Language Craft by Nigerian and Ghanaian Christian Preachers-What Impact?

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Abstract

The increasing language craft by Pentecostal pastors is the focus of this study. The study area is communication language in the sermon of Christian preachers. Quantitative and qualitative survey methods were used. The communication goal of the preachers was investigated alongside the effectiveness of the use of the style as a means of communicating the pastors? message. The audience?s perception of pastors who use the style and the effect of the style on them were also investigated. Study findings show that pastors use the style to facilitate attention and retention on the part of the congregants, a large percentage of the respondents hold pastors who adopt the style in high esteem and the style is also effective from the perspective of the respondents who are Pentecostal church members. It is recommended that pastors avoid over-generalisation in using this style.

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1 Introduction

he message of Christianity places great premium on the meaning that is intended as well as the language with which the meaning is conveyed with the latter relating to style and diction. Right from the age the religion was received, there has been a great emphasis on decorum and elevated style in the language employed to communicate the faith. In the Epistle of Apostle Paul to the Colossians 4:6, there is an admonition: 'Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.' Salt gives flavour for improvement in taste, giving flavour to speech requires some degree of extra effort on the part of the communicator. There is an increasingly predominant practice of the use of 'crafted' language by many preachers in Nigeria and some from Ghana in West-Africa who introduce a lot of alliteration, assonance and consonance into their sermons. Alliteration is the repetition of similar consonant sounds at the beginning of words in a line of poetry. Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds in the middle or end of words in a line of poetry and assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in the middle of words in a line of poetry. These preachers seem to be in a silent contest to outdo one another in the language craft pre-occupation. Homiletic scholars have expressed varying opinions about what should be the style and form of the language of sermon delivery by Christian pastors. According to Brastow (2013), Christianity derived and consecrated its own version of the English Language which it deems suitable for the pulpit. The language of the pulpit is expected to avoid profanity and be sublime. **??**attison (2000:399) differs in a sense from Brastow's assertion; he opined:

The preachers of any period are not to be censured for adapting their style of address and mode of arguing to their hearers. They are as necessarily bound to the preconceived notions, as to the language, of those whom they have to exhort. The pulpit does not so mould the forms into which religious thought in any age runs; it simply accommodates itself to those that exist. For this very reason, because they must follow and cannot lead, sermons are the surest index of the prevailing religious feeling of their age. Jang (2007) argues that the preacher needs to make use of effective communication and rhetorical skills. According to him, the preacher must

consider the rhetorical aspect by giving attention to 'the fields of audience analysis, linguistics, cultural biases in communication, as well as more traditional purviews of speech studies'(Jang2007: 15) In the Victorian age, the language of preaching became so stereotypic and monotonous that the word sermon became interchangeable with dull (Ellison, 1998). Pentecostalism started to emerge after the American Civil War and its major trademark among others was its scripturally appealing message (Archer, 2004). According to **??**arret (1982), one in four Christians in the world is a part of the Pentecostal Movement. The Centre for the Study of Global Christianity estimated that, there are about 279 million Pentecostal Christians and 305 million Charismatic Christians in the world **??**Pew Research, 2011). With the Pentecostal movement gaining ascendancy, Christian preachers and translators of the Bible strive to employ the everyday use of language to facilitate comprehension and sustain the attention of their audience. It has also been observed that Pentecostal preachers painstakingly try to maintain their lionised personal image in the sight of their congregants. As a critic of the Pentecostal movement T Morolake Omowumi Adekunle ? & Dennis Soku ? in reverence. This may to a large extent give the minister more liberty in relating to the congregants and choosing his words and language style for preaching. The modern-day Pentecostal preachers have become more flamboyant in their use of language on the pulpit. Perhaps the explanation for this development can be found in the observation of Oakley(1987) that members of congregations have become accustomed to listening to expert communicators on radio and television; they are consequently more exacting in their demands of those who preach from the pulpit on Sundays. **??**akley (1987:4) concludes, 'If, therefore, the minister is to display an equal competence in preaching the Word, he will need to develop all his skills as he adapts himself to different kinds of audiences and addresses them in terms suitable to their conditions and outlook. **??** Hillis (1973) outlined Cicero's five principles of rhetoric that he claims have been influencing preaching for centuries. These are: the speaker-

2   ? Makes a discovery of what should be said (invention)

? Chooses the order in which to arrange his speech (arrangement)

? Uses his language in a peculiar way (style)

? secures the speech in (memory)

? effectively (delivers) the speech.

The principles highlighted by Cicero seem to operate in the sermon delivery of modern day Pentecostal preachers who painstakingly attend to style and choice of words. It has been observed that these preachers use a lot of alliteration, consonance and assonance in their sermons and this study set out to examine the impact this language craft has on congregation members. a) Research Questions 1. What do preachers intend to achieve by using sound devices? 2. What is the view of congregants about preachers who use devices of sounds like alliterations, assonance and consonance? 3. Do congregants think preachers get the result they desire in using these devices?

II.

3   Review of Literature

In this section we presented some theories that underline language communication. We also cited use of language craft in the pulpits.

4   a) Communication Accommodation Theory

This theoretical perspective examines people's underlying motives in a speech act, the causes of Year 2015 examples of conclusions drawn by others on the speakers shifting their communication styles. The Communication Accommodation theorist of Giles **??**1973) argues that during communication, people will try to accommodate or adjust their style of speaking to others with strong ethnic or racial pride tend to employ divergence to highlight their group identity while people from less privileged and powerless groups make their speech increasingly similar to the more privileged groups in order to gain social approval. There is the tendency for some preachers to diverge in the course of their sermon delivery to display their mastery of language and their eloquence.

Social Judgment Theory (Sherif et al, 1965):

This theory postulates that people respond to communication with latitude of acceptance, rejection, or non-commitment. The tendency of the receiver in a communication event to get persuaded along these latitudes depends on her viewpoint and the importance she attaches to the issue. If a persuasive message falls in a receiver's latitude of rejection, the message will not be accepted. If the issue which is unacceptable is personally important to the receiver, the determination to reject will be greater. A preacher has the same reference point with congregants, that is, the Bible. This makes the task of operating within the congregant's latitude of acceptance an easier task.

Elaboration Likelihood Model (Cacioppo and Petty, 1979): This Theory states that people respond to persuasive messages in either of two routes: the elaboration route or the peripheral path. The elaboration path involves cognitive processes of critical thinking, evaluation and internalisation of the message. Response along the peripheral route and recall is a situation whereby deep reflection, internalisation and recall of messages are avoided in order to prevent information overload. This peripheral route cannot lead to behavioural change. Preachers would rather have the congregants take the elaboration path which would lead to the desired change.

Language Expectancy theory: This was propounded by Burgoon, Jones and Stewart in 1975 and expanded later by **??**urgoon (1995). In a communication event, participants expect certain patterns of communication behaviour. These patterns which are pre-determined by society's psychological and cultural norms, equips a listener to identify linguistic, syntactic and semantic norms in language use. His identification of the norms consequently affects his reception or rejection of the message. Communication expectancies are said to derive from three factors: the communicator -with dimensions like source credibility, personality, appearance, social status and gender, ; the relationship between a receiver and a communicator with the dimensions like attraction, similarity and status equality;

5 b) The Language of the Pulpit

Uhunmwangho, cited by Taiwo (2005) summarizes the general characteristics of the language of religion thus: "it employs a deliberate, evocative use of terminology and phraseology which we must be alert to in order to appraise the primary purpose and meaning of the language". Taiwo (2005:2), in examining the general style of interrogation in charismatic Christian pulpit discourse, affirms that interrogation is used by charismatic Christian preachers during a not only to get information but also to regulate the linguistic behaviour of the congregants. The works of these two scholars reinforce the fact that the language of Christian sermons is engrossing and it demands the complete involvement of the listener

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It may use a word nobody knows, and thus be unclear.

? It may change the author's meaning, and thus be biblically inaccurate.

? It may highlight the outline more than the central truth and its relevance.

? It may draw more attention to the cleverness of the speaker than to the truth of God's word. Sunukjian (2015), however, concedes that alliteration may sometimes be aptly used by preachers. Thompson (2015) highlighted the advantages of using alliteration in preaching as the promotion of listening ear, learning mind and lasting effect in the hearers.

7 III.

8 Methodology

Within a period of two months from February to March, 2014, on a cable television and a local television channel both dedicated to the preaching of the Gospel, the following samples were collected from Nigerian and Ghanaian preachers (See Appendix 1).70 respondents were randomly selected across 10 purposively selected local Pentecostal churches in Adenta District Assembly in Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The Respondents from the Pentecostal churches were made to read the samples on use of sound devices by preachers. Questionnaires were then given to them to fill concerning their views on the use by preachers of the type of language shown to them. Only 68 of the questionnaires were recovered.

Four key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with Pastors purposively selected from 4 different Pentecostal churches to elicit their view on the intention of pastors who adopt the style under study.

9 IV.

10 Research Findings

Research Question 1: What do preachers intend to achieve by using the sound devices? The KIIs with three of the four pastors, respectively portrayed pastors who use this style as attempting to make the sermon interesting in order to arrest the listeners' attention, facilitate the listeners' retention and recall of the message and create a good impression of themselves in the sight of the congregation.

One the interviewee remarked, 'A pastor must have clout, when your congregation comprises highly educated and sophisticated people, you must improve your sermon delivery style.' Another one said, "Many Pentecostal churches have a large number of young people and young people love this style"

The interview with 3 of the pastors show that effective communication with the congregants and personal image building on the part of the pastor are reasons underlying the use of the style under investigation.

However the fourth pastor interviewed expressed the opinion that the style, whose usage is rising largely, promotes self-projection on the part of pastors and its use should be deemphasised.

"These pastors tend to become arrogant believing they are eloquent. They don't realise they are unnecessarily distracting their church members."

The respondents who filled the questionnaires also expressed their views on the intention of preachers who adopt the style under study. All of them (i.e. 100%)without exception saw effective communication as the reason for the adoption of the style. **??**9.1% claims that it makes a difficult sermon topic easy to understand, 39.7 % claims it makes a sermon humorous and interesting and 41.2 % claims it makes the church members to concentrate and learn more.

158 Research Question 2: What is the view of congregants about preachers who use devices of sounds like
159 alliterations, assonance and consonance?
160 The nature of the language used by preachers has generated both positive and negative reactions from scholars
161 specifically, preachers' propensity for the use of alliteration. Uhunmwangho, cited by **??**aiwo (2005:1) berated
162 what she termed 'preachers' slavish servitude to the use of alliteration.' The incessant use of alliteration, according
163 to her, compels the preacher to introduce his own agenda and not the biblical author's agenda into a passage.
164 Sebring (2014) gave three reasons why he views the use of alliteration by preachers as almost always atrocious.
165 According to him alliterated sermon outlines make the message contrived and seemingly forced, it appears very
166 complicated, seems to lack authenticity because it is not representative of real life conversation. In a similar
167 vein Sunukjian (2015: 1) outlines four bad things about alliteration: SPSS was used to generate frequency tables
168 from the quantitative survey. The respondents were asked if they liked pastors who during their sermons use
169 sound devices like the ones shown to them. 71 % of the respondents answered 'yes' while 29 % answered 'No',
170 while those who answered 'Yes' gave more effective communication as their reason. The ones who answer 'No'
171 gave inability to understand the preacher's vocabulary and the style being distracting as reasons Attributes that
172 could create a positive image of the preacher in the sight of the congregants which are good character, good
173 looks, caring for congregation members, good dressing, eloquence of sermon delivery, deep knowledge of God's
174 word and anointing to have prayers answered were ranked by the respondents. The knowledge of God's word was
175 ranked as most important, followed by eloquence of sermon delivery, good character, caring for church members,
176 anointing to have prayers answered, good dressing and good looks.
177 It is obvious that majority of the respondents view preaching using sound devices as a positive practice.
178 Research Question 3: Do congregants think preachers get the result they desire for using these devices? 91.2 %
179 of the respondents were of the opinion that the pastors' use of the style had positive effect on the congregants while
180 8.8 % were of the opinion that use of the style had no effect because it was difficult to understand. Respondents
181 who felt the style had positive effect answered variously that it promoted love and respect for the pastor, making
182 the congregants to be more predisposed to complying with the sermon.
183 V.

11 Conclusion

185 The study shows that congregants are largely in approval of the type of language under discussion. However, the
186 few dissenting voices are worthy of attention. The content handled by the preacher is of utmost importance and
187 there is need to prevent any hindrance to its assimilation. Preachers who adopt this style must be mindful of the
188 comprehensibility to their congregants given the fact that the level of congregants' education differ from one to the
189 other. Moreover, the morality of the preacher is undermined when absolute statements made, misrepresent reality
as in the case of a statement like "A man who executes God's counsel diligently soon becomes an executive." [1] [2]

Figure 1:

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192 . Emotion not subjected to reflection leads to dejection. (C) (4). The measure of the Holy Spirit in your life
193 determines your heavenly treasure (S) (5). The presence of God is the greatest present to His priests. (A) (6).
194 Yourself must be sacrificed to be sanctified (A) (7). Sanctification transforms you from the vulnerable to the
195 venerable (A) (8). A life of devotion is a life of deviation from the devil's ways (A) (9). Your situation should not
196 be a restriction but a motivation for higher aspiration.(C) (10) (11). A man of low understanding is a man of low
197 standing (C) (12). As you make the Lord your fortress, you forsake your stress (A) (13). We must partake in the
198 suffering of Christ to have his offering. (C) (14). When you reject divine direction you inject devil's prescription.
199 (A) (15). It takes a company to fulfil a calling (A)
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211 *sel diligently soon becomes an executive (S)*,

212 [A man who hates instruction hastens to destruction (A) (18). A disciple is someone who submits to discipline without spleen(C)]
213 *A man who hates instruction hastens to destruction (A) (18). A disciple is someone who submits to discipline*
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244 *Repentance brings remittance of sin and admittance into God's kingdom(C) (26. The cessation of the*
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11 CONCLUSION

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