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## Strategies used by Pentecostal Preachers to Enhance Audience Participation during Sermons in Eldoret, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

This paper set discusses the strategies used by preachers to ensure audience participation. The paper is based on a study of sermons given by Pentecostal preachers from selected churches in Eldoret town in Kenya. The paper was informed by the Speech Acts theory. The data was collected through camcorder video recording and participant observation. The data from the camcorder was transcribed word-for-word and then analysed at the level of speech acts and implicatures. The relevant texts were extracted from the selected sermons to illustrate the speech acts and implicatures identified. The linguistic and non-linguistic cues that trigger the speech acts were also identified. The study established that, to a large extent, the speech acts performed by preachers succeed. However, there are a few instances when they misfire and the preachers fail to get the desired response. The illocutionary acts performed are generally geared towards persuasion but the preacher does not always get the expected effect of his/her sermon. This is because some of the effects are mental and therefore cannot be observed, for example, if a speaker issues a warning, he can only hope the audience will heed it but he has no way of measuring this. Preachers employ certain strategies as a way of controlling the discourse in the pulpit in order to ensure audience participation and also to achieve better communication. It is recommended that a syntactic analysis of sermons could also be carried out to establish how words and phrases combine to make sentences in sermons for effective communication.

### Introduction

In sermons, the speaker is charged with the responsibility of passing the divine word of God to the audience so he must be one who believes the word he speaks and would like his intentions fulfilled. This means that he or she must adhere to the conditions necessary for the success of the speech acts he performs. This paper examines the strategies that preachers use to enhance audience participation in sermons based on a study conducted in selected Pentecostal churches in Eldoret town in Kenya. The study was informed by the Speech Acts Theory as propounded by Austin (1962) and advanced by Searle (1969, 1976).

This paper falls under studies on religious language. Crystal (1995) argues that the forms and functions of language used in religious practices vary according to the beliefs of the adherents. The language could vary from highly structured forms to totally unpredictable ones, from voluble expressions to silent and meditative ones, from tightly structured unison responses to spontaneous loudness. According to Uhunmwangho (2000), the general features of religious language are: "it employs a deliberate, evocative use of terminology and phraseology which we must be alert to in order to appraise the primary purpose and meaning of the language." This paper, in exploring the strategies used by preachers to ensure audience participation in sermons identifies the words, phrases and clauses that signal these communicative acts. These acts are the ones that inspire active participation in sermons and church services.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The sermon, as a speech event, involves communication between the preacher and audience. As such, there is an understanding and sharing of meaning that takes place during a sermon. The sermon is a monologue, as it involves one speaker addressing many people with a view to influencing them. Subsequently, the speaker may employ certain strategies to ensure audience participation. Although other studies have been carried out in the area of pulpit discourse, strategies used by preachers to ensure audience participation have not been adequately described. Therefore, this paper examined the strategies used by selected Pentecostal preachers to ensure audience participation during sermons in sampled churches in Eldoret town, Kenya.

## **Literature Review**

A study by Taiwo (2005) found that in charismatic churches, preaching differs a lot from those of orthodox Christian churches. Charismatic churches are mostly marked by their vibrant ambiance. For example, the characteristic composure and solemnity that marks sermons in orthodox churches is not present in charismatic churches. Charismatic preachers are less rigid and slightly informal in the delivery of their sermons. They often transport their audiences along by ensuring their active participation. It is not unusual to often hear sermons being interjected by unsolicited quips from the audience. Such comments include phrases such as “oh yes”, “amen”, “preach it pastor”, and the like. Such interjections could also be in form of a rapturous noise or an applause (which sometimes drown the message) expressing approval of statements made by the speaker. There are also non-verbal responses such as applause and waving of arms to show agreement of the message. The preacher may solicit responses such as a repetition of something he has just said, making the congregation to fill a gap in his statement and so forth. All these are strategies employed by charismatic Christian preachers to ensure the attentiveness of their listeners. This information lends credit to the study at hand which sought to identify strategies used by preachers to ensure audience participation.

In church services, sermons are messages given for the purpose of transforming the lives of the listeners. According to Taiwo (2005), the most active use of language in charismatic worship service happens during preaching. Preachers appeal to the faith of their listeners by encouraging them to pursue righteousness and hope for the best. They also use the message to warn, chastise, and challenge the listeners to tap into their potentials. The preacher controls the discourse and only allows the congregation to participate at his will in the course of the discourse. The use of interrogation is one of the features of a charismatic sermon and they are used with the purpose of achieving the intentions of the speaker. This is of benefit to this study which sought to identify the strategies used in sermons to solicit active participation in sermons.

Taiwo (2006) is an investigation into the general pattern of discourse in English- medium Christian Pulpit Discourse (ECPD). The expression “ECPD” is used to embrace every situation of language use when a message is given in English from the pulpit in any Christian religious practice.

The study focuses on the various ways pulpit preachers in ECPD elicit responses from their congregation. In ECPD, the preacher controls the discourse and the congregation shares in the process of the text as it unfolds. Three major methods of response elicitation were identified in the data: the use of interrogative, declaratives and imperatives. The responses elicited can come in form of speech, i.e., vocal utterances. This is typical of many speech situations, so it is an unmarked response. The response could also come as mental behaviour. This is done when preachers make statements or ask questions, which demand no verbal response or physical action. The context helps the hearers to interpret the expressions as ones that require them to respond by reflecting on what they have heard. Responses may also be physical actions whereby the speaker makes the hearer to act or behave in a particular way. These responses are relevant to the current study because they contribute to the interpretation of preachers’ intentions in the data analysed. The responses result from the strategies used by preachers to ensure audience participation.

The analysis of data revealed that Christian pulpit preachers elicit more spoken responses and this follows the most natural tendency in spoken discourse where a spoken form is used to elicit another. The modes of eliciting responses revealed were:

- i. Conventional answer (Praise the Lord – Hallelujah)
- ii. Repeated statement (say ‘I am blessed’ – ‘I am blessed.’)
- iii. Gap filling (Jesus is... – Lord)
- iv. Correct statement (The bible says ‘those who will live a righteous life will be loved by all men’ – No/ ‘will be persecuted.’)
- v. Response to prayer -I am a winner – Amen)

These findings are relevant to the current study because some of these were identified as the strategies used to ensure audience participation.

## The Speech Acts Theory and Communication Strategies

The Speech Acts Theory was first proposed by Austin in 1962. It was refined and advanced by Searle in 1969 and 1976. Austin developed it as a theory of meaning and Searle defined it as a theory of discourse. The theory aims to do justice to the fact that even though words encode information, people do more things with words than convey information; they often convey more than their words encode. Austin noted that all utterances, in addition to meaning something, actually have some communicative force, which is the dynamic element in communication, the element that moves communication forward.

The theory looks at the meaning of utterances in terms of propositional (locutionary) and illocutionary meaning. It thus concerns itself with acts that are performed in or by speaking a language. The theory gives explicit recognition to the social or interpersonal dimensions of language behaviour. Speech acts have both an act component and a linguistic component. It is partly taxonomic and partly explanatory since it must systematically classify types of speech acts and the ways in which they can succeed or fail. It must reckon with the fact that the relationship between the words being used and the force of their utterances is often oblique. Bach (1994) gives the example of the sentence '*This is a pig sty*', which he says might be used non-literally to state that a certain room is messy and filthy and, further, to demand indirectly that it be straightened out and cleaned up. He goes further to say thus:

even when this sentence is used literally and directly, say to describe a certain area or a barnyard, the content of its utterance is not fully determined by its linguistic meaning in particular, the meaning of the word 'this' does not determine which area is being referred to. A major task for the theory of speech acts is to account for how speakers can succeed in what they do despite the various ways in which linguistic meaning underdetermines use (Bach, 1994).

In general, speech acts are acts of communication. To communicate is to express a certain attitude, and the type of speech act being performed corresponds to the type of attitude being expressed. For example, a statement expresses a belief, a request expresses a desire, and an apology expresses a regret. As an act of communication, a speech act succeeds if the audience identifies, in accordance with the speaker's intention, the attitude being expressed.

Some speech acts, however, are not primarily acts of communication and have the function not of communicating but of affecting institutional states of affairs. They can do so in either of two ways. Some officials judge something to be the case, and others actually make something the case. Those of the first kind include judges' rulings, referees' calls and assessors' appraisals, and the latter include sentencing, bequeathing and appointing. Acts of both kinds can be performed only in certain ways under certain circumstances by those in certain institutional or social positions. For example, "With this ring I thee wed" – by speaking the utterance you perform the act. For a performative to have the desired effect, it has to meet certain social and cultural criteria, also called felicity conditions which are also discussed in this section.

Further, in his essay, Austin (1962) abandoned the distinction between constatives and performatives and replaced it by a new distinction between three different "aspects" of an utterance against the background of a generalized claim that all utterances are really performatives. This generalized claim is the key assumption of Speech Acts Theory (the theory of "how to do things with words"), that is to say by making an utterance, language users perform one or more social acts. These are called 'speech acts'. The threefold distinction is that between different types of action. For instance, by speaking an utterance (*locution*), you may perform the social act of making a promise (*illocution* – what the speaker does by using the utterance) and, as a result, convince your audience of your commitment (*perlocution* – what the speaker has done, having made the utterance).

The perlocutionary act is a matter of trying to get the hearer to form some correlative attitude and in some cases to act in a certain way. For example, a statement expresses a belief and normally has the further purpose of getting the addressee to form the same belief. A request expresses a desire for the addressee to do a certain thing and normally aims for the addressee to intend to and, indeed, actually do that thing. A promise expresses the speaker's firm intention to do something, together with the belief that, by his utterance, he is obligated to do it, and normally aims further for the addressee to expect, and to feel entitled to expect, the speaker to do it.

Austin's (1962) notion of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts is relevant in the interpretation of sermons because speakers use language in the sermons to make utterances (locutionary act). They perform acts of promising or encouraging (illocutionary act) and they would also like to make the audience act in certain ways or express certain emotions (perlocutionary). They want their opinions recognized, advice taken or warning heeded. For example, when a speaker says,

'Christians ought to live in obedience to God', he performs a locutionary act. The illocutionary act is advising the audience to obey God. This is the perlocutionary act.

Austin (1962) further argued for four felicity conditions, which, if satisfied for a given illocutionary act, make the act happy or felicitous. If these conditions are not satisfied, the act backfires and is said to be unhappy or infelicitous. For example, if a speaker says 'I baptize you...', the act of baptizing will not succeed if the speaker has no authority to do so. These conditions include preparatory condition which establishes whether or not the circumstances of the speech act and the participants in it are appropriate to its being performed successfully. An executive condition determines whether or not the speech act has been performed properly. A sincerity condition determines whether what the speaker gives is what he believes to be true. A fulfillment condition is determined by the perlocutionary effect of the speech act.

The felicity conditions are different for different kinds of illocutionary acts. According to Searle (1969, pp. 57-61), they can be grouped under Preparatory conditions, Sincerity conditions and essential conditions.

### ***Preparatory Conditions***

The person performing the act must have the right or authority to do so and in certain cases, the occasion of his utterance must be appropriate to the illocutionary act in question (Searle, 1969). For example, the act of baptizing cannot just be performed by anybody anywhere. It is done by a bishop or a pastor in a church setting. If the preparatory conditions are not met, the act will be said to have backfired. This condition is relevant to the study in that preachers are vested with the authority to present God's word. The act of preaching is done not just by bishops or pastors but also by members of the congregation who are considered competent to handle different topics. The one who is given a chance to preach has the authority to present the sermon in a way that fulfils his intentions at the time.

### ***Sincerity Conditions***

The sincerity condition borders on the intentions of the speaker, for example, for a promise, the condition is that the speaker intends to act, for a request, that he wants the hearer to act and for an assertion, that he believes what he says (Searle, 1969). If the person performing the act does so insincerely (without the appropriate beliefs or feelings) his illocutionary act will be guilty of what Austin calls an abuse. For example, for warning, the sincerity conditions are that the speaker intends to warn and cause the hearer to act by heeding the warning. Preachers perform illocutionary acts of warning, promising, advising among others and these require them to meet the sincerity conditions in order for the acts to succeed.

### ***Essential Conditions***

The person performing the act is committed by the illocutionary force of his utterance to certain beliefs or intentions (Searle, 1969). For example, for a warning, the speaker intends that his utterance will count as a warning.

As a further contribution to the development of the Speech Acts Theory, Bach and Harnish (1979) developed a detailed taxonomy of speech acts in which they spell out the correlation between type of illocutionary act and type of attitude expressed. They say that "in many cases, such as answering, disputing, excusing and agreeing, as well as all types of acknowledgement, the act and the attitude it expresses presuppose a specific conversational or other social circumstance." For example, the act of thanking expresses the attitude of gratefulness for something done to the speaker by the hearer of hearers. Their classification of speech acts comprises constatives, directives, commissives and acknowledgements.

### ***Constantives***

These are statements that convey information and can be judged as true or false. They commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. For example, an utterance such as: "This morning we went to talk about applying the word of God in our lives." The utterance performs the act of stating the topic of the sermon. The adverbial phrase 'this morning' refers to the time of the preaching, the pronouns 'we' and 'our' include the speaker and the audience and the verb 'went' is the present tense to indicate that the action is to place at the time specified. The relationship between the words used and the context (church service) lead to the meaning of the utterance. The speaker is committed by the utterance to the truth of the expressed intention because whatever he says during the sermon must be relevant to the stated topic.

### ***Directives***

These are utterances intended to produce some effect through action by the hearer. They involve the speaker trying to get the hearer to behave in some required way. For example, "Discipline your children while there is hope." The utterance has the structure of an imperative because there is no subject at the beginning. Imperatives generally carry orders or commands so the utterance can be said to perform the illocutionary act of ordering those members of the audience with children to

discipline them. The illocution is carried in the verb 'discipline' which is in the imperative form. The intended effect is to have the audience act by disciplining their children but this can't be measured. The speaker is clearly trying to get the audience to obey God's word by acting in the desired way. The utterance can also be interpreted as an advice in the context of preaching and the speaker expects the audience to heed the advice.

### **Commissives**

These are utterances that commit the speaker (to a greater or lesser degree) to some future action. They essentially involve the speaker committing himself to behave in some required way. They tend to be convivial and are performed in the interests of the audience rather than the speaker. For example, "You are here and you need grace to take you further + raise your hand I pray for you" + (some hands are raised) (*pays for those whose hands are raised*).

The illocution of promising is contained in the clause '... raise your hand I pray for you.' The speaker is promising to pray for the audience members who raise their hands by using the first person pronoun 'I' to refer to himself and the verb 'pray' in the present tense. The action he promises to do is in the interest of the audience because they will receive grace for their benefit. Another illocution could be that of offering where the speaker can be said to be offering to pray for the audience who raise their hands.

### **Acknowledgements**

These express or make known the speaker's psychological attitude towards a state of affairs which the illocution presupposes. For example, "I thank God for the privilege of sharing His precious word with us today." The illocution 'thanking' presupposes a state of affairs where the speaker has been given favour or something good has been done to him. In this case, the presupposition is that sharing God's word (preaching) is a God-given privilege. This is the common ground of the speaker and audience because that is how the utterance is interpreted in the religious context. The speaker's utterance is thus understood as an acknowledgement of God's favour in allowing him to preach.

### **Materials and Methods**

The research targeted speakers and audiences in Pentecostal churches in Eldoret town, Uasin Gishu District, Rift valley Province, Kenya. Pentecostal churches refer to those in which "the central focus is the Holy Spirit and the manifestations of the spirit through speaking in tongues, healing, prophecy and discernment of spirits. They also believe in the casting out of demons, loud prayers, clapping and shouting, usually characterize their worship" (Taiwo, 2005).

The researcher targeted those churches that use English only or English and Kiswahili in conducting their services. The recordings were done in six churches and a total of ten sermons were collected. The researcher used purposive sampling method to sample sermons that she found relevant to the study. Five sermons were selected for data analysis and three of these were sermons preached by the pastors of the churches and two by visiting speakers who are in Christian ministry. The researcher also sought the opinion of other preachers and pastors who had interacted for a longer period with the subjects. This was to avoid bias and so establish validity and reliability of the data collected. In addition, the researcher chose these subjects because they had theological training.

The churches visited included those that were located 5-7 kms from the Eldoret town centre. The churches considered include Deliverance Church, Eldoret Happy Church-Town Centre, International Vision Centre (IVC), Christian Growth Centre, Sirikwa Pentecostal Fellowship-Central, and Sirikwa Pentecostal Fellowship-Mission Centre. The audiences in the churches visited ranged in number from 200 to 500 people. They consisted of youth (13-20 yrs) and adults (21-yrs and above).

The sermons were transcribed word-for-word and then typed out for analysis. The linguistic features in the studied sermons were identified and used in the interpretation of data. These features were taken to be the units that trigger the illocutionary acts and include: single words, phrases, clauses or whole utterances.

### **Results and Discussion**

The study examined the strategies used to ensure audience participation in church sermons. It examined specifically how preachers controlled the discourse in the pulpit and ensured audience participation. From the study findings, the strategies used included questioning, repetition, declarations and conventional answers. The sermon is a monologue, but, in Pentecostal preaching, there is active listener response. The preacher prompts these responses as a way of involving the audience in his sermon.

### Questioning

Preachers at times asked questions to solicit information from the audience as a way of controlling their linguistic behaviour. Text 1 gives an example taken from the beginning of the sermon on 'seasons.' The preacher had just reminded the audience that it was a continuation of what they had been talking about.

**Text 1: "Anybody who remembers that + a season comes with what?" (Grace).**

The preacher used the *wh*-question to elicit verbal response from the congregation. The question serves the purpose of ensuring audience attentiveness because, for them to fill in the gap, they must know what the preacher requires. The question also enables the preacher to evaluate the effectiveness of his communication in the previous sermon. The correct answer given by the audience is evidence that they understood the message.

### Repetition

Repetition occurs in different ways in sermons. For example, the preacher may ask the audience to repeat a statement after him, to say something to their neighbour or even to repeat a statement he says in mother tongue or Kiswahili. Text 2 gives an illustration of repetition.

**Text 2: "There are people who've gone through enough and nothing scares them. They can ask you + 'what have I not seen in this world?' (Gestures with hand) + + Say it in your mother tongue and listen to how it sounds + + (laughter and shouts of 'it's true') + Do you want to try it in your mother tongue? (Yes) Okay- let's go" (laughter as the audience say the statement in mother tongue).**

The preacher was referring to those who have gone through many difficult experiences in life which have shaped them for the better. They are therefore not easily shaken by tough situations. The preacher involved the audience by telling them to ask the question '**what have I not seen in this world?**' in their mother tongue. The audience agrees that there are such people in the world and they laugh as they ask the question in mother tongue. The utterance serves as a hearing check and in this way ensures audience participation.

### Declarations

This is a strategy in which the speaker makes a series of declarations or asks questions to elicit response from the audience. Text 3 illustrates this and is taken from a sermon on making a difference for God. The preacher had just talked about the effect of what people say about us in our lives and made these declarations to focus the audience on what God says about them as the important thing to consider.

**Text 3: "Whose report are you going to believe? + (the Lord's) Are you gonna believe what your teacher says about you? –(NO)- what your spouse says- (NO)- what people say – (NO)]- I am gonna believe what God says about me + (shots of yes and clapping). + He says I am precious before him- I am blessed- You may think I am not handsome but man I am" + + (shouts of yes/ululation and clapping).**

The responses from the audience are prompted by the preacher's questions and declarations, which constitute a way of controlling the linguistic behaviour of the audience. The preacher is affirming group solidarity by prompting the audience to agree with his stand. This helps to cement the message he was conveying that whatever God says about one is what matters and that one can make a difference for God irrespective of his past. The prompts from the speaker made the audience very boisterous.

### Conventional Answers

These are answers known to every member of the religious community and they know the forms that require these responses. As such, when the preacher uses these forms, the audience responds with the answer in unison. Texts 4-6 are examples of conventional answers from the data collected.

**Text 4: "Hallelujah! + (Amen) + + Praise the name of the Lord" + (Amen).**

The conventional answer 'Amen' is prompted by the expressions 'Hallelujah' and 'Praise the name of the Lord.' Preachers, from time to time, utter these expressions during preaching as a way of giving praise to God and also ensuring audience attention. Preachers may also prompt this answer by telling the audience the number of times to say it and this happens when the audience is too quiet or does not respond as the speaker expects.

**Text 5: “There is power in the grace of the Almighty + (Amen) + + Grace is above any other prevailing circumstances” + + (Amen).**

The declarations made by the preacher about the grace of God prompt the answer ‘Amen’, to show agreement.

**Text 6: “Let me tell you this- if you’ve ever made such statements like ‘I will never talk to anybody,’ please break it” + (Yes).**

The response ‘Yes’ here serves the same purpose of the agreement ‘Amen’ and shows that the audience concur with the preacher’s sentiments. The speaker was talking about the danger of not seeking help and sought to advise the audience to seek help from others.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study established that, to a large extent, the speech acts performed by preachers succeed. However, there are a few instances when they misfire and the preachers fail to get the desired response. The illocutionary acts performed are generally geared towards persuasion but the preacher does not always get the expected effect of his/her sermon. This is because some of the effects are mental and therefore cannot be observed, for example, if a speaker issues a warning, he can only hope the audience will heed it but he has no way of measuring this. Preachers employ certain strategies as a way of controlling the discourse in the pulpit in order to ensure audience participation and also to achieve better communication.

The researcher cannot claim to have exhausted all the issues relevant to strategies used by preachers to enhance the communicative impact of their sermons. Therefore, a syntactic analysis of sermons could also be carried out to establish how words and phrases combine to make sentences in sermons for effective communication.

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