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Psychological Acts in Bishop Oyedepo's Sermon Titled 'Gateways to Financial Fortune'

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Abstract:

This paper critically examines psychological acts in Bishop Oyedepo's sermon titled 'Gateways to financial fortune'. A descriptive design and a qualitative method were adopted for the study. Purposive sampling technique was adopted in the selection of six (6) samples that contain the targeted linguistic words and expressions. The sample texts were subjected to textual analysis. Analysis of the data was done within the framework of the pragmatic acts theory. The psychological acts (emotions) were identified and analysed. The study revealed the psychological acts through the Pragmeme of 'emotives' to pract disapproval, fear, depression, doubt and excitement. The psychological acts identified from the data revealed the state of the mind of both the preacher and the congregation. It described the preacher's emotion, and enabled the congregation decode meaning. The paper concluded that the utterances and texts in sermons are forms of social actions that occur in complex social contexts and it identifies the function of the speaker's utterances in context as a way of performing social actions and creating social realities. The study recommends that Preachers should explore the linguistic choices available for use in sermon delivery through communicative competence for comprehensive sermon delivery and adequate understanding.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Psychological acts, Sermons

1. Introduction

Christian sermons are preached for salvation and deliverance of worshippers from emotional, spiritual, social and political crisis (Idowu, 2007). Also, through sermons, Christian believers are persuaded to lead the right path by revealing the basic truth. This is done through the dynamic use of language. Language is a not just a means of communication but also an efficient facility of human behavior. Through language, sermons are delivered thereby sending an important message to the listeners who are the Christian believers. Crystal and Davy (2013) describe the language of religious discourse as the kind of language used to express religious beliefs. Comparatively, the language of religion differs from the language of everyday communication because it is used by a group of people with like minds who share the same understanding of the context. Consequently, if the language of religion is interpreted out of context, meaning could be hampered and the purpose of the sermon may be forfeited. Furthermore, language is contextually used to express emotions, give a directive and maintain social relations through interaction physically, psychologically, and contextually. Language elicits different emotional reactions that explicate the message in the sermon distinctly because sermons are richly situated in the context thereby revealing the realities of the world, we live in. This accounts for the relevance of the pragmatic study of language in a specific context such as in religious discourse.

The significance of language as a voice of authority in the Church has drawn the attention of linguistic scholars because religion plays a significant role in society (Ekeoha, 2015). Also, religion is an aspect of human life that affects the general wellbeing of the people in a society especially in Nigeria where religious beliefs are held in high esteem. Therefore, the language used to preach in the religious setting has become a topic of discussion and criticism among people in the society, in the media, and among religious groups who may not share the same religious beliefs with the so-called religious sect. Preacher's utterances on vital and sensitive issues have been analysed and debated upon. There have been several judgments and interpretations ascribed to sermons especially church sermons by the congregation, the bloggers and the society as a result of the preacher's language. This affirms that sermons are accessible and indispensable to people in the society who may not share the same beliefs and ideologies. Similarly, the communicative role of language in the religious setting has attracted the attention of many people in the society because sermons are directed towards persuading,

encouraging, and influencing behaviors. Specifically, Pentecostal church sermons are often targeted towards addressing critical issues affecting people in the society.

Ekeoha (2015) describes Nigerian Pentecostalism as a unique and pragmatic mode of Christianity that explores the use of language verbally and non-verbally. Also, the language of Nigerian Pentecostalism is influenced by the peculiarities of the Nigerian indigenous culture, the happenings around, and some external factors. Speech events, ways of life, mode of dressing, and language codes characterize the mode of worship. The language is also influenced by the socio-economic, political, and religious situations in the country. Such situations are part of the contextual features that should be considered in interpreting the sermons. Meanwhile, language is used sermon delivery to address social, political, economic, emotional, and above all spiritual problems. Specifically, language is used to pray, command, admonish, pass judgments, curse, assert, assault, insult, persuade and convince the congregation. Furthermore, language is used as a non-physical weapon of spiritual warfare to ensure that abstract ideas are concretised hence, if the choice of words employed in church sermons are carefully selected, it could lead to a physical confrontation because language evokes emotions and feelings.

Also, Idowu (2007) observed that there is a growing concern among critics on the nature of sermons heard in the Nigerian Pentecostal Churches and the media every day. Nigerian Pentecostal Sermons have been manipulated over the years as a result of wrong interpretations, misrepresentations, and misconceptions which often lead to media attacks, criticisms, hate speeches, cyberbully and physical/emotional abuse, stigmatization of the preacher, and the church members by the media and the society. This study is motivated by the need for peaceful coexistence in Nigeria, a country notable with ethnic, political and religious induced crisis. Also, the recent advocacy against hate speeches in the country has motivated this study. Therefore, this paper pragmatically investigates the emotional language of the preachers using the pragmatic acts theory as its framework in selected Nigerian Pentecostal Church Sermons. Emotions have always been a mysterious realm of human beings; hence, this study aims to identify the psychological acts (emotions) explored and the contextual features that assist the preacher's emotional language.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Pragmatic Act Theory

This theory was propounded by Jacob L. Mey. The pragmatic act theory was introduced as a result of the deficiencies acknowledged in the speech act theory. Mey (2001) explains that the theory focuses on the environment in which both the speaker and hearer find their affordance. The whole act of using language unconventionally can be likened to pragmatic acts. Pragmatic acts are situation derived and situation constrained. It studies the use of language concerning the users. This means that pragmatics helps us to study a language as it is used by people for their purposes and within their respective limitations and affordances Mey (2001). This theory is most suitable in describing specific acts looking at it from the contextual point of view. Acts were captured under the umbrella of the speech act theory but not all acts can be determined by speech act alone. The pragmatic acts cover all lapses in the speech act theory by introducing the conversational act which captures the interactional function between the participants, the physical acts, and the psychological acts. The pragmatic act theory focuses on an interactional situation in which both speakers and hearers realize their aims. In this theory, the act is called a 'pragmeme'. Individual pragmatic acts realize a particular 'pragmeme' which he calls 'pract'. All acts are not completely identical therefore every 'pract' is also an 'Allopract'. An 'allopract' refers to a different realization of an act which is a 'programme'. In contemporary pragmatic studies, the properties of 'emotives' are open to pragmatic analysis in their context. Pragmatics is interested in how emotion-related utterances are produced in specific socio-communicative contexts, and how they can be interpreted by the recipients to make sense of their emotional impact or content. However, emotional utterances do many more than simply expressing and communicating emotions. They possess a certain pragmatic meaning, i.e., the intention of the speaker to inform, disapprove, command, warn, complain or praise and a rich pragmatic potential that needs to be revealed. Emotional utterances show how the speaker feels about a particular situation such that words can express his emotional state as well as his feelings while speaking.

3. Methodology

The descriptive design and a qualitative method were adopted for this study to account for how the preacher's emotional language and psychological acts in the selected sermon chosen as the data for the study. Discursively and interpretively, inferences were made concerning the correlates of contextual/pragmatic features of the preacher's emotional language and interactions with the congregation. The population for this study was derived from the sermon theme 'Covenant day of long life' presented on the 21st of April, 2021 by Bishop David Oyedepo of the Living Faith Church Worldwide aka Winners Chapel. Five (5) excerpts labelled PSYA 1-5 were randomly but purposively selected and were subjected to a detailed analysis. The secondary data was adopted and sermons were retrieved from unscripted sources such as the church websites and their certified 'YouTube' channels representing the source of data for this study. The recorded sermons were transcribed into texts and analysed. The linguistic tools that were explored in the study are the psychological acts (emotions). The contextual features that were employed for the interpretation of the pragmatic acts are: (SSK)shared situational knowledge, (SRK) shared religious knowledge, (REF)reference, (REL) relevance, EXP (Experience) and (V)voice. The psychological acts which display emotional reaction such as disapproval, fear, depression and doubt were identified and analysed.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Presentation of the Psychological Act Excerpts

S/N	Excerpts	Contextual Features	Pragmeme	Pract
PSYA1	'... So, you are not permitted to be buried, without attaining, to a good old age....and no one here shall be buried without attaining to a good old age. Not when they carry you to toilet, carry you to bath, no nonono... that's not good enough'	SSK, EXP, REF, VCE	Emotive	Disapproval
PSYA2	'...Which law? You will make a law that will make me take what I do not want to take? No! No! No! Not when I see the side effect. Not when I see people dying. My God. You have what it takes my friend. (2X) 90% of Nigerians don't wear any mask. Go to town now, you see the social distance on motor bikes (laughs) and yet they have no virus. Its propaganda. All the market women you buy things from, do they tie their nose? No. so why do you buy from them? Fear! Fear is of the devil. Now by this anointing, the yoke of fear on your life is destroyed! You know you didn't vote me to be a prophet, I was operated into it. You can't say you will dis-vote me; you can't dis-vote me. (Congregation shouts)...	SSK, REL, REF, VCE	Emotive	Disapproval Fear
PSYA3	'...He said I will kill myself if I don't get that money. I say wait, how much? Please don't kill yourself because your death will cost me more...'	EXP, REF	Emotive	Depression
PSYA4	When the young lady came and said, her health is threatened, what I did was to rebuke the spirit of fear...So I rebuke the spirit of fear (Amen) tormenting anyone under the sound of my voice. (Amen).	REF, SRK	Emotive	Fear
PSYA5	...I am very excited because it is showing that the blessing is speaking (congregation claps) when the blessing speaks, the wicked is angry. Amen! (Laughs).... How much love a good old age here? That's Gods will for you, (Amen). It's not an ambition, it's your birth right. (Amen). I said it's your birth right (Amen). Now in Genesis 15 verse 15, God was speaking to Abraham, and here is what he said 'and thou shall go to thy fathers in peace; thou shall be buried in a good old age. So, you are not permitted to be buried, without attaining, to a good old age. (Congregation shouts excitedly Amen) and no one here shall be buried without attaining to a good old age (Amen)... (PSY1, SRM1).	REF, REL	Emotive	Excitement
PSYA6	The word came through him and you can't hear from God and doubt him. You can't hear from God and doubt him. May you hear from the Lord today, (Amen). You can't hear from God and doubt him. So, he fulfills that word to the letter.	REF, SRK	Emotive	Doubt

Table 1: Presentation of the Psychological Act Excerpts

4.2. Interpretation

Table 1 presents five psychological acts under the Pragmeme 'Emotives'. Conversational expressive that communicate the speaker's emotions are termed 'emotives' (Weigand, 2010). The utterances in the excerpts analysed reveal various forms of emotional reactions such as disapproval, fear, depression, excitement and doubt. The emotional reactions were revealed from the utterances which form the textual data for the analysis of psychological acts.

4.3. Psychological Act of 'Disapproval'

Disapproval is the possession or expression of an unfavourable opinion. Synonyms that can function in this capacity are dissatisfaction, displeasure and distaste. The utterance suggests that the preacher disapproves of premature death because it does not conform to the Christian believe and faith. The emotional reaction reveals the preachers feeling of dissatisfaction towards premature death, hence, his utterances aim at encouraging the congregation to believe that God's will for them was to attain the good old age

'... So, you are not permitted to be buried, without attaining, to a good old age....and no one here shall be buried without attaining to a good old age. Not when they carry you to toilet, carry you to bath, no nonono... that's not good enough'

The preacher aggressively disapproves of premature death because of the shared knowledge about the low mortality rate in the society which has been viewed by many people as a normal occurrence, therefore he uses his experiences (EXP) and shared knowledge (SSK) to describe the problems associated with old age such as being carried to the toilet and to bath, while advocating for a good old age. He uses REF to directly refer to the congregation using the personal pronoun 'you'. He also makes reference (REF) to the good old age through repetition. Also, the repetition of 'NO' reveals the psychological act of disapproval. Here he disagrees with the government's policy on taking the COVID-19 vaccine compulsorily. He refers to the government's law as a propaganda born out of fear and aimed at instilling fear into the people to enable them take the vaccine. The aim of this message was to discourage members from taking the vaccine out of fear. He makes Reference (REF) to the lexical items associated with the virus such as the law, the people whom he estimated as 90% of Nigerians, mask, motor bikes, propaganda, social distancing, market women and nose. The law aims to make the people take the vaccine compulsorily. 90% of Nigerians are the people affected by the law. Motor bikes are the most popular means of transportation among the low-income earners. Nose mask, social distancing are lexemes associated with COVID-19 virus.

...Which law? You will make a law that will make me take what I do not want to take? No! No! No! Not when I see the side effect. Not when I see people dying. My God. You have what it takes my friend. (2X) 90% of Nigerians don't wear any mask. Go to town now, you see the social distance on motor bikes (laughs) and yet they have no virus. Its propaganda. All the market women you buy things from, do they tie their nose? No. so why do you buy from them? Fear! Fear is of the devil. Now by this anointing, the yoke of fear on your life is destroyed! You know you didn't vote me to be a prophet, I was operated into it. You can't say you will dis-vote me; you can't dis-vote me. (Congregation shouts) ...

The shared situational knowledge (SSK) about the virus and its impact in the society and its relevance (REL) assist the members in interpreting the preachers' message. He used SSK and REL to express his disapproval. Covid-19 pandemic which ravaged the world since the year 2020 till date. It affects the people's lives negatively therefore it is still a relevant (REL) issue to be discussed. The preacher exclaims in a loud voice to show his emotional reaction towards the spirit of fear by rebuking it in the lives of the congregation. The congregation interprets the message, displaying an emotional reaction in support and approval of the preacher's message by shouting.

4.4. Psychological Act Of 'Depression'

Depression is a mood disorder marked by sadness, dejection and hopelessness. It is the feeling of severe despondency and dejection resulting from disappointments and self-doubts. It is a mental illness that negatively affects how one feel, the way one thinks and to act. This feeling often leads to death if it is not treated. The preacher recounts a statement from a member of the congregation showing a state of depression in PSYA4, SRM1'...He said I will kill myself if I don't get that money. I say wait, how much? Please don't kill yourself because your death will cost me more...' The reference to the personal pronoun 'he said' reveals that the preacher was giving account as the third person narrator. The preacher shares his personal encounter with the person through the use of experience (EXP). Reference was made to the word 'kill' which suggests death. The victim reveals his intention to kill himself out of frustration. This shows the emotional state of depression. However, the preachers aim in this context is to stop the victim from killing himself by encouraging him.

4.5. Psychological Act of 'Excitement'

Excitement is a feeling of great enthusiasm and eagerness. This is a positive emotional reaction displayed by the preacher and the congregation. He reveals the feeling of excitement because of the blessings of God. He also reveals that the devil was angry because of God's blessings upon his life. He made reference (REF) to God's blessings as the reason for his excitement and also the reason for the devil's anger. The congregation reacts positively by clapping and laughing in excitement. He went further to convince the congregation that it is the will of God for them to live up to the good old age through the reference (REF) to the scriptural passage Genesis 15:15. He assures the congregation of God's plan which is to attain the good old age. The congregation interprets the message positively by shouting and reacting excitedly. This display of a positive emotional reaction by the congregation is due to the relevance (REL) of the message at the crucial time when the mortality rate is high.

...I am very excited because it is showing that the blessing is speaking (congregation claps) when the blessing speaks, the wicked is angry. Amen! (Laughs).... How much love a good old age here? That's Gods will for you, (Amen). It's not an ambition, it's your birth right. (Amen). I said it's your birth right (Amen). Now in Genesis 15 verse 15, God was speaking to Abraham, and here is what he said 'and thou shall go to thy fathers in peace; thou shall be buried in a good old age. So, you are not permitted to be buried, without attaining, to a good old age. (Congregation shouts excitedly Amen) and no one here shall be buried without attaining to a good old age (Amen)...

4.6. Psychological Act of 'Doubt'

Doubt is a feeling of uncertainty or lack of conviction. This is an emotional reaction borne out of suspicion. However, the preacher discourages members from doubting God through the reference (REF) to 'God'. The shared religious knowledge (SRK) concerning the power of God assist the preacher to dissuade the congregation from doubting God. He emphasizes the utterance 'you can't hear from God and doubt him' by repeating it 3 time just to convince the congregation and dissuade them from doubting God.

'...the word came through him and you can't hear from God and doubt him. You can't hear from God and doubt him. May you hear from the Lord today, (Amen). You can't hear from God and doubt him. So, he fulfills that word to the letter...'

4.7. Psychological Act of 'Fear'

Fear is an unpleasant emotion caused by the threat of danger, pain or harm. Fear is a negative emotional reaction that is harmful hence the need to rebuke it. The preacher acknowledge fear as the reason for oppression by the devil, therefore, he describes fear as threatening and tormenting. The relevance (REL) of rebuking the spirit of fear was established by the reference (REF) to health and medical verdicts. The preacher refers (REF) to fear as the cause of sickness, hence the need to reject and rebuke fear.

'...When the young lady came and said, her health is threatened, what I did was to rebuke the spirit of fear...So I rebuke the spirit of fear (Amen) tormenting anyone under the sound of my voice. (Amen). That medical verdict is inferior to the verdict of the scriptures (congregation responded 'Yes') ...'

The preacher through SRK buttresses his point when he compared the medical verdict to the scriptural verdict. The knowledge of the scripture assists him to refer (REF) to the medical verdict as inferior to the verdict of the scripture. The congregation interprets the message accordingly by responding positively with the words 'amen' and 'yes'. The aim of the preacher was to rebuke the spirit of fear in the lives of the congregation.

5. Conclusion

Psychological acts were analysed to pract disapproval, fear, depression, doubt and excitement. The psychological acts identified from the data revealed the state of the mind of both the preacher and the congregation. It described the preacher's emotion, and enabled the congregation decode meaning. The study revealed the psychological acts through the Pragmeme of 'emotives'. The emotional related utterances that were produced by the preacher were interpreted by the recipients to make sense of their emotional impact or content. However, emotional utterances do many more than simply expressing and communicating emotions. They possess a certain pragmatic meaning, i.e., the intention of the speaker and a rich pragmatic potential that needs to be revealed. Pragmatic potential is additional information created by the speaker/writer that needs to be decoded by the addressee. It contains the hidden abilities of language units to convey all general content of an utterance, including additional implied information. Pragmatic potential of a language and communication is connected with a person's attitude to language signs and with the expression of his/her appraisals, emotions and intentions. Emotional utterances show how the speaker feels about a particular situation such that words can express his emotional state as well as his feelings while speaking. The utterances in the excerpts analysed reveal various forms of emotional reactions such as disapproval, fear, depression, excitement and doubt. The emotional reactions were revealed from the utterances which form the textual data for the analysis of psychological acts.

The findings of this study have revealed the complexity of sermon delivery through psychological acts revealed in the sermons. Based on the observations of Osisanwo (2003) that the goal of pragmatics is to explain how utterances convey meaning in context, how the context determines the interpretation of the message, how the message is received by the hearer and the speaker's intention all enclosed the study of meaning in context. This study demonstrates the interrelatedness of language, meaning, action and context in religious discourse in Nigeria. This study is able to ascertain that the utterances and texts in sermons are forms of social actions that occur in complex social contexts and it identifies the function of the speaker's utterances in context as a way of performing social actions and creating social realities. The study recommends that Preachers should explore the linguistic choices available for use in sermon delivery through communicative competence in order to be accessible to a larger number of the heterogeneous population in Nigeria.

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