

Pragmatic Analysis of Praise and Worship Songs Rendered at Selected United Evangelical Churches in Lokoja, Kogi State

Idegue, A. Solomon, Ph.D.

Department of English and Literary Studies

Federal University Lokoja, Kogi State

Solomon.idegu@fulokoja.edu.ng

09013393936

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to apply pragmatic principles to examine the focus of praise and worship and their direction in selected United Evangelical Churches in Lokoja metropolis, Kogi State. The data collected were 10 songs which made up of naturally occurring songs in the United Evangelical church, Lokoja Township Superintendency, Lokoja and the United Evangelical Church, Ganaja 1, Lokoja. The theory of Pragmatic Truth was used as the theoretical framework for the study. Morris's Pragmatic Theory of Truth is a by-product of his pragmatic theory of meaning. According to this theory, truth is well grounded in the practical role played by the concept of truth. The finding shows that the focus of praise and worship is directed towards the pleasure of the church minister and congregation rather than God. This is so because a particular song can portray several meanings that can relate to both concepts.

Keywords: Evangelical Church, Congregation, Metropolis, Praise and Worship, Pragmatics

Introduction

Language, according to Edward Sapir (1921), is purely human and a non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. This means that language is established as form of communication solely exhibited by humans which is in use in everyday interactions, in principle, speakers communicate for the purpose of making the listener to fully understand the meaning behind that communication.

Language has developed over time and several scholars have decided to delve into the study of language which is called linguistics. Linguistics can be generally defined as the scientific study of language and its properties. Peter V. Oviogun and Pal S. Veerdee (2020) define linguistics as a scientific study of language, including its nature, structure, development and relationship to society and human communications. Michael Pleyer, Ryan Lepic and Stefan Hartmann (2022)

explain linguistics as a field concerned with understanding the human capacity for language and how meaning is constructed in communication. The study of linguistics has brought about several aspects of language in various components which include morphology, phonology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics.

In language, different words can be used as a means of expression of a particular aspect of belief. Choristers have different intensions when rendering Christian songs which can range from hymns to praise and worship. Words, phrases and sentences in a particular song tend to convey meaning beyond the general or surface level. This study will be subjecting various Christian religious songs to a pragmatic analysis by using pragmatic theory to understand implicit meanings to utterances in the praise and worship section of the United Evangelical Churches in Lokoja metropolis.

This research work is primarily focusing on the aspect of language study which is pragmatics. Pragmatics is an aspect of linguistics that studies the meaning of an utterance by going beyond the surface and literal meaning to analyse the implied meaning. It considers language as a means of communication and interaction, and how it gives birth to the understanding of one another.

Earlier studies by noteworthy pragmatists have focused on several aspects of language meaning as related to Christian religion. They have analysed the meaning of the names of songs in christen worship. Yet, no finding has properly been able to analyse the meaning of the contents of the contemporary praise and worship in present day Christian churches. Often time, songs sung during a Christian religious gathering are not fully understood by the listeners. They fall under two categories which are praising God and not glorifying God, and are directed at humans to elicit a response. This research work, however, is meant to delve into context and check, pragmatically, on self-glorification or praise of God in Christian praise and worship with respect to United Evangelical Churches in Lokoja metropolis.

Theoretical Framework

The Pragmatic Theory of Truth by Charles Sanders and Pirece (1939) can be viewed as making contributions to the specific-act and justification projects by focusing, especially on the practice people engage in when they solve problems, make assertions, and conduct scientific inquiry. The theory focuses on how the concept of truth is used and what speakers are doing when describing statements as true. Depending on the version, speakers may be commending a statement, signaling its scientific reliability, or committing themselves to giving reasons in its support. In the same manner, pragmatic theory of truth always focuses on the criteria by which truth can be judged. This may involve linking truth to verifiability, assertiveness, usefulness, or long-term durability. With regards to the speech-act and justification projects, pragmatic theory of truth seems to be on solid ground, offering plausible proposals for addressing these projects.

The History of Praise and Worship

From time immemorial, Christian followers have used music as a channel of communicating their love and adoration towards their Creator and Saviour, Jesus Christ. In fact, the use of music with God's people is encouraged throughout the pages of Scripture. In the Old Testament, the psalmist writes, "sing to Him a new song; play skillfully and shout for joy". In the New Testament, the apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs". Throughout Christian history, wherever there were revival, renewal, and restoration, fresh songs of praise and worship have followed, and in many cases serve as cultural and historical indicators of what the Lord was doing in His people at that particular time in history. As Agbeleoba (2010) observed, "Christian song is never static, never quite the same from one generation to another. When viewed from two or three decades, the changes appear rather small. However, a backward look at fifty years reveals more distinct differences, and these differences become more sharply defined over a passing century". This statement by Agbeleoba provides a platform for a study of the distinct differences of music in the church during the past century.

Music among the followers of Christ has metamorphosed from hymnody (composing and singing of hymns) to the rise of the worship chorus in the late 1970s. Its origin can be traced to the Youth for Christ Movement of the 1940s and 1950s, and the Jesus Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. A significant move of God during this time that helped to popularize the "worship chorus" was what is referred to as the "Youth Movement". Having its root in the 1940s, youth choirs had gained popularity in the 1970s through a number of para-church organisations, such as Youth for Christ.

Conceptual Review

Praise: Christian praise simply means to be thankful for God's blessings, and to declare the good news to God and to others. In the original Greek, praise means to sing, to tell of, to give, or to confess. Praise about God, while worship is to God. Praise is opening up, worship is entering in. Praise is boldly declaring, worship is humbly bowing in the presence of the most High God. Praise is to applaud what God has done, while worship is honouring God for who He is.

Worship: Worship is the highest form of honour and respect that we can show towards God. In both the original Greek and Hebrew, worship conveys the idea of: to prostrate oneself, to bow down, to fall face down, to pay homage, and to pay respect. The English word "worship" comes from two Old English words: "weorth" which means worth, and "scipe" (ship) which means quality or condition. So, "worth-ship" is the quality of having worth. When we worship God, we

are ascribing worth to Him and proclaiming that He alone is worthy. Worship is not always quiet and contemplative. Whether we think, sing, dance, imagine, clap, speak, whisper, or shout about how awesome our God is, worship should be reserved for Him alone.

Implicature: Nominally, this term has a relationship with the word “implication” which means intension, understanding or involvement. Usually, every utterance is considered to have a specific meaning. That meaning of the speech is referred to as implicatum by Grice (1975), which then is formulated with the term non-natural meaning, while the indications are referred to as implicature. According to Potts (2005), implicature is the conclusion of a speech, as well as the shared background of knowing between the speaker and the hearer in a given context. Therefore, implicature shows the differences between what is said from what is meant.

Conventional implicature is the implication which is general and conventional. In general, everyone knows and understands the meaning or implications of a case. Understanding the implications conventionally supposes the listener or reader to have experience and general knowledge. Conventional implicature appears in conversation acts. Therefore, the nature of implicature is temporary and non-conversational directly with utterance spoken (Levinson, 1991). Implicature is a combination of language with situation where the same speech in different situations may not produce implicature or it may also suggest implicature (Potts, 2005).

According to Grice (1975), there is a set of assumptions that covers and regulates the activities of the conversation as a speech act. According to Grice’s analysis, a set of assumptions that guides someone in conversation is cooperative principles. In carrying out cooperative principles in the conversation, each speaker must obey the four maxims of conversation, namely: maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relevance and maxim of manner.

Presuppositions: Pragmatic presuppositions refer to the assumptions shared by the speaker and the hearer which constitute the background knowledge of their ongoing discourse. Some of these shared background knowledge assumptions have linguistic markers or triggers. In pragmatics, two major types of presupposition are discussed: Conventional and pragmatic presuppositions. The former is less reliant on context than the latter and is typically tied up to specific linguistic forms. For instance, would you like some coffee, suggests that the coffee is already prepared. Nevertheless, pragmatic presuppositions are context –dependent and arise from the use of an utterance in a specific context.

According to Crystal (2003), a presupposition refers to something presumed by a speaker when uttering a specific sentence in apposition to what is explicitly stated. Broadly speaking, speakers regularly formulate their messages depending on the presumptions regarding what their hearer previously knows. Such presumptions are possible to be wrong, but they determine much of what speakers say in their actual language use.

Speech Acts and its Elements

Speech act is a part of pragmatics where there are certain aims beyond the words or phrases when a speaker says something. It helps us to distinguish sentences, considered in abstraction of use, and the act that speakers or writers perform in using them. We can distinguish what a sentence means from what speakers mean in using them. Through speech acts, the speaker can convey physical actions merely through words and phrases. To ask of how a particular communicative act functions in a particular society presupposes that we examine the conditions that hold communication in the society. The conveyed utterances are paramount to the actions performed. The language we use, and in particular the speech we utter are entirely dependent on the context of the situation in which such acts are produced. There are three types of speech acts. They are locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. These can be simply said to be the act of saying something, what one does in saying it and what one does by saying it.

Locutionary speech act is roughly equivalent to uttering certain utterance with certain sense and reference, which again is roughly equivalent to meaning in traditional sense (Austin, 1962). Simply put, locutionary speech act is what is said. It is the act of producing meaningful utterances.

Perlocutionary act refers to the effect the utterance has on the thoughts or actions of the other person. It is the act that is carried out by a speaker when making an utterance that causes certain effect on the hearer and others.

The illocutionary act is the act of doing something in saying something. The illocutionary act is performed through the communicative force of an utterance, such as promising, apologizing, welcoming and congratulating (Yule, 1996: 48). It is the most significant level of action in a speech act because the force, which has been desired by the speakers determine this act.

Types of Speech Acts

Expressives are speech acts that express a psychological state. These speech acts include thanking, apologizing, welcoming, and congratulating. For example, when someone says “don’t be shy my home is your home”. The utterance represents the speaker’s expression that he/she welcomes someone.

Declaratives are speech acts in which the utterances effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and which tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions. These speech acts include excommunicating, declaring war, christening, firing from employment. For example, “you are now husband and wife”.

Directives are speech acts that a speaker uses to get someone else to do something. These speech acts include orders, command, requesting, suggesting and questioning. For example, when someone says “could you lend me a pen, please?”. The utterance represents the speaker requesting the hearer to do something which is to lend him a pen.

Commissives are speech acts in which the utterances commit the speaker to some future course of action. These include promising, threatening, offering, refusing, pledges. For example, when someone says “I’ll be back”, represents the speaker’s promise that he/she will be back.

Representatives are speech acts that the utterances commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. The utterances are produced based on the speaker’s observation of certain things that followed by stating the fact or opinion based on the observation. When someone says “she’s beautiful”, the speaker can state the sentence based on the fact or just give his or her own opinion about physical condition of a person. It also states what the speaker believes to be the case or not. Statements of facts, assertions, conclusions, and descriptions are all examples of the speaker representing the world as he or she believes it is. For example, when someone says “The earth is flat”, it represents the speaker’s assertions about the earth. The speaker has opinion that the earth is flat. Representative speech acts can be noted by some speech acts verb, such as: remind, inform, insist, assure, agree, claim, beliefs, conclude.

Methodology

Data gathering was restricted to two United Evangelical Churches in Lokoja metropolis. 10 different songs were collected through recording from the two United Evangelical Churches as primary data for the study. The researcher put into consideration various means and environments these songs were sung and how they were interpreted. This research work was carried out in line with the aim of the study, which is to pragmatically examine the focus of praise and worship songs predominantly sung in churches with reference to the United Evangelical Churches in Lokoja metropolis. The research work focuses on songs as a tool of sincere communication of a true feeling in Christianity. The 10 commonly used songs that are relevant to the study are as follows:

- (i) Jehovah, you are the most high; you are the most high God
- (ii) When you see me dance, I dance like a winner man
- (iii) You are good, you are kind, you are good Jesus, everyday every hour, you are good Jesus
- (iv) I carry favour for head oo
- (v) I serve a God who is powerful eh, I serve a God who is mighty, this God is a good God and I call Him a miracle Papa

- (vi) You are the God who can never fail, you don't know what it means to fail, everything on earth may fail, but you can never ever fail
- (vii) You are good and your mercies is forever, hallelujah
- (viii) Jesus ye, Jesus ye, Jesus ye
- (ix) I am always happy oo, I am very, very happy oo
- (x) Everybody praise the Lord now, I will praise Him every day, I will praise the Lord

Data Analysis

SAMPLE 1: *Jehovah, you are the Most High God*

The locutionary act is presupposed here in the context of the song being sung as praise and worship. The above locution in context of praise and worship means the asserting nature of the chorister that makes reference to God as the Most High. This means the chorister is referring to God as sovereign over many gods. This implies that the usage of these words as a sentence in this context is complete and adequate as the words and the sentence refers to and can be called praise. The four maxims can be said to have not been violated as it carries complete thought with adequate expression. It also has no ambiguity and has relevance to the subject matter.

SAMPLE 2: *When you see me dance, I dance like a winner man*

The song is sung in supposed praise to God. The song can be categorized under the umbrella representatives as it is making a statement about the reason for a certain type of mannerism. The illocution of this statement is made as a song by the chorister in reference to a certain kind of posture that represents the state of mind and feeling at that moment. As regards to implicature of the above statement, the maxim of quantity is not flouted as the statement provides adequate information and passes a complete thought. The maxim of quality is also not flouted because adequate information on the subject matter is incorporated.

SAMPLE 3: *You are good, you are kind, you are good Jesus, every day, every hour, you are good Jesus.*

From the song above, the stage of analysis will be categorized under declaratives. The song states the characteristics of God as it is connected to Jesus. The song places emphasis on the character of being good and kind as it relates to the subject matter. This statement mentions the qualities of God and places emphasis on it by repetition. The four maxims used in the analysis of conversation have not been violated as the song has quality, quantity, relation and manner. It is

clear and precise, void of ambiguity, relevant and passes a complete thought. This song can be said to fall under the praise of God by man in this congregational setting.

SAMPLE 4: *I carry favour for head oo*

The song above can be classified under declaratives. The song places emphasis on a person that has favour everywhere. It is geared towards the human and its daily activities and the expression of that daily activity, and how it has translated to favour. The song is not in any form or relation directed to towards the praise of God. It serves as an awareness of a present state of a person. The maxim of quality is violated as the song has no representation to its context which is meant to praise God. The maxim of relevance is not violated as the statement carries a complete thought. The maxim of relation is flagrantly flouted. The song is not relevant to the context in which it being sung. Finally, the maxim of manner is not completely followed as the statement is not clear and concise.

SAMPLE 5: *I serve a God who is powerful eh, I serve a God who is mighty, this God is a good God and I call Him a miracle Papa*

Here, the chorister sings this song in praise to God. Its literal meaning is pointing out that the God whom he serves is powerful, mighty, and good and that is a reason to be called a miracle worker. The song has a direct assertive (declaration) speech act as the speaker explains the various stages that need to be put in place to be called a miracle worker. The point above can also be considered as the locutionary and illocutionary acts. This can be said that even if the God factor is called multiple times, the major attention is directed towards the congregation and the chorister. This can be considered as praise unto God, but can also be seen as a self-centered praise.

SAMPLE 6: *You are the God who can never fail, you don't know what it means to fail, everything on the earth may fail, but you can never ever fail*

The above locution can be placed under representatives. The statement above can be said to express complete trust in God with the emphasis on the fact that He cannot fail. This is established as praise to God as one of the characteristics of praise and worship is the acknowledgement of what God can do. The statement above insinuates a close relationship that has been tested over again to come to this specific conclusion. Finally, the maxim of manner is also not violated because the statement is not ambiguous as it has meaning, as it is related to the context. This, can however, be considered as a praise song to God as it has several characteristics that fall under what can be referred to as praise to God.

SAMPLE 7: *You are good and your mercies is forever, hallelujah*

The literal meaning of this statement expresses that the experience of the chorister in reference to God in this context is that he is good and his mercies is long lasting. So, it is a valid reason to praise. This statement can be recorded under declaratives. The chorister speaks with clarity and understanding in the context that the statement is made. The maxim of relation is also not violated as the statement made is relevant. The relevance of this is the mentioning of the characteristics of praise as it relates to the subject matter. The last maxim is that of manner. The statement is void of ambiguity. It is clear and concise. The statement with analysis can be said to be praise to God.

SAMPLE 8: *Jesus eh, Jesus eh, Jesus eh*

The head chorister leads this song in order to praise God. The level of ambiguity of this song is quite high. As it is stated above, one of the personalities that can be referred to as Jesus is called several times without implied meaning. This seems to be a call for recognition as the name is called severally, but after the call, no information is given.

SAMPLE 9: *I am always happy oo, I am very, very happy oo*

The statement above can be classified under expressives as it shows a certain kind of emotion and how it is expressed. The illocution of the above statement is a state of emotion which is happiness and a strong emphasis on that emotion. The meaning that is given to this is just a heightened level of emotion. The maxim of implicature has been flouted in several aspects of the above statement. The above statement is passing a personal emotion, but the context in which is being used is meant to praise God. Finally, the maxim of manner to which the statement is being made is also violated as the statement is ambiguous. There is not a full trend of thought as to why the emotion is being evoked. This statement can be said to be not meet the expectations of being praise and worship to God because there is no reference whatsoever to Him.

SAMPLE 10: *Everybody praise the Lord now, I will praise Him every day, I will praise the Lord.*

The song above can be categorized as a declarative statement. The statement is encouraging the congregation to join in the act of praise. As regards implicature, the maxim of relevance is not violated in this statement as the context to which the head chorister expresses this statement relates to the subject matter. Finally, the maxim of manner is also not violated as the statement is clear and concise stating the exact instruction that should be carried out with an expected response from the congregation. The song clearly mentions the act of praise, and this clearly shows that the song is praise to God.

Findings

The songs that were analysed were those frequently used by the two United Evangelical Churches in Lokoja metropolis, United Evangelical Church, Lokoja Township Superintendency, Lokoja and United Evangelical Church, Ganaja 1, Lokoja. The finding shows that some songs sung were not in any way related to praise and worship to God, but were majorly directed to please human emotions. The finding also shows that several songs sung in churches have different meanings, especially if the context is changed from praise and worship to God to man, and his actions.

Conclusion

The study examined the pragmatic analysis of praise and worship in the two United Evangelical Churches in Lokoja metropolis. Pragmatic Theory of Truth has been a theory that has been effectively used in the research of human interactions. From this study, different songs conveyed different meanings, especially in the context in which they were used.

References

- Agbeleoba, S., & Ogunlade, A. (2010). A Stylo-Pragmatic Analysis of Selected English Gospel Songs in Nigeria. *British Journal of English Linguistics*.
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, D. (1987). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Foster, D. (2022). What is Praise and Worship? A Biblical Definition. *Site Name*.
- Grice, H. (1975). Logic and Conversation. In P. Cole & J.L. Morgan (Eds.). *Syntax and Semantics: Vol. 3. Speech Acts (pp. 41-58)*; Academi Press.
- Jacob, Mey (2001). *Pragmatics: An Introduction; Second Edition*: Oxford: Black Well.
- Kissine, M. (2008). Locutionary, Illocutionary, Perlocutionary. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 2(6), 1189-1202. Doi: 10.1111/j.1749-818x.2008.00093.x
- Levinson, S.C. (1992). Activity types and Language. In P. Drew & J. Heritage (Eds.). *Talk at Work*.

(pp. 66-100). Cambridge University Press.

Mey, J.L. (2008). *Pragmatics: An Introduction to Pragmatics* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Black Well Printing.

Morris, C.W. (1938). *Foundation of Theory of Signs*. University of Chicago Press.

Oviogun, P.V, & Veerdee, P.S. (2020). *Definition of Language and Linguistics: Basic Competence*.

Macro Linguistics and Micro Linguistics.

Potts, C. (2005). *The Logic of Conventional Implicatures* (Oxford Studies in Theoretical Linguistics). USA: Oxford University Press.

Pleyer, M., Lepic, R., & Hartmann, S. (2024). *Compositionality in Different Modalities: A View from Usage-based Linguistics*. *International of Primatology*.

Peirce, C.S. (1939). *Collected Paper on Sanders Peirce* (C.Hartshorne & P. Weiss, Eds.). Harvard University Press