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OGUAA JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND HUMAN VALUES

Unintended Meanings In Christian Faith-Based Discourse

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Abstract

Language, in different facets of human life, has always enjoyed the attention of scholars over the years. There have been works on Christian faith-based discourse, some of which are termed 'the language of religion', 'religious language', 'Christian religious language', 'language of worship', etc. most of these works focus on register or vocabulary. With the proliferation of churches in Nigeria today, certain linguistic trends have emerged in Christian faith-based discourse. This paper investigates these linguistic trends in Christian assemblies with the aim of

highlighting the meanings they could convey. Fifteen speech samples produced by a set of purposively sampled participants who occupy certain leadership positions in their assemblies are used in this study. Some of the speech samples were transcribed from existing audio-tapes and interaction with church leaders while others were recorded through note-taking during church activities. The findings reveal that the trend of language usage under study projects unpleasant and unintended meanings which may inhibit the successful practice of the Christian faith by adherents, and hinder intending or prospective members. Unintended expressions tend to underrate God and magnify Satan (the archenemy of the Christians), or they mock the Christian faith and exaggerate life's problems. Words are powerful and as such, must be employed in Christian faith-based discourses with utmost care. The role of language in the progress of the church, physically or spiritually, should not be underestimated.

Keywords

Language, Christian Faith-Based Discourse, Unintended Meanings, Church Progress

Introduction

'Language is foremost a means of communication, and communication almost always takes place within some sort of social context. This is why effective communication requires an understanding and recognition of the

connections between a language and the people who use it.[1] Communication involves the ways by which messages are sent and received, and language is a very important means of achieving communication. Therefore, since language is indispensable in any communicative events, it is needful to ensure its proper application and interpretation if communication must be successful. This implies that meaning is central to effective communication. Language, be it spoken or written, is used to convey thoughts, opinions, ideas, and feelings. Every language user who has a message to pass would wish that his hearers get the message and capture the meanings he intends to convey to them. However, communication may not be as smooth as this. Certain factors may inhibit the process so much that the message sent is wrongly decoded because of the linguistic elements employed in its coding, in addition to the organisation of such elements.

Meaning is the essence of any linguistic signal. The inability of the sender of a signal to encode his or her message appropriately may result in wrong or unintended meanings being suggested to the hearer. Language, which is the dress of one's thought, no doubt plays a significant role in communication. In order to forestall a situation in which wrong or unintended meanings are conveyed due to the inappropriate coding process of thoughts, feelings or ideas, there is the need to consider the linguistic features and communicative import of the expressions with which these are communicated.

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[1] J. S. Amberg and D. J. Vause. *American English: History, Structure, and Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2009. 2.

Generally, humans engage in communication on a daily basis. It is an activity that exists in all spheres of human endeavour. In the religious circle specifically, worshippers interact in a bid to establish social rapport with one another. Beyond this, adherents of different faiths usually commune with their God or gods. Christians, the world over, establish fellowship with one another through the use of language and other forms of communication. They use language to express greetings, good wishes, and counselling. They also speak with their God in prayer by praising Him for mercies enjoyed, favours received and requests granted. They are also able to make fresh requests and seek His face daily.

Nigeria is a nation filled with highly religious people of diverse faiths. In contemporary times, the number of Christian worship centres shows unrestrained increase. Churches are springing up daily with the attending multiplicity of branches in almost every community nationwide. In these various religious speech communities, language is employed to meet the interactional needs of members with one another and with their God.

Statement of the Problem

Language, as a concept, is a vital tool of communication in Christian faith-based discourses. It is a dynamic phenomenon that is prone to change as it is capable of adapting to the socio-cultural milieu within which it is used. This, it does, by adopting nomenclatures for the experiences of its users and for emerging new concepts in their world, as the need arises.

As part of this process of language adaptation, certain expressions have found their way into discourses among Christians. Paradoxically, these expressions, some of which project meanings other than those intended by their users, are gaining wider acceptability; they are seeping into discourses in Christian assemblies where their usage had not been experienced or encouraged before. Abioje records that 'In 1999, Fidelis K. Obiora listed 1,018 names of Pentecostal Churches, with no assurance that he was exhaustive'.[2] The proliferation of churches and church activities has paved way for the increasing popularity of this usage, and the effect of all these on the Christian faith is a great challenge. Users of these expressions do not concern themselves with or bother about the other possible meanings that the expressions used in this study may convey. These possible meanings and implications other than those intended by the users are the concerns in this paper. This paper, therefore, investigates the use of certain expressions in Christian faith-based discourse, their other possible semantic implications which Christian faithfuls may not be aware of, as they use the expressions, and the possible overall impact of their usage on the Christian faith.

Objectives of the Study

This paper seeks to highlight the dynamism of language usage by contemporary Nigerian Christians and its attendant unintended meanings by exploring the semantic

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[2] P. Abioje. 'Theological Discourse on the Pentecostal Emphasis on Miracles in Nigeria'. *Nigerian Journal of the Humanities*. University of Benin: Faculty of Arts'. 1. 2004. 1.

implications of selected expressions from discourses of church activities and other contexts. The paper does not delve into hermeneutics but does a purely lexico-semantic analysis of the speech samples collected. This, it does by exploring lexical relations such as collocation, antonymy and synonymy. Language is not complete in itself. Its usage involves the employment of specific vocabulary and established grammatical rules. Hence, to attain its objective, the paper examines how vocabulary and grammatical rules are strung together in the sampled expressions to create linguistic strings that could convey meanings other than those intended. In other words, possible inferences and implications that can be drawn from the sampled expressions form the focus of this paper. Here, semantics is a key player.

Methodology

The speech samples used in this study are culled from discourses during vigils, seasonal camping, prayer meetings, crusades, deliverance sessions, preaching, and testimonies. They are speeches produced by a set of people who occupy various leadership positions in their Christian assemblies. To obtain data for the research, some of the speech samples were transcribed from existing audio-tapes and interactions with church leaders. Others were recorded through note-taking during church activities. This was dependent upon the circumstance of data collection. The selected speech samples, all of which occurred in their natural setting, contained certain expressions that are capable of conveying unintended meanings in the discourse of Christians. The

analysis of meaning and semantic implications, as presented in this paper, is done by exploring lexical relations such as collocation, antonymy and synonymy. In this regard, the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (11ᵗʰ ed., 2008) is a good reference point. Also, *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (10ᵗʰ ed., 1999) becomes relevant, particularly because of its special reference to antonyms, synonyms and its rich entry of words in the thesaurus.

Semantics

Semantics is the branch of linguistics which examines how meaning is conveyed through the use of linguistic elements. There is a link between linguistic forms and the meanings reflected in them. Obviously, language conveys meaning through words, and indeed, communication is incomplete in the absence of meaning. In learning a language, knowledge about the sound pattern and the syntax of such a language only is not enough. The learner ought to be able to adequately associate meanings to these structures. Lexical relations such as collocation, antonymy and synonymy are very useful means of analysing meaning. This kind of approach, according to Reimer, is aimed at 'characterizing the meaning of words in a way that adequately reflects their use by speakers and the relations in which they participate with other lexical items'.[3] This is an approach to the study of meaning corroborated by Lyon's,[4] and referred to by Lehrer and Lehrer as 'semantic network'.

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[3] N. Reimer. *The Semantics of Polysemy: Reading Meaning in English and Walpiri*. New York: Mouton de Gruyter. 1972. 107.

[4] J. Lyons. *Semantics*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1977.

According to them, 'one of Lyons' many contributions to semantics is that words and their senses do not exist as isolated elements - they are embedded in a set of rich lexical relationships of various sorts, and it is this set that constitutes the sense'.[5]

Collocation, antonymy and synonymy are structures of the language system which aid semantic interpretation by explaining the meaning of a word in terms of the relationship that such a word has with other words. They are sense relations which indicate intralinguistic relationships. Collocation has to do with the juxtaposition of words often found to exist together just as *grey* will naturally occur with *hair*. While antonymy is the semantic relation between words which are opposite in meaning, synonymy shows the semantic relation between words whose meanings are the same or almost the same.

Language and Religion

Language reveals information about a religion to the world. The way a language is used among those who practise same faith also goes a long way in telling the lifestyle and beliefs of such a people. This can be seen, for instance, by the fact that some religious groups or adherents are identified by certain slogan, common saying or popular linguistic codes found to be the habitual linguistic behaviour manifested in their day-to-day discourse. No matter what, language usage, particularly by believers in the Christian faith, is

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[5] A. Lehrer, and K. Lehrer. 'Fields, Networks and Vectors'. F.R. Palmer (ed.) *Grammar and Meaning:* Essays in Honour of Sir John Lyons. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1995. 33.

expected to command a level of respect for both the religion and its adherents. We may allude to the submission of Muhammed *et al.* that:

> Language of religion is a register that represents the variation of language, used in the setup of religion, from the everyday language and other setups. Language of religion is totally different from the everyday language. It is the language in which certain aspects of everyday language are altered or sometimes suspended. Language of religion is considered prior to everyday language. It is considered prior maybe because of its relation to Divine Beings, Divine Beings or Super Beings are involved in the production of words in religious language.[6]

The assertion above implies that the language of religion is prestigious. By 'language of religion, he means the words spoken through the mouth of God, revealed to holy men and recorded unedited. Although this is not the subject of focus in this paper, we may borrow from the fact that language usage in Christian faith-based discourse must attract honour and promote the integrity of the Christian faith.

Data Presentation and Analysis

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[6]H. N. Muhammad, A. Nazish, A. N. Navid, U. Muhammad, A. S. Syed, and S. Ghulam 2014. 'Language of Religion'. *International Journal of Innovation and Scientific Research.* 5:1, 40.

The data collected for this study are presented in tables and are analysed semantically.

SAMPLE 1   Pray as if you don't mean it.

SAMPLE 2   Let your 'amen' be born again.

SAMPLE 3   Pray as if your fingers are being trapped by the door of a car that is violently shut.

SAMPLE 4   Pray like a mad prophet.

SAMPLE 5   Pray like one who has been bitten by a dog.

SAMPLE 6   Pray like a dog that has just escaped from a lion.

SAMPLE 7   Shout 'blood of Jesus' like someone who has hot yam in his mouth.

SAMPLE 8   Let your 'amen' be seven-fold for God to answer your prayer.

SAMPLE 9   Give me a better 'amen'.

SAMPLE 10   I don't want a miserable 'amen'.

SAMPLE 11   Let someone/somebody shout 'halleluya'.

SAMPLE 12   My God is a God of blindness.

SAMPLE 13   Pray that your blood will be so bitter that Satan will not be able to suck it.

SAMPLE 14   Do not let my life be like Kwara State.

SAMPLE 15   Lord, make me like Oshodi in Lagos.

Expressions of Prayer Indicating Lack of Seriousness

Sample	Statement	Context
1	Pray as if you don't mean it.	Church service
2	Let your 'amen' be born again.	Church service

SAMPLE 1: Pray as if you don't mean it.

The word 'mean' in this context means to attach a degree of importance to a thing. Its synonyms, as used here, are 'count', 'matter'. Therefore, in terms of its usage in this sample statement, the word 'mean' could have unintended meanings with the following implications:

i.   People can go to church to engage in prayer without actually being serious about it.
ii. Prayer can be likened to a child's play.
iii. Prayer houses (e.g. the church) can be places of unserious, mechanical, routine prayer exercises.

The questions are:

i.   Why pray at all if you do not see it as important?
ii. Is God so unserious as to listen to prayers that people do not mean?

It is possible that the user of this expression expects people to pray in faith such that they can see their problems already fading into insignificance. However, the semantic implications suggest otherwise. 'Pray and see it already done' could be a better replacement. The Bible which contains the tenets of the Christian faith enjoins believers to pray effectually and fervently. Effectual fervent prayers are not prayers that one does not mean.

SAMPLE 2:   Let your 'amen' be born again.
The word 'amen' means 'so shall it be'. It is a word found in the Bible and it is usually said at the end of a prayer. The phrase 'born again' is described as 'relating to, or being a usually Christian person who has made a renewed or

confirmed commitment of faith especially after an intense religious experience'.[7]

The implications are:
  i.   The word 'amen' can be used to connote something negative.
  ii. In the sense of i. above, therefore, it has to be made clean or 'renewed'.

The questions are:
  i.   What are those things that could make the word 'amen' unclean or sinful so that it has to be transformed and made clean or become born again?
  ii. Through what means or processes can the word 'amen' become 'born again'?
  iii. 'Amen' is a word and therefore inanimate (without life). How possible is it to do or get involved in acts that can render it sinful thus requiring it to become clean or 'born again' as requested?

This expression was used to persuade participants in a prayer session to shout the word 'amen' louder than they were doing. Although participants got this message, the usage describes the sacred word as being unclean. The phrase 'born again' does not collocate with 'amen'. 'Say 'amen' loudly or say a louder 'amen'is better. In both the Old and New Testaments, there are instances of the use of the word 'amen' as shown, for example, in the following passages:

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[7] *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.* (10th ed.). Merrian Webster Incorporated. 1999.

> Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the Lord…[8]

> Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.[9]

In these instances, 'amen' is used once.

There are instances of the use of the emphatic 'amen'. In such cases, 'amen' is repeated twice with the first separated from the second by means of a comma or by means of the conjunction *and*. Instances of this usage which is found only in the Old Testament are shown below:

> And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands…[10]

See also 'Amen and Amen' in Psalm 41:13; Psalm 72:19, etc. Such a sacred word as this which is usually used at the end of a prayer, as shown in the Christian Bible ought not to be described directly or indirectly as unclean. Such a word should not be trivialised.

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[8] The Bible. (King James Version) Ibadan: Beulahland Bible Publishers. Psalm 106:48.

[9] The Bible. (King James Version) Ibadan: Beulahland Bible Publishers. Romans 15:33, KJV.

[10] The Bible. (King James Version) Ibadan: Beulahland Bible Publishers. Nehemiah 8:6 KJV.

Expressions of Prayer Requiring Dramatisation

Sample	Statement	Context
3	Pray as if your fingers are being trapped by the door of a car that is violently shut.	Audio-recorded preaching
4	Pray like a mad prophet.	Church service
5	Pray like one who has been bitten by a dog.	Church service
6	Pray like a dog that has just escaped from a lion.	Church service
7	Shout 'blood of Jesus' like someone who has hot yam in his mouth.	Audio-recorded preaching

In each of samples 3-7, there is the use of simile which involves the comparison of one thing with another. This is shown in the use of 'as if', and 'like'. These samples reveal mannerisms in prayer as suggested by the one leading the others. He or she states the prayer point and tells the congregation how they must say the prayer. The phrases 'violently shut', 'mad prophet'; the clauses 'trapped by the door of a car', 'bitten by a dog', escaped from a lion' 'hot yam in the mouth' all depict unpleasant experiences of pain, agony, anger or irrational behaviour.

The implications are:
i. The person praying is angry (sample 4) or is in deep sorrow, agony or pain or has serious problems needing God's urgent intervention (samples 3, 5, 6, and 7).

ii. The person saying the prayer must surely scream, make some very unpleasant loud noise in form of groaning, e.g. bark like a dog (since he has been bitten by one), to attract God's attention (sample 5).

iii. The person praying must imagine himself in the conditions described and must imitate someone in that state.

These samples suggest conditions of torture or unpleasant experiences.

The questions are:

i. Can those who want to cry, scream, bark, or shout not be allowed to do so of their own volition since prayer is expected to be controlled by the Spirit of God? Must someone dictate the prayer mood this way to those who are expected to be led by God's Holy Spirit?

ii. What if in the congregation, there are no people with the degree of problems or challenges that commensurate with such agony or sorrow described in the prayer points?

iii. Going by ii above, won't people have to obey the one who dictates the mood of the prayer by doing exactly what he says, e.g. screaming, barking, shouting etc. in agony or anger?

iv. If someone, not the Holy Spirit, should dictate the mood, and if the congregation must do exactly as they are have been instructed to do, will the act of praying not become a superficial, noisy, dramatic show of mimicry?

v. How dramatic can each participant in this kind of prayer activity be? No doubt, some must be better actors than some others.

In the words of Ian *et al.*

> Prayer is a religious practice that Christians share with many other people. The human cry to the divine for help amid need and the human laud of the divine because of help received are found everywhere, formally organized in religions, intimately experienced by human beings who have little religious formation, enacted in great public gatherings and probably even inscribed in prehistoric petroglyphs of figures with hands upraised. Christians rightly assume that they engage in a widespread human undertaking when they pray.[11]

Although prayers by Christians may involve enactments of some sort in some public gatherings, such enactments are expected to be reasonable and must glorify the God to whom the prayers are directed. Dickson submits that:

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[11] A. M. Ian, A.S. David, K. Karen, & R. T. Iain (eds). 2011. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*. USA: Cambridge University Press. 2011. 403.

> Those who have become Christians need instruction on how to properly pray, for most have come out of religious backgrounds where the teaching and practice of prayer was not according to the will of God. Men have often been taught to ask for the wrong thing in the wrong way. These and many others must be corrected in the prayer life of new Christians[12].

The following data show speech samples that emphasise intensity in prayer in terms of frequency or loudness of expression. These are discussed below.

Expressions of Prayer Requiring Frequency of Occurrence and Loudness of Voice

Sample	Statement	Context
8	Let your 'amen' be seven-fold for God to answer your prayer.	Church service
9	Give me a better 'amen'.	Church service
10	I don't want a miserable 'amen'.	Church service

SAMPLE 8: Let your 'amen' be seven-fold for God to answer your prayer. The expression 'seven-fold' means to be laid over another seven times.

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[12] R.E. Dickson. *Dickson Biblical Research Library*. Hutchinson, Kansas: Africa International Missions. 2014. 1004.

The implications of these are:

i.   One must say 'amen' seven times before God can grant one's request.

ii. Saying 'amen' once is not strong enough to get one's prayers answered.

The questions are:

i.   What is it that makes the 'amen' said once less effective than the one said seven times?

ii.   Does God not answer prayers said with a single closing 'amen?

As earlier discussed, there are instances of the use of 'amen and amen' or 'amen, amen' in the Old Testament only while in the New Testament, there are records showing the use of 'amen' once at the end of a prayer. There are no records of 'multiple-fold amens'.

SAMPLE 9:   Give me a better 'amen'.
The word 'better' means 'more desirous or effective'. 'A better amen' is an 'amen' that has improved in the way it is being said.

The implications are:

i.   The preceding 'amen' was not good and effective enough.

ii. There are some instances of 'amen' that are not good or effective.

The questions are:

i.   Can there be a bad, ineffective 'amen'?

ii.   Since 'amen' means 'so shall it be', does the number of times it is said diminish this meaning?

The speaker, no doubt, wanted the people to shout the word 'amen' louder than they did previously. 'Say amen loudly' would also have been okay.

SAMPLE 10: I don't want a miserable 'amen'.
Again, the word 'miserable' is used to qualify 'amen'. The word 'miserable' is defined as 'wretchedly unhappy or uncomfortable', 'causing unhappiness or discomfort', 'habitually morose', 'pitiably small or inadequate'.[13] All these are derogatory qualifiers for the sacred word – 'amen'!

The implications are:
  i.   'Amen' can denote a state of unhappiness on the part of the one saying it.
  ii.   This word, which is a biblical term, can denote something unpleasant or negative.

The questions are:
  i.   The word 'miserable', as used in this sense, shows a state of unhappiness. Does this state of unhappiness reflect upon the person saying 'amen' or upon the word 'amen' itself?
  ii.   How can the word 'amen' be miserable? This is inconceivable.
  iii.   How suitable is the word 'miserable' as a qualifier in the phrase – 'miserable amen'?

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[13] *Concise Oxford English Dictionary.* (11th ed.) Revised 2008.

What the speaker intended to say was 'say amen lively' or 'say amen by faith'. His focus ought to have been on the person praying and not on the words being said.

Expressions of Prayer Reflecting Absurdity

Sample	Statement	Context
11	Let someone/somebody shout 'halleluya'.	Audio-recorded preaching
12	My God is a God of blindness.	Interview
13	Pray that your blood will be so bitter that Satan will not be able to suck it.	Church service

SAMPLE 11: Let someone/somebody shout 'hallelujah'.
The word 'hallelujah' means 'God be praised' while 'someone' or 'somebody' means 'an unknown or unspecified person'.

The implications are:
  i.   The call to someone or somebody to shout hallelujah may be obeyed by just one person or a few people in the congregation.
  ii.   The one requesting that 'someone' or 'somebody' should shout hallelujah will be satisfied even if it is only one person who responds to the call.

The questions are:
  i.   Should the one who says 'let someone or somebody shout hallelujah' expect more people to shout when all he wants is 'someone' or 'somebody'?

ii. Should people in the congregation be described as cold or considered to lack revival when they do not all respond to the call to someone or somebody to shout hallelujah?

iii. When one person or a few people in the congregation respond(s) to the call to someone or somebody to shout hallelujah, must there be a repeat of the request demanding another round of hallelujah to be said because of dissatisfaction with the hallelujah shouted previously?

If the speaker wants the entire congregation to shout hallelujah, 'let everyone/everybody shout hallelujah' could be a good substitute.

SAMPLE 12: My God is a God of blindness.
This person praying this way wants God to blindfold his enemies. However, the statement may have other implications semantically.

The implications are:
i. God has everything to do with blindness.
ii. He can make people, demons etc. blind.
iii. He himself could also be blind.
iv. He is the God of the blind.
v. He can heal those who are blind.

The question is:
i. If God is the God of blindness, how would his being blind correlate with the fact that He is a perfect God?

Since the expression 'my God is a God of blindness' is capable of multiple interpretations, and could also be misleading, 'my God has the power to make blind' could be better.

SAMPLE 13: Pray that your blood will be so bitter that Satan will not be able to suck it.
The prayer is said to prevent attack from Satan who is also regarded as a blood-sucking viper.

The implications are:
  i.   The person praying this way believes that Satan is interested in sucking his or her blood.
  ii.   Satan may have to taste the person's blood first before he can tell if it is bitter or not.
  iii. The person praying this way is still vulnerable to attack from Satan, since he (Satan) must first taste his or her blood to know how bitter or otherwise it is.

The question is:
  i.   If Satan has to taste a person's blood first before he can tell if it is bitter or not, how reasonable is this prayer which is meant to prevent him (Satan) from tasting it at all?

The person praying this way could have concentrated on his or her whole being rather than on a part. The synedochic use of 'blood' here suggests that attack involving the sucking of blood may not be completely preventable. It could have been more appropriate if the

prayer reads 'let me be untouchable for Satan such that my blood becomes inaccessible to him'.

Expressions of Prayer Relating to Geographical Locations

Sample	Statement	Context
14	Do not let my life be like Kwara State.	Interview
15	Lord, make me like Oshodi in Lagos.	Interview

SAMPLE 14: Do not let my life be like Kwara State.
There was the need for the person leading others to pray this way to make the participants understand the historical background of the prayer. Each time this kind of prayer is being said, stories have to be told. Certain new states have been created, and some parts of these states were carved out from Kwara State. The belief is that as the new states were being created, Kwara State was diminishing in size. The idea is that one should pray in order not to keep decreasing like Kwara State.

The implications are:
i.   Kwara State is not a good state one can identify with.
ii. There is nothing good about Kwara State.
iii. If Kwara State is not to be identified with, it is possible that its inhabitants are not enjoying life.
iv. Anyone who wants to live in Kwara State may have to be ready to identify with the negative ideas that the State represents.

v. One would live a miserable life if one has his or her life patterned after that of Kwara State.

The questions are:

i. How patriotic are those who pray this kind of prayer?
ii. Are the people who pray this way devoted to their country?
iii. Would this kind of prayer promote unity among Nigerians - Kwara State and non Kwara State indigenes?
iv. How happy and contented would Kwara-born people be if they were to be in the gathering where this kind of prayer is said?

While praying, any Christian who is vigorously loyal to his or her country ought to look for other means of comparison or avoid the use of derogatory illustrations which project a sense of derision or contemptuous ridicule of other people.

SAMPLE 15: '**Lord, make me like Oshodi in Lagos'.**
Again, this kind of prayer required the one leading the other people in the prayer session to explain the social setting of Oshodi, a town in Lagos State. It is usually a busy place characterised by the continuous goings and comings of people of all ages, sizes, status etc. Also, cases of stealing perpetrated by pickpockets are recorded daily in this area of Lagos State. The idea in this kind of prayer is that one's life would always attract people like Oshodi does. People must always come to one.
The implications are:

i. Oshodi is a good place to identify with, in all ramifications. Therefore, everything about Oshodi is good.
ii. One's life would be better off if it were like Oshodi.

The questions are:
i. Going by the busy nature of Oshodi, how would one live a peaceful life if one is as busy as Oshodi?
ii. Is it everything that is being done in Oshodi or that Oshodi stands for that is actually acceptable?
iii. Are evil acts not being perpetrated in Oshodi by those who, taking advantage of its busy nature, go there to kidnap people or rob them of their belongings?
iv. Since there are also unscrupulous people in Oshodi, is it not possible that if one keeps praying to be like Oshodi, one may get visited by, or attracted to, or connected with the wrong people – robbers, bag snatchers, pick-pockets, kidnappers, drunkards, etc?

Although this prayer speaks well of Oshodi, it doesnot address the vices that possibly take place there. It is therefore dangerous to pray that one's life should be exactly like this place. Such a prayer could invite all kinds of evils not expected.

All the samples except a few indicate the use of commands. These are marked by words such as 'pray', 'let', 'shout', and 'give'. This usage requires the congregation to do something or behave in a particular manner. In some instances, they come in form of persuasion so that they can

pray more earnestly as seen in samples 2,9,10, and 11 –'let your amen be born-again', 'give me a better 'amen' etc. There is also the use of lexical items, phrases or clauses suggesting violence. These samples suggest violent acts which are imagined to be perpetrated by or upon the person praying. The lexical items in the samples that collocate with violence and pain include 'fingers trapped', 'mad prophet', 'bitten by a dog', and 'hot yam in the mouth'. The use of simile, indicated by the use of 'like' also features in the selected samples, e.g. 'like a mad prophet', 'like one who has been bitten by a dog', 'like a dog that has just escaped from a lion'. Adjectives showing quantity –'seven-fold', and those showing quality – 'better' and 'miserable' are seen in the samples. All of these are used to show how the discourse should go. This may include the voice level indicating intensity or loudness as seen in all the samples 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, posture indicating continuous locomotion as seen in samples 5, 6 and 7, and frequency as seen in sample 8.

Conclusion

The Christian religion preaches salvation in Christ. It emphasises godliness and faith in the All-Sufficient God through His Son, Jesus Christ. It promises succour now and in eternity for its adherents. However, this trend of language usage that projects unpleasant and unintended meanings, as shown in the analysis, may inhibit the successful practice of the Christian faith by adherents, and hinder intending or prospective members. Those expressions (though unintended) sometimes tend to underrate God, magnify Satan - the archenemy of the

Christians, mock the Christian faith, and exaggerate life's problems.

Worshippers may, over time, get accustomed to the meanings of the expressions analysed in this study, as intended by the users, due to constancy of usage and explanations offered about each of them during prayer sessions. However, these linguistic forms are not healthy for discourse in the Christian faith. Although these lexical choices have been adapted in the religious context to make members more committed to the act of praying, their semantic imports (considered from the perspective of observers who may not have been schooled to understand such inventory of words in the religious context) seem to run contrary to the adapted meanings given to them. In their pure semantic senses, the expressions connote aggression, rashness, anger, violence, malicious inclinations, and unpatriotic dispositions.

Words are powerful and as such, must be employed in Christian faith-based discourse with utmost care. Attention must be paid to clarity or ease of comprehension, logicality, and modesty. It is important to choose appropriate words for appropriate experiences in appropriate contexts. Olayemi emphasises the indispensability of language in a successful gospel music ministry. She recommends an appropriate balancing of the message and the medium of the music of the gospel artiste. In her words, 'language used by gospel artistes should be properly managed such that the essence of gospel music is

not completely eroded'.[14] In the same vein, Christians ought to be careful about their expressions and acts in prayer and the kind of public image such expressions and acts may make of them. The sporadic spread of the kind of linguistic trend discussed in this paper, from denomination to denomination poses a great challenge to the spiritual growth of the church now and in future. The role of language in church progress cannot be underestimated. The church must be sensitised!

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[14] O.T. Olayemi. 2010. 'A Sociolinguistic Perspective of English as a Language of Popular Gospel Music in Nigeria'. *Orisun: Journal of Religion and Human Values*. 9. 140.