kingdom and the power and the glory and the greatness forever. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. Blessed be his holy name. Hallelujah. You may be seated. Praise God. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord Hallelujah. Hallelujah Praise the Lord. How are you doing? Fine Praise the God Did you have a beautiful week? Yes Say “Thank you Lord Jesus.” Thank you Lord Jesus. Do you have your Bible with you today? Yes Alright, let us sing our song. Hold your Bible now. I have a wonderful treasure, the gift of God without measure, we shall travel together, my Bible and I. Now some of you have been traveling around, do you really carry your Bible? Yes I have a wonderful treasure, the gift of God without measure, we shall travel together, my Bible and I. If you don’t have a Bible here today, I feel sorry for you. Praise the Lord. Hallelujah.	el rep pr el rep d rep el rep el rep el rep el rep el rep d song el rep song comm el rep
Main Discourse	Directing Transaction	Turn into your Bible, turn into your Bible, Romans, Romans, chapter number 2. Are you there? Verse 13 I want you to read verse 13. One, two, go That’s unbelievable, it can’t sound like that.	d foc d p comm

		<p>Are you reading verse 13? Yes Are you sure? Yes Okay let me read what I have here; I don't know if that's what you have. "For not the hearers of the law are justified, or just before God, but the doer of the law shall be justified. Is that what you saw? Yes It didn't sound like it when you read it. Different translation, right? Read it one more time. Praise God. Hallelujah.</p>	<p>el rep el rep comm inf el rep comm el d el rep</p>
<p>Main Discourse</p>	<p>Informing Transaction</p>	<p>Many, many times, we find we are reminded again and again to do the word. But it's not the one that hears it that is justified but the one who does it. The word of God is for us to live by. See, we live by his word. His word has given us life. The whole creation came into being through the word of God. The Bible says, in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. It tells us, "All things were made by him, the world and without him was not anything made that was made". See that, saint John chapter 1 verses 1 and 3. Now, if you also read Hebrews chapter 1, it tells you something beautiful. It says, "He upholds all things by the word of his power". He upholds all things by the word of his power. In other words, he sustains what he made with his word. He made with his word and he sustains it with his word. You came from God's word. Your origin is the word of God. See, your body, your physical body was made from the dust of the ground, but you are not the physical body, you live in the physical body. The Bible says, your body is your house. It's your domicile, where you dwell. That's your house, your living tabernacle, but it's not you. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. You are a spirit being. You came from God, created by his word. He founded your body from the dust of the ground. And the only reason, you are here today is because God spoke and when he spoke, it became possible for Adam and Eve to reproduce the physical bodies. They were able to reproduce another human person. And that word that God spoke made it possible for the human life to be transferable from one physical body to another. Because life is in his word The Bible says God's word is life. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. Now, that word, the Bible tells in the 14th verse of the 1st chapter of saint John's Gospel, that word became flesh and dwelled among us. His name is Jesus. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. The Bible says he was in the world, the world was made by him. Jesus is the word of God made flesh. His whole substance is the word of God. He's the creator word become man. Are you still there? Yes That's who Jesus is. See, until you have a clear revelation of Jesus, you walk in the dark. Jesus is the creative word of God became flesh. The very word that made everything became man, tabernacle in him and flesh. God rented, God hired, God rented the body of a woman named Mary and tabernacled himself in a woman's womb and was born as a man to be 100% man because of his physical body but 100%</p>	<p>inf ad v/inf inf inf inf inf inf inf fr inf inf inf res inf inf inf inf inf el rep inf inf inf add/inf inf add/inf inf inf el rep fr inf el rep inf inf ch/el rep comm fr comm inf</p>

		<p>God for his life came from God. The Bible says, "He was in the world, the world was made by him and the world knew him not". He came unto his own and his own received him not, but as many, verse 12 as many as received him, to them he gave the ability. Thank you Lord Jesus. To become, the authority, the power to become the sons of God. That's how we became the sons of God, we became, we became, we are not assuming. There was a transfiguration, we became, from being human, we became divine. Amen. As many as received him, to them he gave the ability, the divine energy. Something actually happened and we were recreated and became sons of God. So John cries out, now are we the sons of God. He says, "It doth not appear not what we shall be, but we know. Glory be to God. That when he appears we shall be like him, we shall see him as he is. In other words, though now, when you look at us, you may not be able to tell us from others, he says it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know. Hallelujah. Amen That when he shall appear, we shall be like him. But already in the now, he says, now are we the sons of God, we are now, we are not going to be, we are now. Glory to God. You know, those are the things the world doesn't want us to talk about. Why was Jesus crucified by men? Why did they hate him so? Why did they dislike Jesus? Because of his words, nothing else, it's his words that put him in their trouble, his words. He didn't talk like a normal human person. He had confessions that were so powerful. He confessed himself to be the son of God. They didn't like it. When he spoke words, blindness left. When he spoke words, deaf ears were unstopped. When he spoke, the lame got to walk. When he spoke, even the maimed were healed, when he spoke, the dead was raised. His words were different. It wasn't his touch that was the miracle, it was his words. Because others touched the same people, the crippled were banded or carried by the people, they still didn't change. Somebody fed them, they still didn't change. But when Jesus spoke, oh, oh, oh, there was a change, a significant change. There were those whom he touched, there were those who embraced him, there was no change. It wasn't in that physical contact, it was in his words. His words created the world, his words sustains the world. Hallelujah Praise the Lord</p>	<p>inf inf inf inf as inf inf inf inf rep inf inf inf comm inf inf el rep inf comm/adv el comm el el el inf inf inf inf inf inf adv/inf inf inf inf el rep</p>
Subsidiary Discourse	Eliciting Transaction	<p>What are you gonna do with your life? Who are you? Have you discovered yourself or you are still running around, trying to find out who you are? Have you found yourself? Have you reclaimed yourself? Have you delivered your soul? Are you still there? Yes sir. Thank you Lord Jesus.</p>	<p>el el el el ch rep comm.</p>
Subsidiary Discourse	Informing Transaction	<p>If you understand Christianity you'll know you're not in the club. It is more than a club. It's not a nice, beautiful association of believers. It's more than that.</p>	<p>comm inf comm</p>

		The Bible says, "If any man be in Christ, if any man be in Christ, if any man, anybody, if any man be in Christ, he is, he's not going to be, it's not a promise, it's a statement of fact, he is ..."	inf
Subsidiary Discourse	Informing Transaction	<p>You see, what most of the church has not done, is to dare accept God's word as it is. That's what most Christians have never done, dare to accept God's word as it is, to be hold to accept God's word as it is.</p> <p>Always, you know, they try to refine it, you know, and em, try to make it suit them and suit their beliefs and try to make it, em, to become acceptable to their religiosity.</p> <p>They just want it to be accommodative, so em, because they think if they dare to believe, what He says, it wil change them and they don't want to change.</p> <p>But think about it, he loves you more than you love yourself.</p> <p>Amen.</p> <p>He is more ambitious for your success than you can ever be.</p> <p>Have you ever thought about that?</p> <p>Ever met someone who loves you more than you love yourself?</p> <p>That is hard for you to figure out, but that's a fact of life.</p> <p>If you could only believe that, it will change many of things, if you could only believe he loves you more than you love yourself.</p> <p>That's why, you know, in the Old Testament, where it tells us that Abraham believed God, what he actually says in Hebrew, is that Abraham made an unqualified commitment of himself to Jehovah.</p> <p>Where it says Abraham believed God, it's not was like you know you read it in English, but it says Abraham believed God, not it means that Abraham cast himself on Jehovah in utter self-abandonment.</p> <p>That's what the Hebrews says, trusting that he was who he said he was.</p> <p>Hallelujah.</p> <p>Praise the Lord.</p> <p>If you would only dare believe and accept that he loves you more than you love yourself.</p> <p>The one who steals to find no reason to steal, the one who lies to find no reason to lies. The one who cheats to find no reason for that.</p> <p>You know why?</p> <p>Because you have cast yourself into the arms of the one who loves you more than life.</p> <p>Think about it because he gave himself for you.</p> <p>It says greater love has no man than this that a man would lay down his life for his friends.</p> <p>He says, I am the good, listen to his words, listen to his confessions.</p> <p>Your struggling is unnecessary.</p> <p>He says I am the good shepherd.</p> <p>The good shepherd gives his life to his sheep.</p>	<p>fr</p> <p>comm</p> <p>res</p> <p>inf</p> <p>comm</p> <p>adv/inf</p> <p>rep</p> <p>inf</p> <p>el</p> <p>el</p> <p>comm</p> <p>comm</p> <p>inf</p> <p>inf</p> <p>comm</p> <p>el</p> <p>rep</p> <p>comm</p> <p>comm</p> <p>el</p> <p>inf</p> <p>comm</p> <p>inf</p> <p>inf</p> <p>comm</p> <p>inf</p> <p>inf</p>
Subsidiary Discourse	Directing Transaction	<p>Say, "I'm a child of God."</p> <p>I'm a child of God".</p> <p>Say one more time "I'm a child of God".</p> <p>I'm a child of God".</p> <p>One more time "I'm a child of God".</p> <p>"I'm a child of God".</p> <p>Say, "I know who I am</p> <p>I know who I am</p> <p>Saint John's gospel chapter number 10, I'm a child of God, I know, I know who I am.</p> <p>Hallelujah.</p> <p>Born again full of the Holy Ghost, I know who I am.</p> <p>I know who I am.</p>	<p>d</p> <p>rep</p> <p>d</p> <p>rep</p> <p>d</p> <p>rep</p> <p>d</p> <p>rep</p> <p>decl</p> <p>rep</p> <p>decl</p> <p>rep</p>
Main Discourse	Eliciting Transaction	<p>Now, he will not give his life for you, you know why?</p> <p>simple</p> <p>Why would Jesus not give his life for you today?</p> <p>Talk to me.</p> <p>Why would Jesus not give his life for your?</p> <p>Do you think he will? Give his life for your today?</p> <p>Why not?</p> <p>Isn't he a good shepherd anymore?</p> <p>He's already done it?</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>You are the result of what he did so when you get into trouble, why didn't he give his life for you</p>	<p>el</p> <p>comm</p> <p>el</p> <p>p</p> <p>el</p> <p>el</p> <p>el</p> <p>el</p> <p>el</p> <p>rep</p> <p>comm</p> <p>el</p>

		<p>again? Not because he's already done it, no, when he did it you didn't exist. I don't mean you weren't born of your mother, I'm not talking about time, I'm talking about the fact that you are a new creation, one that never existed before. You are the result of his work, his death, burial and resurrection. So now, you have arrived on the scene, a new kind of man, so why would Jesus not give his life for you anymore? Why, why doesn't he die for you? We just read in Hebrews 7:25, where it said he is able to save to the uttermost, them that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. So, there is no dying there, so he will save them to the uttermost. So, why wouldn't he die for you again? I shouldn't really say 'again', I should say why won't he die for you? Come on talk to me. Tell me. Don't look me like that. I want you to give me an answer Okay, you're waiting for me to answer my own question which is unfair. I give a homework. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. See, you have to understand who you are. Why can't Jesus not die for you? He can't die for you? Why? Because you have his life. Yes sir Amen oh. It's with you. You're living his life. You cannot die. Can you see it? You cannot die.</p>	<p>inf inf inf fr el el inf fr inf fr el inf p p as d fr comm inf el rep fr comm el el inf rep inf inf inf inf</p>
Main Discourse	Main Discourse	<p>When that life comes into you it doesn't matter how long it has been there. It will be healed. Glory be to God Hallelujah Close up, there are some people who have had wounds that have been there for years, the natural life has been destroyed and so they cannot be healed, the doctors have tried, all kind of medication has been used, but if you apply Ha, ha, ah,ah Glory be to God That thing cannot stay in your body, the wound will close up. That life is what you have received I want you to understand it That's what John was talking about when he says beloved now are we sons of God. We have that life in us now. He says, "Be not afraid at your adversaries he says, because you have already overcome them" why? Because greater is he that is you than he that is in the world. Greater is he Amen I don't know what you are facing in your family today or what you are facing at your work or what you are facing in any area of your life, but hear me, greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. Learn to speak like Jesus. He said, "Cheer up I have overcome the world." O glory be to God. Learn to talk like Jesus. He says, "Cheer up I have overcome the world." How? Come on The man hadn't even died for us, he hadn't gone to the cross when he even made that statement. He said "Cheer up I have overcome the world." How did he overcome the world, brothers and sisters? Eh, ah, ah, ah, yah, ah, ah, yah, ha, yah O boy, I'm coming out of skin already. My, my, my, my He said, "Cheer up I have overcome the world." I don't know whether I should keep speaking English now.</p>	<p>decl el rep inf comm. decl inf inf inf inf inf inf rep decl d res el d inf p inf res el</p>

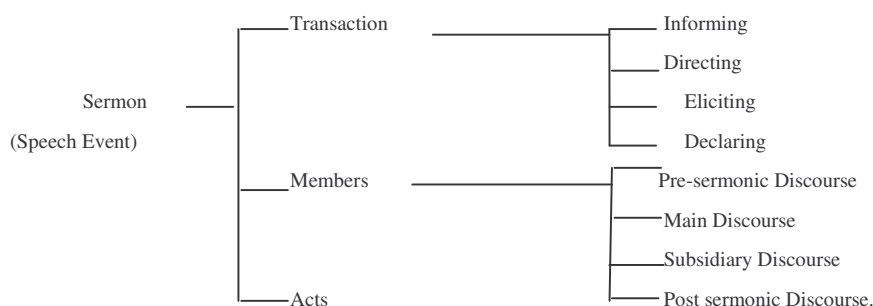
		<p>Do you understand what I am talking about? Listen to Jesus. Are you hearing me? Yes He didn't say these words on the cross, he didn't say them after he died, he didn't say them after his resurrection, before the cross So We ought to find, it out how did he do it? The man said cheer up, I have overcome the world. I have overcome the world. Jesus Hmmm He is talking to his disciples. He said cheer up, relax Eh, eh, eh He said, cheer up, I have overcome the world. Hmm Oooh Oooh Brother listen, Jesus said he has overcome the world. As far as this was not on the cross, then it means he did something you and I could do. Are you hearing me? Yes I used to think that when he did that, he just subdued the world and left it subdued, that we ... no, no, no, no, he showed us the way He said, Cheer up I have overcome the world and once you just found out how Jesus overcome the world, you do the same thing, you do the same thing, you do the same thing Are you hearing me? You do the same thing. Jesus said, cheer up</p>	<p>comm. comm res comm/as ch d ch rep inf fr comm. inf rep inf inf inf inf inf ch rep inf inf ch res inf</p>
Subsidiary Discourse	Directing Transaction	<p>Tell somebody cheer up. Cheer up. One more time, cheer up. Cheer up. Hmmm cheer up. Cheer up Ha, ha, ha Say, there is hope for you. There is hope for you. Cheer up Cheer up Cheer up Cheer up Cheer up Cheer up Cheer up</p>	<p>d rep d rep d rep d rep d rep d rep d rep</p>
Subsidiary Discourse	Declaring Transaction	<p>He said I have overcome the world. I have overcome the world. You know what you know how he overcame the world? I've found out about it. Ha, ooooh, ooh Ooooh, ooh Eeeeh Eeeeh Now I am laughing at the devil Seeh Glory to God Ha, ha, ha, ha Glory to God Glory to God He said, "cheer up I have overcome the world Hmm Eh, yah Oooh, ooh Ha, ha, ha, ha, Ha, ha, ha, ha, HMMMMMMMMMMMMM</p>	<p>inf res el inf comm. el el el el inf</p>

		<p>Ooh, ooh Ha, ya HMMMMMMMMM..... I see what David saw now He said my heart is inditing a good matter Ha, ha , ha, ha Eeh Ha No wonder when some people listen to us, they think we are bragadocious, and they think it's their responsibility to humble us Ooh Jesus said cheer up. Ooh No more long face. Cheer up. Ooh No more sadness. Cheer up. Ooh Maybe I should calm down a little. Yes, so that I can help you get this stuff.</p>	<p>comm. inf comm. res decl d decl d comm. Rep/comm.</p>
Post Sermonic Discourse	Informing Transaction	<p>Do you know what you have done today? You have taken serious steps in the realm of the spirit. You have claimed lands, I'm telling you. You have claimed lands. These things will begin to manifest themselves. Amen You are going to see them happen. Amen Some have seized new businesses. You, you have seized them. You have seized new ideas. Some of you have claimed family members. You have taken serious steps. Hallelujah Say this with me, I am an overcomer. Born to overcome. Born to overcome. Born to walk in victory. Born to walk in victory. Listen, it doesn't matter what challenges you have faced in your life, it will come to pass. Amen. Hallelujah And being a child of God that is anointed of the spirit, you cannot be overcome, you cannot. Are you getting me? You cannot be overcome. This is the victory that overcomes the world. So, don't stop, alright, don't stop. Don't stop speaking those words, don't stop speaking them. Thank you lord Jesus. Wave your hands to the heaven and thank him. Hallelujah Thank you Lord Amen Hallelujah</p>	<p>el inf inf inf rep decl rep decl decl decl decl el d rep d rep d rep decl rep el add/decl ch decl inf d adm pr d el pr rep el</p>
Post Sermonic Discourse	Closing Transaction	<p>You may be seated. Praise God. Hallelujah. Thank you lord Jesus. Glory to God. See, I've been only able to give the introduction of what I wanted to say to you this morning, the introduction. I've said I will give all that to you in 20 minutes and take the remaining 40 minutes to share what I really want to share with you. This was supposed to lead you to something, well that will be another service. Hallelujah Praise God.</p>	<p>d el rep pr el fr inf/ms inf/ms inf el</p>

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Discussion

The discourse structure of the sermon is presented diagrammatically below:



The diagram illustrates the structure of the sermon. The sermon is a speech event consisting of linguistic categories such as transactions, members and acts. Transactions in this discourse are of four kinds: informing transactions, whose function is to communicate ideas, facts and opinions to hearers; directing transactions which attempt to get hearers to perform non-verbal action; eliciting transactions that bring out verbal actions from hearers, and declaring transactions which are realized by acts such as prayers, petitions, declarations and other utterances through which speakers perform their institutional roles and functions.

The discourse is also made up of members – main and subsidiary – that help to develop the thematic proposition of the sermon through informatives, comments and illustrations. Discourse acts are also identified in the sermon. These are sentences, phrases or words that perform structural and functional roles in the discourse. Some of these acts, for example, prayers, admonitions and declarations are peculiar to sermonic discourse. The pre-sermonic discourse in this sermon consists of an opening prayer and a series of exclamatory expressions, such as ‘Praise God’, ‘Hallelujah’, ‘Amen’, all of which are interpreted by hearers as elicitations, for responses are provided by the congregation. This is followed by greetings, comments and informal questions to the congregation e.g.:

1. How are you doing?
2. Did you have a beautiful week?
3. Say, “Thank you Jesus.”
4. Do you have your Bible with you?

The purpose of these preambles is two fold. First, they lay a background for and help to introduce the sermon. Secondly, this kind of informal opening, characteristic of public speeches, creates an atmosphere of camaraderie between the interlocutors, thus breaking down traditional, monologic barriers found between clergy and laity in religion and institutionalizing informal, reciprocal and dialogic patterns recently characteristic of Pentecostal sermons in Nigeria. As part of the opening gambit, the speaker introduces a song. Songs are a frequently used opening strategy in sermon delivery. They help to capture the theme of the sermon, while creating a mood or pathos thought conducive to the preaching.

The sermon begins and progresses through an alternation of main and subsidiary discourse members. The structure of a sermon therefore conforms to the pattern: pre-sermonic discourse + main discourse + subsidiary discourse + post sermonic discourse. The main discourse is initiated through directives to hearers to open to Bible texts and this is further developed through textual exposition and exegesis. The sermon has lengthy main discourses centering on issues of life, death and victory in life. It is also significant for its subsidiary discourses which are declamatory and highly rhetorical in nature.

After the initial opening transaction, a directing transaction follows and the congregation is requested to open their Bibles, read out selected texts or carry out verbal actions, as in the following extract:

5. Preacher: Say, "I'm a child of God."

Congregation: I'm a child of God.

Preacher: Say, "I know who I am."

Congregation: I know who I am.

This initiation- response pattern continues for some time, thus creating a participatory trend in the discourse. The speaker sometimes departs from this pattern and changes to a declamatory style when blessings, declarations and prayers are passionately pronounced on the congregation e.g.

6. Preacher: *You are going somewhere. You are a victor. You are not born for failure. You are not for sickness. You are not born for poverty. You are a success. You are walking in victory. You are walking in prosperity. Victory is yours. Success is yours. You are moving forward. You are making progress.*

Informing transactions are however more commonly used than other classes of transactions; for it is through these that the preacher builds up the thematic proposition of the sermon. These are opened with frames, focus, comments or informatives e.g.

7. You see / what most of the church has not done is to dare accept God's word as it is.

(fr)

(comment)

Several classes of acts are used in the discourse, some of which are:

Directives	-	Read it one more time.
Elicitation	-	Do you have your Bible with you?
Check	-	Are you still there?
Frame	-	see, now, okay, so, all right, listen
Asides	-	Don't look at me like that. Thank you, Jesus.
Focus	-	Now, I read to you from verse 8.
Prompt	-	Come on, talk to me.

Acts such as restates, additives, adversatives, causatives are used for the purpose of cohesion and coherence in the sermon.

Discourse Strategies in the Sermon

Sermons, typical of spoken exchange or interactions are structured by shared though unspoken assumptions between speaker and addressees. These shared assumptions, according to Stubbs (1983) and Yule (1996) constitute a group of related facts, a schema or knowledge structure known to interactants in the discourse and with which they determine meaning. In the sermon context, listeners (the congregation) are able, with the aid of a key word, phrase or contextual cues, to activate their knowledge schema(s) and with these are able to make sense of the entire discourse. Participants in discourse will normally activate several schemas, for; these are what give them a cue when and how to respond to speaker's utterances and it gives them a clue, for instance, that the sermon has come to an end. Indeed, the congregation's ability to arrive at interpretation of the unsaid are based on these pre-existing knowledge structures.

One of such schema in sermon delivery relates to the use of opening and closing strategies by preachers. Some of the opening strategies are songs, general statements, prayers, citation of Bible texts and announcement of sermon topics, for example:

8. Turn to your Bible, Romans, chapter number 2.

9. All right, let's sing our song.

10. God bless you, you may be seated.

11. Now, some of you have been travelling around, do you really carry your Bible?

When the preacher says, for instance, “Let’s sing our song”, the congregation has to rely on their background knowledge and not the linguistic context to decode his meaning.

In closing the sermon, discourse strategies such as prayers, summary statements, directives or enumerative adverbs could be used by the preacher, as in:

12. You may be seated.

13. Do you know what you have done today?

14. I’ve only been able to give the introduction of what I wanted to say to you this morning.

When preachers employ discourse strategies to open, or close a sermon, the congregation resort to interpretative tools such as background knowledge, situational factors, as well as textual and contextual resources to decode meaning. It is, in fact, the ability of the hearers to do this that aids interpretation of the sermon and that facilitates the felicity of the entire communication process.

Form and Function in the Sermon

In discourse, formal structures are often influenced by socio functional goals of speakers. This implies that utterances may take one form and be interpreted as performing different functions. In the sermon, formal categories: interrogatives, declaratives and imperatives are realized functionally as elicitation, informative/declaration and directives, respectively. An interrogative however, may not be regarded as an elicitation if it is not intended to receive a verbal response from hearers. It may, on the other hand, be interpreted functionally as a directive to carry out non-verbal actions as in:

15. Will you turn your Bible to Romans chapter 8?

Rhetorical questions are also difficult to classify functionally in the text, since they are not intended to elicit verbal response from hearers but are used rather to get them to think and arrive at logical conclusions. For instance:

16. Why was Jesus crucified by men?

17. What are you going to do with your life?

Directives in the sermon are also not realized by imperative forms only. Often, exclamatory or declarative forms such as ‘Thank you, Jesus’, ‘Hallelujah’, ‘Amen’ or simply calling out a Bible text may function as a directive or an elicitation for verbal and non verbal responses. The congregation therefore responds appropriately based on their background knowledge. The overriding principle in all of these is that the linguistic context is not sufficient in the interpretation of meaning. Rather, information from the non-linguistic environment, that is, situational factors, as well as the co-text or sequential relationships in the discourse account for speaker’s meanings.

Sentence structure in this sermon is also determined by its function in discourse. Sermons could be of different text types: narrative, expository or exhortatory. Though sermons do not adhere strictly to one text type, since there is a possibility of mixture of text types within the same genre, it is the function to which the sermon is put that determines the sentence form and structure. Where speaker’s goal is didactic, the sermon takes a narrative or expository form. In such an instance, sentences are long, wordy and structurally complex, for example:

18. *You remember the Bible tells us about the house of David and the house of Saul. He says that, there was a long war between the house of David and the house of Saul. The house of David was the house that believed in the things of the Spirit and the house of Saul was the house that believed in being head and shoulder above others. In other words, they believed in the power of the flesh. They had carnal weapons. There was a long war between them, the Bible tells us. Then it says that, “But the house of David grew stronger and stronger and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.’. Now, he showed us an example because John says that, “This is the victory that overcomes the world.’. He said, “This is the victory that overcomes the world”, he said, “even our faith”, our faith-filled words. You keep speaking them. At the beginning, things may not look different but don’t stop because the Bible says that the house of David grew stronger and stronger and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.*

In this extract, the preacher's goal is to teach, explain and exhort; his sentences therefore, are structurally complex, connected severally with the subordinator 'that'. However, where the purpose of the preacher is exhortatory, the declamatory style is used, with short, simple sentences through which the speaker admonishes, exhorts and persuades listeners to right thinking and right living. An example is:

19. *The cancer has to die. The tumour has to go. Oh, hallelujah. I'm walking in victory. I'm walking in prosperity. Greater is he that is in me. I know who I am. I'm a victor in life. Oh, glory be to God. Oh, thank you Jesus. The word of God is to live by. Hallelujah. You are greater than the system. Are you hearing me? He says, Cheer up, I have overcome the world.*

Such utterances are usually delivered at a fast tempo and with a rising intonation, thus making the pace of speaking fast and contributing to force and directness in the discourse.

Conclusion

The above analysis has revealed the features and patterns of discourse in a Nigerian Pentecostal sermon, and the discourse strategies employed by the preacher in communicating biblical truths have been discussed. The study furthermore examined the relationship of formal structures in discourse to communicative and socio-functional goals of the preacher.

This study has revealed that sermons are indeed a highly structured speech event consisting of linguistic categories and units which are however functionally determined and interpreted. The functionalist paradigm within which the text is analysed further confirms that language functions in human interaction are significant in determining structure and form of language.

The study further demonstrates the interrelatedness of language, knowledge, action, meaning and context in discourse. Our findings confirm the assertion of Cook (1989) that, "If we are to find answers to the problem of what gives stretches of language unity and meaning, we must look beyond the formal rules operating within sentences and consider the people who use language and the world in which it happens as well" (p. 99). Therefore, our study of the discourse features and patterns of a Nigerian Christian sermon is a veritable way of demonstrating the symphony between language use and the people.

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