
ANALYSIS OF THE SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF SELECTED CHRISTIAN PRAISE AND WORSHIP SONGS**Emmanuel C. Sharndama, PhD.**Department of English and Literary Studies,
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Okoh Idam OnyinyechiPolice Children Primary School Karewa 1,
Yola, Adamawa State**Abstract**

This study examines the syntactic features of selected christian praise and worship songs performed by two Nigerian Christian performing artists Panam Percy Paul and Osinachi Kalu. Qualitative approach was employed to identify and discuss the functions of the prevalent and significant syntactic features. The result of the analysis showed that the syntactic features of praise and worship songs are fairly simple rather than complex. Prevalent occurrences of the simple and the imperative sentences were identified across the texts in the corpus. While the simple sentences have SVO structures which contribute to the straightforwardness of the messages of the song texts, the imperatives have their subjects elided thereby heightening the tempo of the praise. Other syntactic features identified but not prevalent are interrogative and compound sentences.

Keywords: Language, Lexis, Syntax, Praise, Worship, Song.**Introduction**

The term language is one of the linguistic concepts that do not yield to one acceptable definition. From time immemorial, scholars have offered diverse views on what language is. Sapir (1921) for example, defines language as purely human and noninstinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntary produced symbols. This definition anchors on the inseparable nature of what we convey and the instrument we use to convey them. It entails that language is a vehicle through which speakers convey message or information from their minds to the minds of the target audience

According to Halliday (1965), many attempts have been made by linguists of all ages to vividly define what language really is. He defines language as a complex

phenomenon that is as old as man. It is so valuable to man that societal cohesion and continuity cannot be achieved without it. This relates to the description of the concept "language" by Prasad (2009) as being "basic to human civilisation; which means that human civilisation would have been impossible without language). Language is not something that comes to being overnight. It is neither an organism, as many nineteenth century linguists saw it, nor an edifice, as it was regarded in early modern structuralisms' period of linguistics. It is a fair thronged activity comprising speaking, listening, writing and reading.

Language is used in human societies to facilitate communication. It is through language that members of a given speech community interact with one another, share ideas and express their feelings. O'Neil (2006) posits that human language is unique in being

a symbolic communication system that is learned instead of biologically inherited. Symbols are sounds or things, which have meaning given to them by the language users. Language is medium through which humans perform different activities and communicate the norms, the values, beliefs and codes of life.

Halliday (1973) opines that language varies as its uses vary. Variation of language according to use is called functional variation or register. The concept “register” as interpreted by Halliday and Hasan (1990) is a semantic concept which can be defined as a configuration of meaning that are typically associated with particular configuration field, tenor and mode. The field refers to the total event in which the text is functioning and the purposive activity of the speaker or writer, it, thus includes the subject matter as one element in it. The field describes activities and processes that are happening at the time of speech.

Drawing from the fact that language varies according to use, this study is embarked upon to investigate the syntactic features of praise and worship songs a sub-category of the discourse of Christian religion. Specific attention will be paid to the identification of the different sentence types significant to the understanding and interpretation of song texts.

The Language of Religion

The language of religion in the context of this study is synonymous to the style of language used in religious texts. Focus is made specifically to the style or variety of language used in praise and worship song. According to Thorne (1997), the language of religion generally can be found in many contexts: religious newspaper and magazines, radios and televisions, and local publicity materials promoting church events.

According to Samarin (1976), members of religious communities are expected to

share the community's language expectations. Some of these expectations include what Fairlough (1985) describes as “knowledge based” which incorporates the knowledge of language codes; knowledge of the principles and use, knowledge of the situations, and knowledge of the world. In most religious communities, what to say, how to say it, and when to say it are largely determined by the leader of the congregation at any point in time. Also, the atmosphere in the religious gathering constraints and regulates the participants' use of language.

Syntax

The term syntax in linguistics refers to description of how words and phrase are arranged to form a sentence. It also refers to the study of the structure of sentences. Syntax is a Greek word which means “arrangement.” Syntax is used to refer to the language rules for the grouping of words into large grammatical units, that is, sentence. The basic unit of syntax is sentence just as morpheme is that of morphology. In a similar vein, Finegan (2008) defines syntax as the part of grammar that governs the form of strings by which language users make statement, ask questions, give directives and so on. The study syntax addresses the structures of sentences and their structural and functional relationships to one another.

Like Finegan (2008), McGregor (2009) is of the view that syntax is concerned with the means available in language for putting words together in sequences. McGregor further asserts that sometimes, the term grammar is used instead of syntax, though more usually grammar is considered to cover not only syntax but also morphology and phonology as well. Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2003) like the foregoing two scholars also describe syntax as the part of grammar that represents a speaker's knowledge of sentences and their structures.

As a subfield of linguistics, syntax is the analysis of the structure of a sentence. In this sense, syntax is a component of grammar. O'Grady, Archibald and Katamba (2011)

opine that the study of syntax lies close to the heart of contemporary linguistic analysis and work in this area is notorious both for its diversity and for its complexity. New ideas are constantly being evolving and there is controversy over how the properties of sentence structure should be described and explained.

The term syntax based on the foregoing views is a grammatical component that is concerned with how words are combined to form large grammatical units. Syntax deals with the arrangement, or the organization of bits of language to form longer stretches capable of conveying information to the minds of the audience or expressing thoughts and feelings. It focuses on how words that convey our thoughts or express our feelings are strung together. As a component of linguistics, syntax provides linguistic resources for semantics and pragmatic investigations.

Distinction between Praise and Worship

Praise and worship in Christian Religion are inseparable entities. They collocate and are often conceived as two different things. Foster (2017) makes the following distinctions between praise and worship. Praise in the original Greek means to sing, to tell of, to give or to confess. In its simple terms, it means to be thankful for God's blessings, and to declare that good news of God's love to others. Worship on the other hand in both the original Greek and Hebrew, convey the idea to prostrate oneself, to bow down, to fall face down, to pay homage and to respect. In other words, worship is the highest form of honour and respect that we can show towards God. While worship can be done in public, its main directive is very personal. Worship is a direct conversation between man and God. It is highly intimate and personal.

In a similar vein, Barrier (2016) makes the following distinction between praise and worship. Praise is unidirectional. We praise God. He does not praise us. Praise is our acknowledgement of His power, authority,

wisdom and worthiness. Praise does not require a response from the one who is being praised. On the other hand, worship is rational. It is not only our communion with God. It is also His communion with us. Robbins (2017) is of the view that praise means "to commend, to applaud or magnify." It is an expression of humility ourselves and centering our attention upon the Lord with heart-felt expression of love, adoration and thanksgiving. High praises bring our spirit into pinnacle of fellowship and intimacy between ourselves and God-it magnifies our awareness of our spiritual union with the highest God. Praise transports us into the realm of the supernatural and into the power of God.

Method of Investigation

The study is adopted qualitative approach. This approach is used in order to enable the researchers to explore the functions the lexical and syntactic features in their natural state in the context of praise and worship. Patton & Cochran (2002) are of the view that qualitative research is characterized by its aim which relate to understanding some aspect of social life, and its methods, which (in general), generate words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis.

Similarly, Elliott & Timulak (2005) argue that qualitative research rely on linguistic rather than numerical data, and employs meaning based rather than statistical forms of data analysis. In line with these views, 20 song texts were investigated to identify and explain their significant lexical and syntactic features. The discussions were restricted to the context of praise and worship rather than the broader context of religious genre. The texts were drawn from song texts of two popular Nigerian Christian performance artists--Panam Percy Paul and Osinachi Kalu. Though the texts were drawn randomly, equal number were selected from the song texts of the two artists to ensure representativeness. The texts were studied and analysed under two broad headings "the lexical and syntactic".

Data Analysis

The corpus of the study consisted of 10 texts selected randomly from the songs texts performed by two prominent Christian performance artists- Panam Percy Paul and Osinachi Kalu. The texts were read and scrutinized in order to identify the significant syntactic features. The analysis therefore was done under the two headings.

Syntactic Features

Syntax as highlighted in the section on conceptual clarification refers to arrangement of words to form larger grammatical units, that is, phrases and sentences. Through combining words according to the grammatical rules of a language, users of a language communicate effectively in a given context. The following are examples of significant syntactic features identified from the texts in the corpus of this study:

Simple sentences

A simple sentence consists of one main verb and conveys one idea. Fakuade (2000) defines a simple sentence as a sentence that has one clause beginning with a noun group called the subject, one finite verb, which may be followed by a noun group or adjective. A simple sentence in this sense communicates only one idea. It is therefore straight forward and easy to comprehend by the reader or the listener. The following are examples:

The presence of the Lord
 The power of the Lord is in this place
 The anointing of the Lord is in this place.
 The Glory of the Lord is this place.
 Text 8

You are my shepherd
 You are my guide
 You are the Lord of my life
 You are my King
 You are my increase

You are my song.
 Text 9

The two excerpts above consist of series of simple sentences. The parallel structures in excerpt one are simple sentences. They depict the worshipper's strong belief, acceptance and conviction which imply that God is everything to the worshipper. The uses of the parallel structures intensify the worshipper's strong conviction about the power of God. The use of the parallel structures also places the worshipper low and uplifts God, who is the patron in praise. In the second excerpt, the simple sentences are also parallel structures expressing also the worshipper's belief and conviction. The worshipper is convinced that God who is being worshipped is in communion with him. The parallel structures also reveal the worshipper's intimacy with the worshipped.

Compound Sentences

Compound sentences contain two or more simple sentences joined together by a coordinating conjunctions such as “and”, “but” and “or”. This means that compound sentences convey more than two or more ideas in a single string of words or utterance. Beckley (2014) opines that compound sentences are formed when two or more independent clause are joined together by one or more coordinating conjunctions, The following are incidences of the use of compound sentences in the selected song texts:

He has called me His friend

And made me His brother

And that is why I know

I know that I know.

Text 3

I shall not die

But live and declare

Who is like unto thee oh Lord

The words of the Lord

Among the gods who is like unto thee

Amen.

Glorious in holiness

Text 6

Fearful in praises, doing wonders

We are special people called to King

And we have the staff in our hands

Who is like unto thee There is no one like our God

The earth and its riches belong to our God

Let us go **and** reclaim our land

None like Jehovah

Text9

Text 10

The coordinating conjunctions in boldface in the excerpt above are incidences of the uses of coordinating conjunction in the song texts selected. It was observed that the incidences of the use of coordinating conjunctions were sparse. This entails that other varieties of sentences especially the simple sentence is preferred. A simple sentence convey single idea which is by implications easy to comprehend than the compound or complex sentences. The additive coordinating conjunction “and” joins independent clauses that are of equal grammatical status, while the contrastive “but” joins independent clauses that are in contrast

The interrogative questions in the excerpts above are used to draw the attention of the audience on points rather seeking answers. In the first excerpt, the worshipper draws the audience's attention to the source of his salvation and strength. Confidently, the worshipper affirms that the power of the God he worships surpasses all power and therefore he has no cause to fear or to be afraid. In the second excerpt, the worshipper used the interrogative questions to declare that there is no one comparable to God. The interrogative questions asked are meant to exalt and extol God. The questions also evoke into the worshippers' minds' the image of a Supreme and Omnipotent God'. Hence, there is no one like Him.

Interrogative Sentences

Interrogative sentences ask questions that do not require answers but are geared towards making emphasis and drawing the listener's attention to a point. Interrogative sentences are devices of persuasion in persuasive speeches. The following are examples identified from the texts in the corpus:

The Lord is my light and salvation

Come now

Whom shall I fear

To the God of all creation

The Lord is the strength of my life

Lift Him high

Of whom shall I be afraid

Give Him all the Adoration

Text 2

We will love

And we will serve Him

Eternally

Arise and Shine

Children of Africa

What was hidden from all eyes

Has been revealed to you

The mercy of the God Head

Text 3

Come let's Praise the Lord

Come let's praise the Lord

He is Jehovah [talk about His faithfulness]

He is El-Shaddai[tell the world of His Salvation]

Praise him the Lord [King of Kings, Price of Peace]

Praise Him the Lords of Lords [His Kingdom will never cease](Text 9)The imperative sentence in italics in both excerpts are requests or invitations rather than direct commands. In most cases, the subjects are implied and not stated. By eliding the subjects, the speaker places emphasis on the action expressed by the verb instead the subject. The elision of the subject also heightens the tempo of the songs and depicts the speaker's total conviction. In the second excerpt, the elision of the subject shifts emphasis on the need to praise God. The God Head is addressed as El-Shaddai and Jehovah, the most popular names of the God of Israel. The last two sentences have qualifying statements which point out clearly the supremacy of God. God has dominion over things in both the physical and spiritual realms. The powerful descriptions of God as King of Kings and Prince of Peace evokes into the minds of the audience, an image of a supreme and Almighty God.

The speaker qualifies these descriptions with yet a powerful assertion that“His Kingdom will never end”.

Findings and Discussions

The investigation of the syntactic features of the song texts revealed that praise and worship songs as a sub-genre of songs associated with Christian religion has distinctive lexical and syntactic features. Praise and worship are concerned with the themes of adoration, exaltation and thanksgiving. The analysis carried out showed prevalent occurrences of simple, imperative, compound and interrogative sentences.

The syntactic structures of the texts have been identified as being mostly consisting of SVO structure. This means that the verbs are mostly transitive. The subjects are usually the performers of the actions depicted by the verbs, while the objects are the recipients of the actions. In other words, the sentences consist of the subject and the predicate which usually consist of a verbal group with other constituents like the object or complement. The structure of the simple sentences no doubt contributed to the straight forwardness of the messages of the song texts and their being easy to comprehend.

Another significant syntactic feature identified is interrogative sentences. The interrogative sentences have been used not to seek for answers but to draw the attention of the audience to the significant points and to commit the audience to judge the state of affair or the truth of it. The use of the imperative sentences identified in the song texts makes the tempo of the songs high, promotes the emotion of the worshippers and creates a sense of intimacy in spirit with God.

Compound sentences were also identified in the song texts but are sparse. The sparse incidence suggests that the syntactic structures of praise and worship songs are not complex. The few compound sentences identified are absolute direct opposites of the simple sentences as well as the imperatives. The compound sentences convey two or more

ideas in single stretch, the simple or declarative sentence conveys only one, while the imperatives usually issue commands or directives and have their subjects implied or not stated. The subjects are bound to the context in which they are used.

Conclusions

Based on the foregoing findings, it can be concluded that praise and worships songs as sub-category of religious discourse have distinctive syntactic features. The simplicity of the syntactic features is in consonance with poetic nature of the song texts. They are composed to be sung rather to be read. The syntactic features are appealing because the words are carefully selected to persuade and appeal to emotions of the worshippers.

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