

**A STYLISTIC STUDY OF THE LANGUAGE OF RELIGION;
A STUDY OF OUR LORD'S PRAYER**

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ABSTRACT

There is an interaction between language and religion as they have imbued significant impact among people. This study, a stylistic study of the language of religion examined this interaction as it concerns linguistic study of the language of religion. This study investigated the linguistic features of our Lord's Prayer from the Bible within the theoretical framework of foregrounding put forward by Jan Mukarovsky (1970). The researchers analysed our Lord's Prayer at the graphological, phonological, Syntactic and semantic levels of stylistics to investigate the use of foregrounding as a stylistic tool in a religious discourse. The research findings show that all the levels of stylistics were foregrounded in our Lord's Prayer and established the fact that the structure of language of religion has form and standard like language of other literary discourses. The study also revealed that Our Lord's Prayer as a sample of language of religion has different linguistic devices in order to foreground its theme of conciseness and preciseness, so as to make the message memorable. The researchers conclude that the analysis of our Lord's Prayer also provides valuable insights to prove the linguistic creativity of the Bible as a religious text through the application of the foregrounding theory. This work can therefore be of use to scholars who are interested in this corner of language behaviour to be equipped with relevant descriptive information to study religious language with single theoretical framework.

Keywords: Language, Religion, Religious Language Stylistics, Foregrounding.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Stylistics is a linguistic concept that cuts across all disciplines because every discipline has a way of accomplishing its goals. In other words, every field of study has a style. This way of language usage that is specifically prescribed to a discipline becomes a variety of language. Such varieties include the language of law, journalism, religion, advertisement, media, and so on. The unique way of accomplishing the goals of the above disciplines is through the appropriate usage of language. Language, as we all know, is a

medium of communication through which the norms, values, beliefs, ideas and codes of life are communicated to the people. It represents culture, religion and social norms of a particular society.

The Religious ideologies, on the other hand, reflect on prayers, bible studies, posters, leaflets, songs, charts, tracts and so on. These ideologies are communicated to human through the appropriate manipulation of language. This establishes the fact that there is a relationship between language and religion as language is the medium of transmitting religion to the society. This involves the transferring of religious information, feelings and ideas from one mind to the other for the benefits of the people.

The relationship that exists between language and religion is what this paper sets out to investigate the linguistic features which make religious language prominence under the different levels of stylistics tools. Stylistics basically is a literary criticism that links language and literature and often involves both linguistic and literary analysis. In fact, stylistics is seen by some as a 'branch of linguistics where literary texts can be viewed with linguistic eyes' (Babajide, 2000:122). If style is viewed as the way in which a given person uses language in a given context for a given purpose' then style according to Leech and Short (1981), is applicable to both written and spoken, both literary and non-literary compositions. With this in mind we can talk of the style of the language of religion.

Religious language has distinctive style which will be discussed in this paper. It is these features of the language of religion that must have deviated from the norms/style of linguistics which is going to be explored here through the tool of foregrounding. Foregrounding usually brings out the stylistic effect of certain special features against the background of normal popular expressions. It also helps to provide a standard avenue for comparing choices, so that the different aspects of a writer's style can be registered. Foregrounding is an aesthetic exploitation of language, which promotes;

a form of surprise to the readers into a fresh awareness of and sensitivity to the linguistic medium which normally taken for granted as an automates background of communication (Leech and Short 1981:28).

As far as foregrounding is concerned, the question is what prompts the author to use language in an exceptional way and not just what he has used. In other words, the greater interest of this work as a stylistic critic is not only the linguistically foregrounded features, but also the purposes and effects to the understanding of the message of the text. This is going to be revealed by exposing all the different levels of stylistics; graphological, phonological, syntactic and semantic to show that our Lord's Prayer can be characterized as a type of religious text.

Religion plays central roles in the lives of most people. This is evident in the zeal with which Christians for example pursue their various religious agenda to propagate their doctrines. Studies have been written on various aspects of religious language such as sermons, prayers, music, doctrinal texts but none has been done on our Lord's Prayer. (Ogunleye and Olagunju in Odebunmi and Babajide (2007) carried out a study on thematic structures in Isaiah 49. The paper analyses the thematic structures of Isaiah 49 in the bible and also considers the functions of the structures in communicating the messages of the text. The study reveals that the knowledge of theme and rhyme and their functions is germane to the proper understanding and interpretation of religious text. It also enlightens that thematic progression is a tool of organization of information in discourse structure. This study relates to the present study because Isaiah 49 and our Lord's Prayer are in the holy bible and so possess the same structure of the language of the bible.

E.T. Bababola, (2007) studied structural and syntactic differences in selected verses of three versions of the Holy Bible. He collected data from the three versions of the bible, King James, New international and revised standard versions. The method of analysis was description of sentence types put forward by Aremo (1995) He carried out a comparison of structural analysis of the three versions of the bible and found out that the New International Version makes use of numerous adverbials in order to supply detailed information about the message being passed across. The other two, Revised Standard and King James Versions do not pay attention to adverbials and this makes the versions difficult to understand.

All these studies are on the language of the bible like our Lord's Prayer but none is a stylistic study and did not use foregrounding in their analysis.

Clarification of Concepts

Language:

Language according to Agbedo (2015:14) is a human system of communication that uses arbitrary signals, such as voice sounds, gestures, or written symbols. Language is important in the life of every society and every individual because it involves every human activity and has many functions. People are identified through the language they speak. For instance, the English, Igbo, Yoruba, Japanese, and so on are so called, not only because of their geographical location, but by the language they speak. Human beings interact with one another through language which involves the transference of information, feelings and ideas from one mind to another.

Language oils the engine of social interaction as it is used for education and socialization. A child grows to be an authentic member of society because he has learnt the norms, values, cultures, and beliefs of that society and this learning is done through language. This is why the peoples, culture, norms, values, beliefs systems are transferred from generation to generation through language by word of mouth. Language which is the hub of human existence is freely used by man to say something to one another, play, teach, ask, agree, disagree, love, preach and so on. For example a handshake indicates that one is at peace with someone else a 'hello' is a handshake in words.

Essentially, apart from these expressive, informative, phatic and aesthetic functions of language, we also use language to direct and influence the behaviour and attitude of others. That is why Osuafor (2003) regard language as the strongest means of social control. In fact, language permeates the entire social structure, that the study of a people's language can be used to predict the social situations under which the language is generated. Language plays a major role in the regulation and control of society. It is possible therefore to use language extracts or texts such as religious texts, recorded conversation to maintain the socio-religious relationship of a people as well as the situational needs that determine the linguistic choices speakers make. For instance in wedding ceremonies, child dedication, burial ceremonies church activities these are socio-religious events of the people which need appropriate choice of words by language users to restore man to God and to maintain cordial relationship with the supernatural. Language therefore, is to form a social maintenance act among the people.

Furthermore, in the context of religion language is used to make different kinds of choices with regard to what we want to say, how we want to say it and the specific linguistic choices made to be appropriate for the situation. This explains further that the choice of words needed for a funeral, child dedication, preaching sermons, songs, charts, wedding ceremonies are different from one another. "This is why we must adjust our choice of words in different social situations to fit the occasion" (Palmer 2002:62)"

This is because language is the medium by which religious activities are conducted and this study looks out for the distinctive features of language of religion and how these features are foregrounded for stylistic purposes.

Language may be used for consolidating ideas such as when one repeats words in order to remember them. Things are created artistically through language just like in songs chants, drama, and poetry. Catharsis may be released off from us when we mutter some words to ourselves or make some exclamatory sounds.

The uses of language is inexhaustible, the focus of this study is on the interrelationship between language and religion. Religion is the belief in God as well as the things we say or do to express this belief. This interrelationship involves communication to function effectively so language is an important factor in religious activities. Language does not exist in a vacuum. It is situation which actualizes and humanizes it. Osuafor (2003:28); this is why most linguists and developmental psychologists currently regard the faculty of language as a defining feature of human being.

Religion

Religion crosses so many aspects of human experiences and has attracted various definitions and perceptions from different schools of thought. To the anthropologist religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish a relationship between human and the supernatural. The sociologist defines religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things. The psychologist sees religion as the acts,

feelings and experiences of men in their solitary mood as they position themselves to commune with the supernatural. The above definitions mean that religion blends itself with all aspect of human life. This is why Barbet (1990: 250), affirms that: “Religion may be seen as involving a feeling of dependence on a higher ‘power’ as providing an ultimate foundation for morality, or as encapsulating the truth about the universe and man’s place in it”.

This explains that religion cuts-across the barriers of human life. It incorporates morality through the recognition of a supreme power which provides laws governing and judging over us. For instance we are able to identify what is right or wrong by recognizing the laws in us which we received by adoration of God in human morality. Barbet further explains that, the reality which religious thought expresses is society, just as religion is a social phenomenon and religious believers are those who carry out its social obligations. This means that religion is an inescapable involvement of every member of the society. In fact people who are not all that religious consider it to be important and believe that we cannot function without religion. Similarly, Obilor (2003:28) thinks:

Religion is the whole complexes of attitudes, beliefs, practices, gestures rituals, emotions, convictions and institutions through which humans express their deep fundamental relationship with reality and not excluding the sacred order. (pg 28)

This goes to explain that religion is an activity of the society and therefore needs language to function for its very existence. However, in the context of stylistics and religion which is the foremost concern of this paper is how language is used for religious purposes. It also examines the distinctive features of linguistics in language of religion which is made prominence by foregrounding in our Lord’s Prayer.

Religious Language:

Language of religion is a register that represents the variation of language used in the set up of religion from everyday language. It is a language in which certain aspects of language are altered or suspended for religious purposes. Religious language reveals grave, sober, solemn, serious and spiritual discourse. The bible in its original form for example, is a restriction on one’s choice of English which does not normally apply to other varieties. The language of religion is bent to suit the phenomenon and personality of that which is referred to. This makes the language of religion to be ambiguous; this means that it has more interpretations than the surface meaning. This is confirmed in Etim’s assertion (2006:27) Religious language is meaningful only within a context. The meaning of religious words then can best be understood not abstractly but within the context in which it is used. The language of religion has its special linguistic features as observed by Crystal and Davy (1969):

The language of religion is so removed from the language of everyday conversation as to be almost unintelligible save to an initiated minority, and occasionally one finds a complete foreign tongue being used as the official language of a community.

In other words, the language of religion is sometimes esoteric in nature and could be fully understood only by the “initiated’ minority. This means that the language of religion is metaphorical in nature and can only be understood in a specific language environment.

Crystal and Davy (1969) state the different kinds of religious language:

- Liturgical language which is a prescribed set of rituals performed in religion for a well-known Being, for instance, the use of Latin by a Roman Catholic Church.
- The language of theology: This is philosophical, historical and non scientific use of language to portray a relationship between God and Man.
- The language of biblical translations: This, is in many important respects different from that used in many public prayers and has been the characteristics of some religious discourse, be it sermons, songs, worship and so on.

The language of religion today, is not limited to liturgical use alone in fact some English words that have their origin from the bible are being used freely. For example, “the widow’s mite”, “the good Samaritan”, “brother’s keeper”, etc. In Religious language, therefore, the terminology and phraseology can be evocative to arouse humour in every aspects of the context. This makes religious language important. As earlier pointed out, it is not limited to those who actually practise religion. “it is therefore of more general linguistic interest than is often realized’ (Crystal and Davy 1969:148).

The kind of religious language of this study is the language of biblical translations, the old King James Version (KJV) This particular version exhibits the characteristics of religious language and it is of a kind of language of the bible which is full of archaism (eg pronominal forms such as ‘ye’ ‘thou’) and complex sentences and sometimes euphonic in nature as in the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 9:6-12). It retains what crystal and Davy call “a certain grandeur and power of evocation lacking in other versions...” (1969:150). This version has elevated the poetic use of language which makes it easy for both saying and singing and has important phonological implications.

The linguistic features which uniquely identify texts as belonging to religious language are concentrated in the vocabulary and certain parts of the grammar. For instance it has abnormal semantic role played by some grammatical features like the vocative structures, which does not have a person identifying role to it. For example:

Give us this day. Lead us not into temptation. Forgive us our debts.

There is no person as (subject) attached to the verbs above. They are used as operators.

There is always the use of volatives, imperative and negative imperative sentences in this variety of English. For example volatives are used for wishes and prayers.

Bless him oh ‘Lord.

Hear my prayers good Lord

Imperatives! An imperative issues command

Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself

Negative imperative: This also issues command.

Thou shall not kill.

Thou shall not eat of that fruit in the midst of the garden

Sometimes the sentences are in clusters displaying parallelism of structure and in rhythm and in a period. (Crystal and Davy 1969:156).

Religious language is bound to display a number of theological terms. This is because the semantic structure of the language has only one referential item which is ‘God’ (the son and holy spirit) regardless of the purpose of the piece of religious language. It could be a statement of belief, prayers, sermon or songs.

Furthermore, in religious language, the graphological device makes use of paragraphing, spacing and capitalization, alongside the normal range of other punctuation marks. The initial letters of the lines are always in capital letters and end in a period. Sometimes it is used idiosyncratically for this variety. The reason is to split the text into clearly demarcated graphic units which may sometimes be a sentence. This is to make the text euphonic as in unison speech.

Stylistics

Stylistics according to Abubakre (2011) is the “aspect of linguistics which deals with occasions of distinctive language use objectively by providing both literary and functional interpretation of such usage in literary and non literary discourse”. This definition connotes unique language usage. Crystal and Davy (1969) in their view define Stylistics as “the study of certain aspect of language variation and style”. From the above definitions stylistics concerns itself with what, why and how an author chooses to write.

However, language is a communal property but individually used according to needs and interests. The individual extracts from the stock available to suit his context of use at the point of need. The individual’s preference of linguistic choices in verbal or non-verbal form for the purpose of communication is called style. In this view Crystal and Davy (1969:9) refer style “as to a selection of language habits, the occasional linguistic idiosyncrasies which characterize an individual’s uniqueness”. The implication of this is that “style is individualistic, this suggesting writers’ predilections that are easily discernible and identifiable with specific writers and these predilections are all inclusive, from the choice

of words to syntactic preferences”. (Owolabi in Fakuade 2014). For the purview of stylistics style may be seen in these dimensions as:

- Style as choice; which is the characteristic choices that a writer/speaker makes in a text at various levels of language description.
- Style as situation; this is the context of situation in which a text comes to life. It could be physical, socio-cultural pragmatic etc.
- Style as deviation; this entails what does not conform to the standard which can be at any level of language description which is stylistically significant.
- Style as a man; this focuses on the specific features that are associated with particular individuals for example, writers, speaker’s idiolect. The style of Wole Soyinka is different from that of Chinua Achebe.
- Style as a period of time; this talks about the period a work is done, that is the time relevance of style, e.g old English and modern English.

However several factors can be seen as the determinants of a speaker’s or writer’s style in the study of stylistics. Some of these determinants are:

- **Field of discourse:-** This refers to the subject matter. It is one of the variables that determine the register adopted in any communication. Every discipline has a register which to a large extent, expresses its peculiarities for example, stereoscope, rigour, urinalysis, are peculiar to medical profession and words such as Holy Ghost, Trinity, praise the Lord, belong to the Christian religion. Therefore the field of discourse, which is the subject matter, will determine the style of what is said or written by way of diction peculiar to the field.
- **Tenor of Discourse:** This is the relationship that exists among the participants in a discourse which definitely will affect the style. For example a formal situation requires a formal language style irrespective of the relationship existing between the interlocutors. This is to say that there is no fixed way of using language. A person can demonstrate different uses of language depending on the addressee, the setting and the medium of communication.
- **Mode of discourse:** This refers to the means of delivering a message. In stylistics, the mode of message affects the style. It could be verbal or non verbal written or graphic. A good orator for example may not be a very good writer and this will automatically affect style of message delivery.
- **Contexts:** This talks about the language environment or situation. The immediate environment of an utterance incorporates setting and occasion. This includes geographical, social and cultural situation of language. People from a particular community for a example, may have the same norms, values and belief systems which are guided in their perspectives of existence through the way the main use language to fit their immediate environment. A writer or speaker is affected by context to make his language lucid and relevant which in turn emerges his style.

The above are determinant factors of style and Crystal and Davy (1969:10) posit that: ‘stylistics is the study of certain aspect of language variation and style. Anyanwu (1999:248) defines stylistics as a quasi-science which studies style using linguistic means. From the above definitions, stylistics is a discipline devoted to style. Babajide (2000) opines that “since style is the subject matter of stylistics we can actually conclude if there is no style no stylistics.”

Stylistics is of two types, linguistic and literary stylistics. Literary stylistics is the study of style in all works of imaginative literature. Linguistic stylistics is the study of all language pronouncements Wellek (1971). Literary stylistics is subjective in nature as it studies linguistic insights available in a text and the audience’s response to these effects, basically from the interpreter’s point of view. The distinction is that linguistic stylistics concentrates on the linguistic frameworks operative in the text while literary stylistics rests solely on the subjective interpretation of a text.

The analysis of this work is based on linguistic stylistics to show some linguistic features that would serve as a platform for a stylistic analysis of Our Lord’s Prayer. Linguistic stylistics has features of linguistics at the graphological, phonological, syntactic and semantic levels which are also used in this work to outline the distinctive features of the language of religion.

Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Foregrounding

The term “foregrounding” was first used in stylistics in Garvin’s (1964) translation of the work of Havranek (1964). Jan Mukarovsky, one of the leading exponents of the Prague Linguistic Circle, was the first to postulate the concept of foregrounding in his famous article “Standard Language and Poetic Language” (1970). Foregrounding is the opposite of automatization, that is the automatization of an act the more an act is automatized the less consciously executed. This is to say that, foregrounding generally refers to cases where the language is sufficiently deviant to draw attention to itself and thereby prompt interpretation of extra meaning. Foregrounding is recognised as occurring at all linguistic levels and common types are sound play, unusual graphical patterning, excessive lexical and pronominal repetition, unusual word choices, highly creative metaphors, parallelism, and breaches of the usual discourse structure. The functions of foregrounding can be various, including highlighting specific key points, producing thematic meaning, prompting an emotion/response, and yielding iconic effects. Accounts of foregrounding are provided by many stylisticians including Leech and Short (1981:14). Classify it as “artistically motivated deviation”. Though foregrounding is credited to have been referred to as the “de-automatization of linguistic code”. Halliday (1971) in Leech and Short (1981:48) defines the term as “the general name for the phenomenon of linguistic highlighting, whereby some linguistic features stand out in some way.

These linguistic features may come in form of repetition. For instance, repetition is a kind of deviation used for artistic highlighting purposes. In other words, repetitive patterns of linguistic elements are super-imposed on the background of the expectations of normal usage and so strike the reader’s attention as unusual. This is a device of foregrounding. This explains that deviation does not denote what is negative. Rather, it is a creativity that demonstrates the writer’s competence in using the language the way he does. (Dauda and Bamigboye (2014). “The purpose is for the writer to catch the readers’ attention for linguistic prominence and this is foregrounding. In fact it is a violation or departure from the linguistic general norms of communication by means of language. It is even said that the more an item is foregrounded the more it gets focal prominence in stylistic analysis. Foregrounding helps to provide an avenue for comparing choices so that different writer’s style can be registered. Foregrounding promotes a form of surprise to the readers into a fresh awareness of and sensitivity to the linguistic medium which is normally taken for granted as an automatized background of communication (Leech and Short 1981:28). So the primary concern of stylistician is not only to look for linguistically, foregrounded features in a text but also to recognise the effects which helps to the understanding of the message in the text. For this work, the purpose is to identify and analyze the stylistic features of our Lord’s Prayer which are foregrounded. These features will be analyzed on the different levels of stylistic analysis.

Research Questions

This study is based on the following Research Questions:

1. Is our Lord’s prayer a sample of a religious language?
2. What are the linguistic features of our Lord’s Prayer
3. What are the stylistics levels of Analysis foregrounded in our Lord’s prayer.

Data Presentation

The closest friends of Jesus the - disciples must have heard Jesus prayed many times but still in doubt of how to pray. But they requested to know how to pray but before Jesus taught them the prayer, he explained a few things to them according to Matthew chapter six verses five to eight, Jesus explains that we should keep our prayers simple. That God listens to us no matter how long or short our prayers are. He further explains that we should not show off while praying like those standing on the street corners praying so that everyone would see how great they were. But Jesus wants his disciples to pray in a quiet place in their own understanding, to present their needs, thanks, praise and also say what they are sorry for.

Our Lord’s Prayer is part of Sermon on the Mount.

This is how our Lord Jesus told his disciples to pray:

Our Lord’s Prayer (King James Version) Matthew 6:9-13.

- Verse 9 Our Father which art in heaven
 Hallowed be thy name
- Verse 10 Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven
- Verse 11 Give us this day, our daily bread
- Verse 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
- Verse 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, for ever – Amen.

Textual Analysis

The text is analysed stylistically using foregrounded regularities and foregrounded irregularities showing graphological, phonological, syntactic and semantic features of ‘our Lord’s prayer. It answers all the research questions.

Graphological Features

Graphology is the study of language’s writing system and distinctiveness or the unique uses of punctuation, capitalization, line spacing arrangement and predominant uses of commas (Onwukwe 2012).

The Bible, in which our Lord’s Prayer is contained is pivoted as a matter of fact in narrow columns visibly separated by space in between. Understandably, Our Lord’s Prayer cannot be an exception; hence its graphological characteristic is of narrow column. Graphological device of religious discourse is paragraphing, spacing, capitalization alongside other punctuation marks are given prominence. The initial letters are always in capital letters and ends in period. This is the pattern of our Lord’s Prayer which has five sentences which are numbered as verses that is to say it has five verses. It has short-line pattern which makes it to be like a poem. The initial letters of all the verses start in capital letters. The division of the text into short verses makes it easy to be read aloud as in music and to be recited in unison. This is graphological foregrounding.

Phonological Features

Phonology is the study of speech sounds and how they change in specific contexts or sound environments. It functions linguistically mostly in poetry to highlight the poet’s purpose or concern in a work. (Dauda 2012:67).

There is a lot of parallel items in our Lord’s prayer, parallelism applies not only to poetry text but to all sorts where there is deliberate manipulation of linguistic resources to achieve beauty and convey meaning. Parallelism could be described as similarity of features of in successive lines of poetry “it is also a characteristic of Hebrew poetry as claimed by Crystal and Davy (1969). There are so many forms of parallelism in Our Lord’s Prayer.

Pattern Repetition/Parallelism at the Phonological level:

a) **Alliteration:** Alliteration is the repetition of identical consonant speech sounds in a series of nearby words. For example

Our Father which art in heaven

Vs 9 Hallowed be thy name

Vs 10 Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven

Vs 11 Give us this day...

Vs 13 ... for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever – Amen.

In the above lines of our Lord’s prayer, the voiced dental fricative sound /ð / “Th” alliterates nine times as shown in thy, this, thine, they, father this is parallelism at the phonological level which foregrounds the significant pattern of our lord’s prayer which is to be followed by all Christian.

The alveolar, plosive voiceless consonant sound /t/ also alliterates ten times.

---- art is in heaven

---- as it is in heaven

---- our debt

---- our debtors

---- lead us not into temptations but deliver us from evil

The alveolar fricative voiceless consonant sound /s/ also alliterates eleven times.

---- as it is in heaven

---- Give us this day

---- and forgive us our de**bts as we forgive our de**bto**rs******

---- and lead us not into ---- but deliver us from evil

----- for thine is the kingdom.

The voiceless glottal fricative sound /h/ also alliterates three times as in ---- Hallow, heaven.

There is also an alliteration of the voiced alveolar plosive sound /d/ as in de**bt, de**bto**rs, day, daily, deliver, king**dom, done, and as seen in lines 10, 11, 12 and 13********

Similarly, there is the use of Assonance. Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in nearby words there is the repetition of vowel sounds in nearby words. Assonance as seen in vowel number twelve /ə/ “us” which is repeated four times.

The above shows parallelism at the phonological level, which foregrounds the significant pattern of a religious text which is being euphonic as in unison of speech. The sound effect gives the reader a deep sense of understanding, makes it musical and to bring the message to the forefront of the reader’s mind. This makes it easier for Christians to recite.

Syntactic features

In the bible, we technically talk of a line or verse which equates a syntactic category called a sentence or a sub-sentence category such as phrase or a clause. The bible contains multiple sentences. The pronouns are distinctive because of their archaic forms ‘thy, thine’. The frequent use of pause marked by comma gives it a serious and resonant tone. The text is poetic and as result does not conform to the rule of grammar as in sentence patterns. For example:

Vs 11: Give us this day our daily bread

V O A O

Vs 12: And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors

V O O

Vs 13: And lead us not into temptation

V O O

This is a deviation from the normal sentence pattern. In verse 11, 12 and 13 the main verbs ‘give’, forgive, lead are used as operators without a person attached to them as subjects.

This is a characteristics of religious language and it is foregrounding at the syntactic level.

Parallelism at the syntactic level:

Free verbal repetition:

Structures are said to be parallel at the syntactic level when there is instant repetition of previous parts of a text. For example

- Thy is repeated four times.
- Heaven repeated two times
- Us repeated four times
- Kingdom repeated two times
- The repeated two times

This repetition is foregrounding at the syntactic level which one of the features of a religious text and as rhetorical emphasis. This type of repetition also leads to musicality which makes it easy for the reader to recall.

Semantic Feature

Synonymous Relations:

When two or more lexical items occupy the same grammatical slot and share a general syntactic feature, we say they are synonymously related. This feature is shown in these words (lines).

Vs 11 Give us this day

Vs 12 And forgive us

Vs 13 And lead us not into temptation

But deliver us from all evil

The lexical items, give, forgive, lead, deliver verbs belong to the same grammatical slot. They all share the same semantic feature (freedom). This means that they are synonymously related and are parallel structures. It is foregrounding at the semantic level to show that our lives totally depend on God Almighty.

Coupling: These are structures which in naturally equivalent forms occur in equivalent positions. Lexical items are said to be naturally equivalent when they share common semantic or phonological features and when such items are found in the same paradigm. ‘The’ for example in verse thirteen – ‘the kingdom’, ‘the power’ and ‘the glory’. They all share the same semantic feature (+Almighty)

The kingdom, the power, the glory are coupling because they occupy the same equivalent positions and they are paradigmatically related. They items are all nouns and have the definite article “the” this is foregrounding at the semantic level to show that God is the owner of the whole universe in all ages and ends with a firm affirmation – Amen.

Contextual conditioning: When a lexical item acquires an additional meaning because of the context it appears, it is said that, the item is contextually conditioned. In the religious sample text Our Lord’s Prayer, ‘which’ art in heaven, which is an item for inanimate things functioning contextually as an adjective is referred to God. Give us this day and thine kingdom come. These items are personified

This is because ‘a day’ cannot be given to anybody and ‘the kingdom’ cannot come as if it has legs. But these items are conditioned to fit into the serious pattern of prayer Jesus Christ our Lord recommends for us to follow as we pray.

These expressions are metaphoric to show the distinct nature of the language which helps us to focus on the transcendental values and supernatural but also on the hidden aspect of the world around. This is also a characteristic of religious language as the expressions are connotative in meaning. This is semantic foregrounding. The prayer ends with a doxology which is an expression of praise to God for thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. This means that the kingdom of God will last forever and he has the power and the glory forever which takes up the first three petitions to our father. By the final “Amen” which means so be it”

In response to the disciples’ request lord teach us how to pray Jesus gives them the fundamental Christian Prayer. The Lord’s Prayer is a prayer of hope. The Lord’s Prayer is a prayer that was given to us by the Lord Jesus. Jesus presents himself as our model, and invites them to become his disciples and follow him, in humbling himself, and gave us an example to imitate. It is a template of a Christian prayer which is given to us by Jesus Christ himself.

Conclusion

Religion means so many things to many people but different interpretations of religion is not the interest of this study rather its concern is that language is the medium through which religion is conveyed. This paper has studied the stylistic study of the language of religion a study of our lord’s prayer, under the theoretical frame work of the foregrounding theory. The study reveals that ‘our lord’s prayer has form and standard of a religious text and has some stylistic features which can characterize it as type. From the analysis therefore there are many salient stylistic features of religious language that make it distinct from other languages. It is also discovered here that biblical text have different features that are to some extent similar to the other texts because all the levels of stylistic analysis are very much present in our Lord’s Prayer a sample of religious text. There is foregrounding of theme as well as foregrounding of style in Our Lord’s Prayer. The analysis of the study answered all the research questions. It is also discovered that the Lord’s Prayer as a sample of language of religious deals with different literary devices in order to foreground its theme, conciseness and preciseness. This is to make the message rememberable. The

application of foregrounding theory to this religious text is therefore a step further to the linguistic appreciation of a literary discourse.

Recommendation

The researchers affirm that the stylistic study of the language of religion is not exhaustive since it is only our lord's prayer that is used in this work and therefore recommends that the foregrounding theory can be used for analysis of other religious discourse.

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