

***“Friends, Please do not choose to go to hell”*: Linguistic Strategies and Discourse Functions of Appeals in Christian Religious Tracts**

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Abstract. Even though the persuasive features of religious discourse have been widely studied, existing studies have not adequately examined the use of appeals to create and maintain interpersonal relation. This study accounts for the linguistic strategies and the discourse functions of appeal in 11 Christian religious tracts purposively selected from 40 tracts collected from about 15 churches/ministries in Ondo State, South-western Nigeria. The study which adopts Aristotle’s theory of rhetoric identifies four major types of appeals namely; appeal to intimacy using direct address; appeal to introspection using question and answer; appeal to beliefs and actions using conditional clauses and; appeal to faith using declarative clauses. Writers of Christian religious tracts in the Nigeria rely on emotional appeals, logical proofs and ethics as means of maintaining interpersonal relation with their readers. Also, they assume the position of divine authority and/or of better informed persons to counsel their readers.

Keywords: Appeal, Christian religious tracts, Rhetoric; Religious communication, Discourse functions.

1. Introduction

The analysis of language use in public discourse has been of interest to language analysts. This can be attested to by the volume of publications in learned journals on the investigation of the linguistic and discursual value of language in society. While some scholars have concentrated on the analysis of the formal properties of language, some have focused on

accounting for its stylo-discoursal features; yet others have been attracted to its role in achieving persuasion in communication. Scholarly works on persuasive discourse has concentrated on the analysis of political and religious texts. However, in spite of the high volume of works on religious discourse, not much has been done on the characterization of the persuasive features and the linguistic elements deployed to achieve appeal in religious discourse. The current study examines linguistic strategies and pragmatic functions of appeals in Christian religious tracts in a second language environment, Nigeria.

Writing on religious language, Donovan’s (1976: 10) has observed that religious language is affective because it affects people’s feelings, enters into their imagination, influences their emotions and often gives the impression of conveying profound truth. An essential part of religious communication is the way speakers employ language as an instrument of persuasion. Speakers use language to convince and influence their listeners to adopt, reinforce or modify certain beliefs. They also employ rhetorical devices in creating and maintaining interpersonal relations. Religious communication often involves use of rhetorical appeals to achieve effectiveness in communicating their intentions. Odebunmi (2006) examines the stylistics of religious electronic media adverts in Nigeria. He observes that religious adverts are characterised by lexico-semantic, morphological, syntactic and pragmatic features, marked peculiar religious connotations which have the tendency to deceive the listener and lure him/her to act to the benefit of the advertiser. Taiwo (2006) accounts for tenor in electronic media Christian discourse in

Nigeria. The paper focuses on the analysis of the role structure into which participants in the discourse fit and how this determines how they make and interpret meaning in the discourse. Adeyanju (2008) is a stylo-semantic study of season's greetings from Pastor Adeboye. He observes that Pastor Adeboye "skilfully manipulated linguistic and rhetorical resources to preach a coherent and soul stirring sermon to the members of his church via the New Year greeting card". Chiluwa (2008) interrogates how individual and group identities with reference to their religious inclinations and how social visions are constructed in vehicle stickers. The paper observes that as a means of identification, stickers guarantee social security and provides privileges for group members. Three categories of stickers namely; those that communicate social vision, those that communicate individual/group identity and those that reaffirm faith were identified. Again, linguistic markers of identity in this discursive practice include personal pronouns "I, we, me" and the possessive "my". The paper concludes that vehicle stickers reflect the social discursive practices of the society and they reveal religious and institutional practices and system of believe in Nigeria. Adedun and Mekiliuwa (2010) examine the rhetorical features in the language of Nigerian Christian sermons and observed that Christian sermons are highly persuasive. Preachers deploys rhetorical figures and devices such as logical argument, pathetic argument, rhetorical questions, restatements/repetitions, three-part lists, possibility talk, imagery/metaphors, stories and songs to influence people's decisions, modify their behaviours and warn them of future events. Aboh (2012) is a Systemic Functional analysis of mood and modality in Christian Women Mirror. In a corpus-based lexical study of sermons in Nigeria, Esimaje (2012) observes that as a discourse event, sermons have their own lexes and discourse structure and the type and usage of words in sermons are indexical of their contexts. He avers that religious communication would be better enhanced if the sermon-giver and his audience draw from the same pool of lexis. In a study of Christian apologetics in Nigeria, Inya (2012) deploys Halliday and Hassan's Generic Structure Potentials (GSP) to examine the linguistic elements in Christian apologetics discourses. Accordingly, the paper reveals that the elements of the GSP concertedly work to advance or argue for or defend the Christian belief system. Bankole and Ayoola (2014) examine the nature of propositions and how interpersonal relationships are created in a Christian magazine. Willy and Mbakop (2018) account for the pragmatic functions of 'Amen' as used in two different religious trends, namely mainstream Protestant Churches and Pentecostal Churches. They observe that apart from

its use in traditional conclusion and gospel truth, New-Born Churches also employs it to maintain interpersonal relations and as power marker.

Rajtar (2012) focuses on gender representation in the discursive practices of the Jehovah's witnesses in the former East Germany. The paper examines how the egalitarian stance of the official state ideologies influences the perspectives and practices of Jehovah's witnesses on gender related issues. Saddhono (2012) focuses on the structure and features of discourse, the topics, speech acts and the language form and functions in Friday sermon in Surakarta. Again, Abdel and Eldin (2014) investigate the language use in Amr Khalid's Islamic sermons to uncover the ideological devices in the sermons using critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach. Kim (2016) interrogates a dominant ideological position that excludes women from pastoral position. The paper examines the text of a religious scholar that assigns sovereign values to the interpretations that tends to propagate and legitimise this patriarchal church's policy. The study observes that religious beliefs and doctrines often hinge on debatable and subjective interpretations of biblical texts based on the assumed mental models by presenting implicit presuppositions as unchanging, unchallengeable truths. Adjei, Ewusi-Mensah and Logogye (2016) focus on how language is used to achieve stylistic effects by examining the linguistic choices used by the speaker in the Beatitudes. The study reveals that the Beatitudes which are structured in proverb-like declaration of blessings have three parts namely "an ascription of blessedness, a description of the person's character and a statement of the reason for the blessedness". The writer reaches out to his/her readers by manipulating words in a way to assure them of blessing. Adam (2017) explores the persuasive strategies employed in scripted sermon titles and opening passages. The paper examines the linguistic elements deployed in the realisation of persuasion and how persuasion is used to enhance the credibility of the message.

Our investigation above has revealed that there is a neglect of studies on tracts as a medium of religious communication. This is a gap in knowledge which this paper intends to fill. This study, therefore, examines the discourse functions of appeals and the linguistic elements employed to achieve them in Christian religious tracts.

2. Theoretical Orientation

Even though persuasion seems to be present in virtually all forms of text and talk, religious discourse

is one of the domains of language use where persuasion is most significantly deployed by speakers as a key instrument to convince the audience of the veracity of their claims. The centrality of persuasive use of language in modern society can be better appreciated when viewed against the backdrop of human nature. As beings with intellect, imbued with the power of discernment, humans can influence and be influenced by one another. For example, speakers/writers of religious texts make use of various persuasive strategies to communicate their intentions to their listeners. They usually engage deliberate acts of producing utterances that appeal to the senses and passions of their listeners/readers. By so doing, they influence the beliefs, attitudes and forms of behaviour of their listeners/readers.

This paper explores the use of appeals in the realisation of persuasion in religious discourse. The study is driven by Aristotle's theory of rhetoric because no adequate analysis of persuasive discourse can be done without an exploration of the art of rhetoric. According to Aristotle (1959: 15), rhetoric is a practical discipline aiming at "exerting a persuasive action." Rhetoric is concerned with how persuasion can be achieved in speech making through the application of linguistic devices. Aristotle identified three means by which persuasion can be achieved, namely; by the personal character of the speaker, by putting the audience into a certain frame of mind and by the proof provided by the words of the speech itself (Roberts 2010: 8). He also identifies three forms of rhetorical appeal (ethos, pathos and logos) in persuasive discourse. Ethos relates to the ability of the speaker to exhibit a personal character which is realised in the credibility of his/her speech. Pathos deals with the power of the speaker to arouse the emotion of his/her audience, while logos reside in the power of the speaker to persuade by means of truth and sound argument.

Furthermore, Aristotle points out that there are three kinds of rhetorical speeches: deliberative, forensic and epideictic. The deliberative kind of speech engages speakers in advising the audience to do something or warning against doing something. The speaker in the forensic speech either accuses somebody or defends self or someone while in epideictic speech, speakers praise or blame somebody and describe things or deeds of the respective person as honourable or shameful (Adegoju 2008:5). These three (especially deliberative) are relevant to religious discourse.

3. Methodology

The data for this study comprise mainly Christian religious tracts collected from various churches and Christian ministries in Ondo State, South-western Nigeria. Tract is one of the major means of evangelism among the modern day Christian religious adherents. Thus, most churches print and distribute tracts especially during their outdoor programmes. However, most of the tracts for this study were collected directly from the church office of the churches visited, while a few were collected from members of the church. Over fifteen churches were visited by the researchers between July 2016 and September 2017 to collect tracts. Some tracts were also collected from friends and relatives. On the whole, about 40 tracts were collected from which 18, written in English language, were initially selected. However, only eleven were finally selected for analysis based on their themes and the significance of appeal resources in them.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

This section examines appeals and the linguistic elements employed to achieve them in selected texts. These include appeal to intimacy using direct address, appeal to introspection using question and answer, appeal to beliefs and actions using conditional clauses and appeal to faith using declarative clauses.

4.1 Appeal to Intimacy Using Direct Address

One major means of establishing affection with readers in Christian religious tracts is through appeal to intimacy. This is an appeal to the emotional disposition of the readers whereby readers are made to believe that they are related to the writer and that they care for their welfare and share in their burdens. This show of familiarity, closeness and understanding helps to boost the confidence of their readers. In selected texts, appeal to intimacy is achieved through the use of direct address. Direct address enables writers to talk directly to their readers as if they are physically present. Through this linguistic and discursive technique, writers talk to their readers as if they are engaged in actual face to face interaction. Direct address may manifest through the use of vocatives (personal voice) and through the use of the second person pronoun (you) and its possessive form (your); all deployed by writers to endear themselves to their readers or to create interpersonal relationship with them. The examples below illustrate this:

Extract 1:

The world is a battle ground where everyone is a fighter. Man is born to fight the battles. There are many fights a man can win with his friends and

relatives. There is also a fight to be fought alone. It is an inescapable one; it is our moment of truth. You will be at your moment of truth when you face death. Dearly beloved, when your moment of truth comes, you will be completely left alone. When you are sick, friends can visit, doctors can try their best, your theories and philosophy can give some respite. However, when your moment of truth comes, nobody on earth can help you. After death, you go to meet your maker to give a report of how you spent your life (Heb. 9:27). How prepared are you for your moment of truth? **Tract 3**

Extract 2:

There is something that is still missing in your life. You have got everything, yet lacking something. You are rich, famous, educated, professionally and politically outstanding, yet feeling empty or inadequate like stew without salt and tea without sugar. Brethren, there is still something that can make life worthless if missing- JESUS. Your life is incomplete and worthless without Jesus. **Tract 7**

Extract 3:

You may be brilliant, intelligent, wealthy, beautiful, handsome, brave, bold, eloquent, etc and think you are perfect. Remember, you are an ordinary dust. "For dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:19). Therefore, *do not* forget that one day you will die and surrender all these attributes and achievements behind. Brother and sister, you brought nothing to this world and you will take nothing away from it when you bid it farewell. **Tract 8**

Extract 4:

My dear friend, no matter the extent you might have gone in sin, the love and mercy of Christ can still

redeem you. He died that you may live; he suffered that you may enjoy and was cursed that you may be blessed. He is at the right hand of God calling you that you may have rest for your soul (Matt. 11:28-29). **Do not** delay your salvation. Why not surrender you life to him today and avoid everlasting regret!

Tract 9

Extract 5:

Please, listen to the truth today because the bible says that ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. Jesus is the way, the truth and life. Will you be one of those who will find the way and enjoy eternal rest? Or will you be among those who will reject the truth and end up in eternal condemnation in hell fire? Jesus has gone to prepare a place for you to spend your eternity with him. Very soon, he will come back to take you home where there will be hell fire. Friend, it is never too late, he can still accept you.

Tract 10

As earlier identified, there are instances of the use of vocatives in the extracts above. A vocative is an expression, a direct address in which the identity of the addressee is identified within the sentence. Vocatives relate or denote any noun, pronoun and adjective used in addressing a person or thing. Examples from the extracts above include; *dearly beloved* (Extract 1), *brethren* (Extract 2), *brother and sister* (Extract 3), *my dear friend* (Extract 4) and *friend* (Extract 5). An analysis of the meaning of the linguistic elements in these examples will further reveal the intent of writers.

Examples	Usage/Meaning	Pragmatic import
<i>dearly beloved</i>	Refers to someone who is fondly cherished; special; deeply/profoundly loved; special; dearly loved, a favourite; etc.	Makes readers feel deeply loved and cherished. The reader is happy to know that there is someone who cares for him/her and shares in his/her challenges.
<i>Brethren</i>	It is a solemn address often used to indicate brothers; it is a form of address to members (male and female) of an organisation or a religious group.	Used to enact the spirit of comradeship or oneness between writers/speakers and readers/listeners. Makes readers/listeners feel happy, safe and secure
<i>brother and sister</i>	Common inheritance, common destiny; belonging to the same family; related by blood. In this case relationship by blood (of Jesus).	This helps to make readers feel loved as one belonging to the same family.
<i>my dear friend</i>	A friend who listens and care; important; highly prized; precious.	Reader becomes happy knowing that the speaker cares for him/her. He/she feels recognised owing to the level of importance accorded him/her.
<i>Friend</i>	A person you know very well and who you like a lot, but who is usually not a member of your family and devoid of sexual relation. An acquaintance, an associate.	The knowledge that one is in a friendly environment makes one feel happy, safe and secure.

Table 1

The analysis in the table above exposes the usage/meaning and the pragmatic import of the vocative elements. Writers of tracts often use vocatives as an affective device to influence their readers in a manner that will make them accept their

propositions and then, act in a preconceived way. As we can see from the examples above, the elements are used to establish rapport and intimacy by identifying with readers and by making them feel recognised and loved. Another linguistic element that

serves to support the vocative elements in realising direct address in the data is the use of imperative construction as in the examples below.

Therefore, *do not forget* that one day you will die and surrender all these attributes and achievements behind. (extract 3)

Do not delay your salvation. (extract 4)

Why not surrender you life to him today and avoid everlasting regret (extract 4)

One unique attribute of these imperative constructions is the grammatical structure *aux + neg. + V* which the writers employ to realise their communicative intentions of advising or urging.

4.2 Appeal to Introspection Using Question and Answer

Writers of tracts also appeal to the introspective faculty of their readers by using *question* and *answer* technique. The questions which belong to the non-WH words category are rhetorical in nature. However, unlike rhetorical questions, the answers are provided as a form of conclusion in the statement that follows. In this case, the appeals are directed at the ethical/moral faculty of the readers. They are made to engage in contemplative or meditative thoughts about

their spiritual wellbeing. The question and answer technique often enhance the interactive nature of the tracts as readers are then engaged in interpersonal relations with the writers. This way, writers are able to attract the attention of their readers, remind them of their real life challenges and situations and, provide answers to their puzzle in a subtle manner. Here are some examples from extracts 6 and 7

Extract 6:

Beloved, are you in bondage right now? Are you poor and stagnated? Are you being challenged by a long standing sickness that has defied medical intervention and you are thinking it is all over for you? Jesus Christ is the bondage breaker. He will break every yoke in your life today. **Tract 11**

Extract 7:

Are you unemployed? He says “ask and it shall be given unto you (Mat.7:7). Do you lack anything good? He says that those who seek him shall not lack anything good (Ps. 34: 9). Are you surrounded by troubles? Are you operating under any curse? He says if you call him, He will hear you and deliver you out of all your troubles (Ps.34:6). Does everywhere around you look like a desert? He says He will cause rivers to flow in your desert and make a way for you where there is no way (Is. 43:19). **Tract 12**

Table 2

Questions	Answers
Beloved, are you in bondage right now? ... Are you being challenged by a long standing sickness that has defied medical intervention and you are thinking it is all over for you?	Jesus Christ is the bondage breaker. He will break every yoke in your life today.
Are you unemployed?	...ask and it shall be given unto you (Mat.7:7).
Do you lack anything good?	...those who seek him shall not lack anything good (Ps. 34: 9).
Are you surrounded by troubles? Are you operating under any curse?	...if you call him, He will hear you and deliver you out of all your troubles (Ps.34:6).
Does everywhere around you look like a desert?	...He will cause rivers to flow in your desert and make a way for you where there is no way (Is. 43:19).

The interrogative sentences in the table above require either yes or no answers. They are used in selected tracts to engage the readers in emotional/psychological debate by making them to engage in critical self examination. This is because most of the readers would likely not be able to answer the questions in the affirmative. The tendency, therefore, is to become confused and probably dejected as a result of guilt. This is where the answers provided become relevant as the way out of their challenges or situations.

4.3 Appeal to Beliefs and Actions Using Conditional Clauses

Another significant form of appeal in selected texts is the appeal to beliefs and actions using conditional

clauses. This is a form of appeal disguised in a manner of cause and effect, assertion and interrogation directed at readers to make them act in a preconceived way. The technique involves the use of exhortation and counselling. Writers make use of exhortation to advise, encourage and persuade readers to achieve laudable or commendable deeds. In the words of Sloane,

Exhortation is normally marked by an appeal to belief and action congruent with moral principles, social vision or religious experience shared by speaker and audience. It is therefore a call to a moral turning that often bears a conservative dynamic of preservation, perseverance or return to good conscience. (2006: 294)

Writers usually assume the position of better informed persons or someone who knows better than their readers and as such, are able to offer guidance or counsel. In the texts for this study, writers assume the institutional voice (God's representative) of a pastor or priest to appeal to readers' faith and beliefs. This is a form of appeal to the ethical or moral consciousness of the listeners. They present issues of concern such as sin and its consequences, heaven and hell, righteousness and prosperity etc with the intent to cause a change of attitude in their readers.

Extract 8:

God created man to live forever but man began to die because of sin. Do not indulge in sin because it alienates a man from God and destroys his destiny. So, if you want to be fulfilled in life, desist from sin and you would have won the greatest victory in life.

Tract 1

Extract 9:

Now, if you induce a man by your choice of dress into sexual sin just because you want to be accepted by the people or be part of what is in vogue, do you think God will accept it? If you send men to hell by the way you dress and think God will understand you, you are joking. Those body revealing clothes are nothing but Satan's products to deceive and derail men from following Christ. **Tract 5**

In the extracts, preachers employ logical arguments (logos) and ethics (ethos) to appeal to their listeners. Let us consider some examples to illustrate this.

Do not indulge in sin because it alienates a man from God and destroys his destiny (Extract 8).

So, **if you want to be fulfilled in life, desist** from sin and you would have won the greatest victory in life (Extract 8).

Examples *i* and *ii* above typify instances of the use conditional clause to achieve both logos and ethos as shown in the interlocking/logical relation of cause and effect.

Do not... (cause/conditional)
because... (effect/result)
...if you want..., (effect/result)
desist... (conditional/cause)

Here are examples of instances of conditional clauses with the interlocking relations of assertive statement (example iii) and interrogative statement (example iv).

If you send men to hell by the way you dress and think God will understand you, you are joking. (Extract 9).

If you..., (conditional) **you are joking** (assertive)
if you induce a man by your choice of dress into sexual sin just because you want to be accepted by

the people or be part of what is in vogue, *do you think God will accept it?*

if you... (conditional), **do you think God will accept it?** (interrogative)

In a nutshell, writers employ conditional clauses to appeal to the moral consciousness of their readers. In so doing, they tend to counsel them about the need to stop/desist from indulging in one any habit that may be injurious to their wellbeing. They warn them about the consequences of living in sin. They expose the dangers of sinful habits (e.g *it alienates a man from God and destroys his destiny*) and encourage them to stop such habits.

4.4 Appeal to Faith Using Declarative Clauses

Writers of tracts often deploy ethos by appealing to the faith of their readers to their texts. Appeal to faith helps to enhance interpersonal relations between the readers and the writers of the tracts. Writers often take the advantage of this relationship to appeal to the ethical/moral consciousness and emotional dispositions of readers. Often presented in declarative clauses, appeal to faith is achieved through assuring and comforting statements which could be in form of proclamations (e.g praying and prophesying). Writers make pronouncements by declaring the goodwill (of God and writers) to the readers. They assume the institutional/divine voice to make these pronouncements or declarations. Proclamations have a way of boosting the readers' faith by providing them succour.

Extract 10:

Beloved, are you in bondage right now? Are you poor and stagnated? Are you being challenged by a long standing sickness that has defied medical intervention and you are thinking it is all over for you? Jesus Christ is the bondage breaker. **He will break every yoke in your life today.** **Tract 11**

Extract 11:

Although you may be alive but your virtue, health, potentials, business, opportunities, fortunes etc have died long ago. In the bones in the valley in Ezekiel 37 were very dry but when they encountered the resurrection and life, they came back to life again. **Your dry bone shall rise again.** You will be restored in Jesus name. **Tract 13**

Extract 12

Martha and Mary have lost all hope on their beloved brother; Lazarus (Jn.11:1-44). You might have ruled out any hope of your recovery and therefore have already accepted your fate to die a pauper or die in that sickness or die barren. I have good news for you. The power that resurrected Lazarus on the fourth day is still available today. **You will recover all your losses in Jesus name.** **Tract 14**

The examples below are instances of declarations or proclamations from the extracts above.

*You **will recover** all your losses in Jesus name.* (Extract 12)

*Your dry bone **shall rise** again.* (Extract 11)

*He **will break** every yoke in your life today.* (extract 10)

One significant feature of the examples above is that they are declarative sentences. Consider the use of the modal auxiliary verbs and the present simple form of the verb (aux + mod + V), *will recover, shall rise, will break*. This pattern not only makes the message futuristic but it also confers on it the quality of certainty and assurance. Thus, writers declare their conviction or certainty about the truth in their assertions thereby assuring their readers about them. This further helps to build the faith of readers thereby enhancing interpersonal relations between them and the writers. The interactivity of the message is further enhanced by the use of the second person pronoun 'you' and the possessive determiner 'your' (example i) which the writers used in addressing the readers directly. The issue of certainty and assurance can further be explained through the concept of lexical presupposition. Lexical presupposition arises where a speaker makes use of a word and assumes that his listener will be able to decode the other/unstated meaning of the word as used by him/her. Example ii above exemplifies this concept. The choice of the adverb *again* (one more time), shows that the speaker has assumed that the listener knows the context. By this, the speaker assumes that the listener shares the background knowledge of the story of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37. The use of the word 'again' also suggest the listener had earlier suffered a fall or had been a victim of certain misfortune or life experience from which he had risen or survived. There is therefore an assurance and certainty that he/she will rise again as before. All these are directed at the ethical and moral fabrics of the readers to achieve premeditated intentions.

5. Conclusion

This paper examines linguistic strategies and discourse functions of appeals in Christian religious tracts in a second language environment, Nigeria. As a highly persuasive discourse, writers deploy both linguistic and rhetorical elements to achieve their communicative intentions. The paper identifies four major types of appeals in selected tracts and the linguistic elements deployed to achieve them. These include, appeal to intimacy using direct address,

appeal to introspection using question and answer, appeal to beliefs and actions using conditional clauses and appeal to faith using declarative clauses. The first, appeal to intimacy, is directed at the emotional disposition of the readers to make them believe that they are related to the writer and that the writer care for their welfare and share in their burdens. This show of familiarity, closeness and understanding helps to boost the confidence of their readers. Appeal to introspection is the second type and it is directed at the ethical/moral faculty of the readers to engage them in contemplative or meditative thoughts about their spiritual wellbeing. The third type, appeal to beliefs and actions, involve the use of exhortation and counselling. Writers often project institutional voice which presents them as God's or divine representative. They usually assume the position of better informed persons or someone who knows better than their readers and as such, are able to offer guidance or counsel them. The fourth, appeal to faith, helps to build readers trust in God and it enhances interpersonal relations between the readers and the writer of the tracts. Writers often take the advantage of this relationship to appeal to the ethical/moral consciousness and emotional dispositions of readers. This study has shown that Christian Pentecostal preachers in the Nigeria rely on emotional appeals and on logical and ethical proofs as means of persuasion.

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