

A Sociolinguistic Survey of Communicative Competence and the Language of Sermon in some Selected Roman Catholic Churches in Ebonyi State

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ABSTRACT

Through the words inherent in a language, it may not be out of place to state without equivocation that language controls our thought, feelings, revive the heart and dampens feelings through the powers in those words and through the subtle application of persuasive techniques of the use of these words which enable others think, act, and change their world view towards the direction of the speaker. The overall application of that subtle power is in language use. Thus, the aim of our study is therefore focused on the use of language in some selected Roman Catholic Churches sermons, and then assess the level of competences of the preachers in a bid to pass their message across to their congregation. Two instrument of data collection used in this study were the questionnaire and the participant observation. The mean and standard deviation were used in the analysis of the questionnaire with the criteria mean set at 2.50. From the results of the research, Roman Catholic Preachers exhibit quality competence in their preaching and use of language, they also make use of code switching and mixing, but no matter the language used much competence is usually exhibited; they also consider the worldview of the congregation and thus the expected outcome of their sermon effort realized. The overall competence exhibited by the Roman Catholic Preachers could be attributed to the number of years required to become a catholic priest and their involvement in daily devotional masses and some eucharistic celebration.

Keywords: Sociolinguistic, Communicative Competence, Language, Sermon, Roman Catholic Churches, Ebonyi State.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world virtually everything done by man is experiencing some forms of transformation. This is noticeable in the economic, social, political and religious aspects of human life. This has resulted in significant changes in all these aspects of human life including language, his major means of communication. Language is so vital to human existences; indispensable in religious sermons, in business relationships, education and in all situations of life. This could be why [1] says that without language, the world would be a flux of confused states because it will be impossible to, in the

process of thinking, concretize our thought into words. Language is therefore, the barrier that fries our thought process into ideas. In otherwords, language has no meaning in itself but is deployed as a trigger, which sets off and creates possible worlds or alternative meaning realities within a discourse situation.

Language is used to convey religious thought, economic thought, political thought, societal thought, military and strategic thoughts from individual to individuals; as well as from generation to generation. Thus, language is the most

important information and communication tools for all humans as it is the carrier of the culture and worldview of the people. [2] is of the view that as a people's experience grows, so does their language. This growth of language extends to all facets of human life, thereby exposing its powers in line with [3] opinion that through the power of words (language) have the power to define and compel. As a result, it is the vehicle of order, the principle of creativity and destruction.

Language from the opinion of Anyanwu has the power to achieve all things, it can be used to make and unmake including the natural and super-naturals.

Language is a tool in any religious discourse, it is also a tool for religious sermon, the subject for the present study. As a tool for sermon, it is a vehicle for the conveyance and propagation of the gospel in the Christian faith. It will be an impossible task to achieve a sermon's effort without the use of language, just as no other thing can be achieved with it (language). Church sermons, therefore, not only requires the appropriate use of religious language but the language so used should educate the congregation as well as mirror their worldview.

Communicative competence is paramount in all areas of human existence including sermon. The word of God, effectively communicated in any particular community or culture, helps the community to understand who they are and who others are, it also help them to sort out their problems [4]. This is to say that using language is not enough but using the appropriate language which is in tendon with the discourse situation. Sermon should be embellished with appropriate methodology taking into account the existential realities of the worshipers. When the sermon of the preacher reflects the realities of the worshiper's lives, they can then comprehend and put to use what the preachers have taught despite the background of such preachers. Thus, the duty of the sociolinguistics is therefore, to take a cursory look at the stylistic and the social aspects of language use to

enable the users it better for efficient and effective communication.

The acquisition of knowledge or competency by anyone engaged in any communicative event would make utterances at the deep structure level to end up being identified with utterances at the surface structure level. This is to say that knowledge and intelligence is a possession of the human race as speakers and hearer. This study is intended to look at the competence of the Catholic preachers to ascertain what is obtainable. The study will therefore elicit if language is an effective tool for sermon delivery, the competence of the preacher as well as effects of the preaching efforts in the lives of the congregation.

Statement of the problem

There seems to be a wide spread of churches since the beginning of the 20th century and more are still springing up. Despite the spread of churches in all nook and corners of Nigeria, sins and atrocities still remain the order of the day. It is therefore in place to say that while churches grow in arithmetic progression, sins grow in geometric progression. Whereas some of the churches are regarded as 'living' churches other possibly by rule of opposition could be tagged "dead" churches, the Pentecostal churches and others see themselves as believers whereas others (especially the Roman Catholic Church members) are seen as unbelievers. It is therefore, in line with this that the present study wants to subject the Catholic church preaching to some sociolinguistic survey, to find out if it rightfully belong to where it is being classified by others and why or otherwise. According to [5] "so many of the people in the bickering failures of Christianity speak louder than other words" Again, [6], posits that, the institutional church has, at times, failed at preaching, and therefore failed to regenerate man. This study believes that the failure of the church could be attributed to communicative incompetence and the lack of understanding of the culture and world view of the people by the preachers. According to [7], the evangelism would not be complete if it

does not take into account the unceasing interplay of the gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social. This is why evangelism involves an explicit message adapted to the different situation constantly being realized, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life whose personal growth and development is hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopts the framework of the S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G model

S. The first letter (S) designates situation, which includes both the scene and the setting. This is where the activities are taking place and the overall scene in which they are a part. This component explores two aspects of context: the physical setting in which it takes place, and the scene, i.e., the participants' sense of what is going on when this practice is active. Analyzing the setting and scenic qualities of the practice helps ground the analyses in the specific contexts of social life. **P.** The second refers to the Participants involved. This area includes the people present and the roles they play, or the relationship they have with other participants. A significant shift is marked here in conceptualizing communication as an event in which people participate, and thus the key concept is 'participant' (in the event). This moves away from typical encoding and decoding models, or others which focus initially on senders and receivers of messages. What if a practice such as "reading the paper" is considered an event? Who are the participants in that practice?

E. This refers to the ends or goals of communication. This asks about two ends: the goals participants may have in doing the practice, and the outcomes actually achieved. In the event of joke-telling, many of us are familiar with an off-colour joke, the goal of which was to entertain, with the outcome offending. Communication practice, generally, may target some goals, yet attain other outcomes (intended and not).

Objective of the study

To effectively look into the sociolinguistic study of communicative competence and the language of sermon in Roman Catholic churches in Nigeria, the following objective will guide the study.

- a) The preacher's exhibition of communicative competence
- b) The language of preaching and worldview of the people
- c) Linguistic factors that retard or enhance Catholic sermon

A. Acts, or speech acts include both form and content. That is, any action can be considered a communicative action if it conveys meaning to the participants. What act sequence is involved in and for this practice? And further, what are the content of the practice and its form? This component invites a careful look at the sequential organization of the practice, its message content, and form.

K. One can also choose to focus upon the Key or tone of speech. How the speech sounds or was delivered. How is the practice being keyed? What is the emotional pitch, feelings, or spirit of the communication practice? Regarding funerals, most are keyed as reverent and serious. Other events, such as some talk shows, can be keyed as more light-hearted. The ways practices are keyed, and the way the key can shift from moment to moment, are questions raised and analyzed with this component.

I. Instrumentally or the channel through which communication flows can be examined. What is the instrument or channel being used in this communication practice? The oral mode may be necessary, or it could be prohibited in favour of a specific gesture or bodily movement. Is a technological channel, through song or chanting? The range of instruments being used to design a practice, and the ways each is interpreted, are entered into the analysis here.

N. The Norms of communication or the rules guiding talk its interpretation can reveal meaning. What norms are active when communication is practiced in this way and in this community? This component distinguishes the two senses of norms

that may be relevant to a communication practice: what is done normally as a matter of habit (e.g. few votes), and what is the appropriate thing to do (e.g. one should vote in every election). Standards of normalcy can be productively distinguished from the morally infused, normative dimensions of communication practices. There is a second distinction that guides this component: norms for interaction can be distinguished from norms of interpretation. The norm for interaction can be formulated as a rule for how one should properly interact when conducting the practice of concern: e.g. one should respect one's elders. The norm for interpretation can be formulated as a rule for what a practice means: e.g. sitting in silence with an elder counts as respecting that elder. Both norms are analyzed through this component.

G. Finally, one can look at cultural or traditional speech Genres, such as proverbs, apologies, prayer, small talk, problem talk, etc. Is there a genre of communication of which this practiced is an instance? This might involve identifying the practice as a type of a formal genre such as verbal dueling, or a riddle, or a narrative. As a result, the

RELATED LITERATURES

Here we shall look at what is available in the study of communicative competence, especially as it relates to sermon from a socio-linguistics perspective. To effectively handle this, we shall treat the section according to conceptual issues.

Language is a vocal, written or gestural symbols through which humans communicate ideas, feelings, emotions, desires etc. language is very important to man. It is a means through which communication is propagated. Thus, [10] believe that language is a dynamic entity which thrives among humans and as such a medium through which individuals communicate. They are of the opinion that language is the prime factor for defining a people since individuals who live in a society interact through language.

Communication is a very unique and important aspect of human life. The interpersonal existing among human

properties of those formal genres become relevant to its analysis. Alternatively, the practice might be understood as part and parcel of a folk genre, and be analysed accordingly.

By using these tools (S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G) to analyze one unit, such as particular speech community, a researcher can come to learn more about how people communicate and how that communication is often patterned. A researcher does not need to use all the units and tools every time he or she sets out to look at a speech community. It depends upon the types of questions that the researcher is interested in asking as to what unit and tools he or she will choose. The investigate methodology summarized here involves identifying a unit of communication practice for purpose of analysis, generating data about that practice through procedures of participant observation and interviewing, then analyzing instances of the practice through the components. For any one practice, some components may prove more fruitful for analysis than others, and thus the use of the theoretical framework itself becomes an object of reflection during the ethnographic study [9].

beings might have been impossible without communication [11]. [12], posits that communication is a process whereby messages is enclosed in a package and is channeled and conveyed through a sender to a receiver by some medium. The receiver then decodes the message and gives the sender a feedback. This is to say that all forms of communication require a sender (where the message originates), a message and an intended recipient. Though, the receiver need not be present or aware of the sender's intent to communicate at the time of communication for the act of communication to occur. To [13], there are nine basis elements involved in the process of communication which influence communication. They include: "the sender, the message, the decoding, the process, the feedback, the social setting, the encoding process, the channel, the receiver, and the noise".

According to [14] there are three styles of communication.

- a) Self centred communication - This style centres on the communicator. It is often marked with fear and uneasiness if focuses on the communicator with exaggerated self awareness.
- b) Message centred communication - as is the obvious from the combination of words here, the style is marked with less stress on the self but on the message.
- c) Other centred communication: As is the style marked with respect for the receiver, language, frame of reference life situation, social class, value and self.

The third style here can be seen as the best in communication style for sermon delivery, which is the crux of this study, though the distinction between them may not be sharp.

Languages are as complex as societies. Languages vary in many ways. So are studies in language. Early linguists involved in the study of these variations adopted a view of language, describing linguistics competence which they assumed all speakers possess. But if the linguistics competence of users is just to handle the variation, then a wide range of ability is needed. So, to handle this expected wide range of abilities, the theory of communicative competence was developed. It does not mean that the theory does not have its deficiencies. It may not be perfect because of the social aspects of man that are equally as complex as language itself.

The essence of language studies is to identify and promote effective means of effective communication which is preferably called communicative competence here. Effective communication is effective understanding: effective communal understanding is effective society, which is in line with the present call on sociolinguistics. [15] states that competence involves knowing the rules of speaking in a speech community. She therefore describes it as understanding

the influence of the social factors on speech behavior.

For [11], communication competence is manifested as nothing less than the power of ethics; that is, the power to move the heart of people. Ethics is itself the power of persuasion: right is might.

But Kishik [10] adds that: If you follow certain rules, then you play in the community of those who also play the same game, who share the same form of life, who inhabit the same world that you inhabit. If you do not play according to certain rules, then you simply do not communicate with those who do follow rules; you lack this common ground with them and you remain, to this particular extent, in a state of infancy.

These rules (grammar of the language which includes the metaphoric expressions) regularize the sociality of society, which is to say that the rules help society to share meanings.

The goal of communication is therefore sharing meaning, and most research on communication is to generate new knowledge on how best to maximize the achievement of this goal. [3] also grouped the goals into three - "Self presentation goals", "Relational goals", and "Instrumental goals". He warns that needs and goals are not the same in communication and that communicative competence is dependent on the context in which the interaction takes place. As such, communication which is successful with one group in one situation may not be perceived as competent with a different group in another situation" [6]

[2] further posits six criteria for assessing communicative competence as follows:

1. Adaptability (Flexibility): Here he talk about the "ability to change behavior and goals to meet the need of interaction".
2. Conversational involvement: He see this involvement as behavioural and cognitive being responsive to knowledge of what and how to say what.
3. Conversational management: Here he talks of the ability to regulate interaction

4. Empathy; as an emotional issue, he talks about understanding and sharing emotional reactions to the communication situation.

5. Effectiveness: This involves upholding all expectations of given speech event. This is fundamental for the determination of communicative competence.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study area was Ebonyi State particularly Afikpo North and Abakaliki metropolis. It covered 10 Roman Catholic churches located therein, 6 in Afikpo North LGA and 4 in Abakaliki, 250 questionnaire were distributed using stratified random sampling technique. The administration using stratified random sampling technique. The

administration of the questionnaire was done by the researchers. The percentage response was 100 percent as the researchers were on ground to collect the filled questionnaires immediately. The data were analysed using Linkert four - point scale scored as strongly agreed (4 point), agreed (3 points), strongly disagreed (2 points) and disagreed (1 point).

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Table 1: Level of communicative competence exhibited by Catholic priests

S/No	I t e m s	R a t i n g s				Total	Mean score	Decision
		4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD			
1.	The preachers display more competence when they preach in the language of the congregatiomn	8 0	1 1 2	4 3	1 5	7 5 7	3 . 0	Positive
2.	They preachers display more competence when they preach in the English language	1 4 9	1 0 7	5	2	8 9 9	3 . 6	Positive
3.	The preachers display more competence when they preach in pidgin	2 4	3 8	6 7	1 2 1	3 6 5	1 . 5	Negative
4.	The preachers prefer to mix languages while preaching	9 1	8 5	5 3	2 1	7 4 6	3 . 0	Positive
5.	The preachers display competence when they use religious language	1 5 1	8 6	9	4	8 8 4	3 . 5	Positive
6.	The preachers display competence no matter the language they use	1 1 0	1 2 2	1 5	3	8 3 9	3 . 4	Positive
7.	The preaching are filled with idioms, proverbs, analogies due to communicative competence	1 3 5	8 9	1 8	8	8 5 1	3 . 4	Positive
8.	The preaching's are filled with interjections which show lack of communicative competence	4 0	2 7	8 3	1 0 0	5 0 7	2 . 0	Negative
9.	The preachings show training for the job	1 7 0	7 1	6	3	9 0 8	3 . 6	Positive
10.	The lack of competence stern from lack of preparations	1 2 0	9 8	3 1	1	8 3 7	3 . 3	Positive

The above table (table 1) indicates that majority of the respondents accepted most if not all the propositions got positive scores of 3.0 and 3.6 respectively indicating that the priest show competence in the language of the parishioners as well as in the English language during their sermon delivery, an indication that can be attributed to the fact that the Igbo and English language are the dominant language of the

environment and the preachers are competent in them as a result of their long time training and commitment. However, item three is negative indicating that Catholic preachers in the area under study do not use pidgin English in their sermon delivery. Item four, five, six and seven are all positive propositions which shows their acceptance by the respondents. This is an indication that the preachers in a bid to deliver their sermon

effectively, they code-switch and mix their languages, as well as deploy the use of idioms, proverbs, parables and analogies so as to carry their members along. The respondent however, did not accept their preachers use interjections which is an evidence of the lack of communicative competence. On whether the preaching's show training for the job

and if the lack of competence stems from lack of preparation, the pool is positive. This could be attributed to the number of years a Catholic priest is trained, as it takes one up to a decade of trainings to become a Catholic priest. Thus, lack of competence could be as a result of lack of preparedness.

Table 2: Language of sermon and worldview of the people

S/No	I t e m s	R a t i n g s				Total	Mean score	Decision			
		4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD						
1.	The preaching in the Catholic church focus only on what was read in the church	8	3	2	1	4 1 9	1 . 7	Negative			
2.	The preachers relate their preaching with what is happening in the society	1 6 7	6	8	9	6	8 9 6	3 . 6	Positive		
3.	The preachers relate what is in the Bible with the culture of the people	180	4	9	1	2	9	9 0 0	3 . 6	Positive	
4.	The cultural values of the people are not taken into consideration in preaching	3 9	4	2	1	1 7	5	2	5 6 8	2 . 3	Negative
5.	The language of preachings conflict with the culture of the environment	2 2	3	1	1	1 9	7	8	4 9 7	2 . 0	Negative
6.	The language of preachers promote the culture of the people	1 2 6	1	0	7	1	5	2	8 5 7	3 . 4	Positive
7.	The language of preachers reforms the cultures of the people	1 1 0	8	6	3	7	1	7	7 8 9	3 . 2	Positive
8.	The language of the preachers is based on the cultural worldview of the audience	1 2 0	1	0	1	5	2	4	8 1 7	3 . 3	Positive

The data in the above table (table 2) shows that items 1, 4, and 5 received a negative propositions of 1.7 and 2.0 respectively, indicating that the respondents rejected the propositions that are contained in the items. Specifically, the data contained in this table indicate that most of the respondents agree with the propositions therein in the table while few respondents as earlier pointed above believe in the contrary.

In summary, it could be said that the preachers make reference to the Bible, though not always, they also relate whatever they say with the happenings in the society, as well as incorporate the peoples' worldview. The preachers also make reference to the people's culture by trying to reform some of the cultural excesses and therefore, can be deduced that the preachers do promote the culture of the people as well as use their language to the best of their knowledge.

Table 3. Language related factors that retard or enhance sermon delivery

S/No	I t e m s	R a t i n g s				Total Score	Mean score	Decision
		4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD			
		4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD			

1.	The use of the language of the immediate environment can enhance sermon delivery	8 0	1 2 5	3 8	7	7 7 8	3 . 1	Positive
2.	The use of language of immediate environment retards sermon delivery	5	2 8	1 0 7	1 1 0	4 2 8	1 . 7	Negative
3.	The use of Nigerian English enhances sermon most	1 2 2	1 0 3	2 0	5	8 4 2	3 . 4	Positive
4.	Exemplary life of the priests greatly enhance sermon delivery	1 5 9	7 7	1 0	4	8 9 1	3 . 6	Positive
5.	Using appropriate language according to the audience enhances sermon delivery	1 2 3	1 1 4	8	5	8 5 5	3 . 4	Positive
6.	Not using the language of the immediate environment retards sermon delivery	8 7	1 2 8	2 1	1 4	7 8 8	3 . 2	Positive
7.	The use of code-mixing and shifting enhances the sermon delivery of the preachers	1 3 8	1 0 2	8	2	8 7 6	3 . 5	Positive
8.	Using examples from peoples language enhances sermon delivery	1 4 1	8 3	1 5	1 1	8 5 4	3 . 4	Positive
9.	Preaching without practice or preparations greatly retard sermon delivery	1 3 6	8 1	2 0	1 3	8 4 0	3 . 4	Positive
10.	The lack of knowledge of the peoples language and background greatly retards sermon delivery	1 2 2	1 2 0	5	3	8 6 1	3 . 4	Positive

The data in table 3 above show that majority of the respondents agree with the propositions contained in the items. In view of this, these, items 1,3,4,5,6,7,8,9 and 10 scorer a mean of 3.1, 3.4, 3.6, 3.4, 3.2, 3.5, 3.4, 3.4 and 3.4 respectively. As these mean scores are above the bench mark mean of 2.50, it shows that the respondents agree with the proposition. On the contrary however, only item 2 received a negative response as it scored a mean of 1.7. This mean is below the bench mark of 2.50, the

CONCLUSION

Taking a look at a sociolinguistic study of communicative competence and the language of sermon in Roman Catholic churches in Nigeria to view the competency level of the preachers has been vigorously undertaking by this study. The major instrument by which sermons are delivered is language. Therefore, the language use of preachers needs to be effectively adequate for the aim of the speech act of sermons to be fully realized. A major noticeable point

proposition therein stands rejected. In effect, of all the propositions which list the linguistics factors that can retard or enhance sermon delivery, only item 2 on the use of language of the environment was rejected with the mean score of 1.7, while all the other propositions that list the linguistics factors that can enhance sermon delivery received acceptance - that is scored above the bench mark of 2.50. the summary of it all is that the majority of the respondents accepted the propositions while only few rejected them

from this work is that communicative competence is not the only factor that can influence the outcome of sermon efforts, the attitude, understanding and behaviours of the preacher and listeners also matters a lot. Though, sermon as tools for the propagation of evangelism are meant to influence the peoples' behavior positively. From the observation of the researchers and the questionnaire one cannot say for certain that this aim has been completely achieved.

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