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Relevance of Cohesion in Digitally Delivered Sermons among Christian religious preachers

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Abstract

The innovations in technology is providing Christian religious preachers in different parts of the world with a tool and a channel for reaching their members and non-members in different parts of the world. Preachers currently upload their sermons on social media platforms, such as YouTube, where viewers all over the world can listen to their religious teachings. These sermons, though bearing several messages, are logically delivered to ensure that meaning is not lost. One of the key linguistic devices that helps them achieve this feat is cohesion. The aim of this study, therefore, is to identify the use of cohesion in sermons delivered digitally. It collected data from four sermons delivered by two Nigerian and two non-Nigerian Pentecostal church preachers. These sermons were sourced from YouTube. Their audios were transcribed into text, after which it was qualitatively analysed through the theoretical perspective of Halliday and Hasan's (1976) theory of cohesion. Findings show the use of grammatical and lexical cohesions, which were achieved with grammatical and lexical cohesive devices, respectively. The study also discovered that the cohesive devices helped the preachers to make references, ensure clarity, show relationships, and connect ideas. It concluded that cohesion plays important roles in sermons delivered digitally.

Keywords: sermons, cohesion, cohesive devices, theory of cohesion

Introduction

Language is a system of communication that is very important in human society. It is used for delivery of messages, influencing behaviours, and persuading others. Language is used by different social institutions, including religious organisations, to make communication easier. One of the ways language is used in religion is in delivering sermons. A sermon is religious discourse that preachers, priests and pastors deliver to their audience. It is delivered during religious activities and can be broadcast in churches, streets, and, recently, the social media. Preachers use this medium to teach the doctrine of their religion, desirable morals, acceptable behaviours, and preferred attitudes (Akinwolu, 2021). Hence, it acts as the tool used by religious leaders to direct the lives and actions of their followers. Sermons can be brief or long. However, despite the length of a sermon, it needs to be logical and deliver a wholesome meaning. Faleye and Fajobi (2019) explain that the discourse are created prosodic features, such as intonations, changes in pitches, vowel lengthening, and stress, which enable listeners follow the preaching and identify the delivered messages. Adedun and Mekiluwa (2010) further identify the use of figurative expressions, especially metaphors and analogies, in sermons to ensure clarity. Akinwolu (2021) also states that the terms used in sermons always align with doctrines of the concerned religion. The observations of these scholars reveal different ways of composing sermons, however they did not explain how sermons coherently move from one idea to another. In other words, there is a need to find how cohesion is achieved in sermons. The aim of this study is to examine sermons delivered and broadcast on the internet in order to discover how the ideas and messages in them are logically connected. Specifically, the study identifies the kinds of cohesion in sermons, how cohesion is achieved with cohesive devices, and the roles played by the cohesive devices. With that, the study shows how preachers use the internet to deliver sermons successfully without creating confusions or ambiguities.

Concept of Cohesion

Cohesion, according to Guna and Ngadiman (2015), is a linguistic device that is used to connect words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. Galis et al. (2020) describe it as a form of bond created by utterances to show their relationship. Tywoniw and Crossley (2019) agree that it is not only a connection of linguistic structures but also a connection of ideas within a text. They state that such ideas may be scattered across several parts of the texts, however, the cohesive devices used in the text help to connect and bind them. This explains why Ahmad (2019) see it as a type of semantic tie. This study, therefore, perceives cohesion as the connection between different linguistic structures as a result of the semantic relationship they share. There are two basic types of cohesion. These are grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion (Fitriati & Yonata, 2018). Grammatical cohesion is the type of linguistic connection that is achieved through the use of grammatical structures,

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such as substitution (using words, phrases or clauses to replace a previously mentioned linguistic item), reference (a word that identifies or points to another word or entity in the text), and ellipsis (replacing a word, phrase or clause with nothing). Lexical cohesion, on the other hand, is built with words that are semantically related or connected in one way or the other. This type of cohesion is achieved with the use of lexical cohesive devices, such as synonyms (words connected by similarity in meaning), antonyms (words connected by being opposite in meaning), collocation (words that usually go together), and repetition.

Previous Studies on the Use of Language in Sermons

The use of language in sermons is a topic of interest to many researchers, who seek to discover how the preachers construct meaning with the communicative device. Among the researchers that have conducted related studies are Ajayi (2019), Emeka-Nwobia (2017), Ugot and Offong (2013), Okeke (2019), Obioma (2018), and Asiamah and Israel (2022). Ajayi (2019) examined the generic structure of Christian street evangelism through the perspective of Halliday and Hasan's Generic Structure Potential Theory and observes that the sermons delivered by evangelists on the streets of South-West Nigeria are made up with prayers, songs, greetings, and sermons. However, he did not focus on how these components are successfully merged to achieve cohesion. Emeka-Nwobia (2017) focused on the use of language in sermons to attract and retain members. She conducted a thematic analysis of selected sermons through the lens of Faircough and van Dijk Critical Discourse Analysis and identified the occurrence of certain themes, especially themes surrounding demonic oppression, witchcraft, family conflict, and poverty. The study concluded that preachers use language in their sermons to construct and instil certain ideologies. However, for such ideologies to be constructed, the sermons need to flow logically and the present themes need to be connected. Unfortunately, Emeka-Nwobia did not focus on how the preachers achieved this logicality.
In their study, Ugot and Offong (2013) examined how the language used by a church aligns with its doctrine. After studying the prayers and sermons of different churches through the perspective of Consumer or Gratification Model of Communication, they discovered that churches use expressions that align with their doctrines. This linguistic analysis reveals the use of rhetorical questions, tags, neologism, and code-switching in the sermons. Nevertheless, there is no identification of the cohesive devices used in the study. Obioma (2018) also studied the use of words in sermons through the perspective of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics without focusing on the use of cohesion in the religious discourse. However, he discovered that the words used in sermons show the socio-economic conditions of the country. Okeke (2019) studied how Nigerian Pentecostal church preachers use sermons to attract members. The study was anchored on cohesive, rhetorical and speech act theories as the theoretical framework. It was discovered that the church preachers use grammatical cohesive devices (especially substitution and reference), rhetorical devices (logos, pathos, and ethos), and illocution (directive, representative, and declarative) in their sermons. Asiamah and Israel (2022) explored the use of cohesive devices in sermons through the perspective of Halliday and Hasan's cohesion of English theory, which is the theory adopted by the current study. They discovered that the sermons were created with references, substitution, repetition, ellipsis, conjunction, and collocation. The studies conducted by Okeke (2019) and Asimah and Israel (2022) are closely related to this current study and they provided an insight into the types of cohesive devices used to create cohesion in sermons. However, they did not specify the roles of cohesion in sermons that are delivered digitally.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Halliday and Hasan's (1976) theory of Cohesion as its theoretical framework. This theory explains that communication if connected through the use of cohesion. It identifies two types of cohesion, which are grammatical and lexical cohesion. They explain that grammatical cohesion is achieved when grammatical cohesive devices, such as reference, substitution, conjunction and ellipsis are used. However, lexical cohesion is achieved with the use lexical cohesive devices, which include synonyms, antonyms, metonyms, hyponyms, collocations, and repetitions.

Reference is the linguistic structure that is used to create a semantic relation between ideas, words, phrases, and sentences so that the full interpretation of one is found in another. It includes personal pronouns (words used in place of a noun), comparative reference (words that show similarities and differences), and demonstrative reference (words that show the position of an item). Substitution is a word, phrase or sentence that is used to replace another previously mentioned linguistic item while ellipsis is the omission of a linguistic item or the replacement of a word, phrase or clause with nothing.

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Conjunction is a word used basically to join other words, phrases, clauses, sentences or paragraphs. Synonyms are words that share similar meanings; antonyms are words that share opposite meanings; metonyms are components of an item that is used to represent the whole; and hyponyms are words that indicate specificity by stating the member of a broader class. Furthermore, collocation are words that usually occur together and repetition (sometimes referred to as reiteration) is the reoccurrence of a specific word, phrase, clause or sentence within a text. The perspective of Halliday and Hasan's theory of cohesion provides this study with the perspective for examining the selected sermons to identify the type of cohesion used by the preachers to deliver them. With that, the study is able to discover how the preachers successfully make their sermons meaningful to their audience.

Research Methodology

The data for this study were collected from four sermons that were delivered by four different Pentecostal church pastors - Joel Osteen (of Lakewood Church), Kenneth Copeland (of Eagle Mountain International Church), Paul Enenche (of Dunamis International Gospel Centre), and David Oyedepo (of Living Faith Church Worldwide). These pastors were purposively selected because they have large followership, which the researchers believe is as a result of the inspirations from their sermons. The selected sermons were downloaded from their official YouTube accounts and then transcribed into texts to enable in-depth analysis. Qualitative analysis method was adopted and Halliday and Hasan's Theory of Cohesion in English provided the theoretical perspective for conducting the analysis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The presentation and analysis of data is segmented into two parts to capture the use of grammatical and lexical cohesion.

Grammatical Cohesion in Selected Sermons

Table 1 presents examples of sentences that formed grammatical cohesion in the sermons. They reveal that the preachers achieved this type of cohesion with grammatical cohesive devices, such as references, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction.

Table 1: Grammatical Cohesive Devices in Selected Sermons

s/n	Excerpts	Preacher	Cohesive Device
1.	*They* were satisfied, *they* had something to eat, but God wasn't satisfied. *He* was taking *them* into a land flowing with milk and honey	Osteen	Personal reference
2.	If you are a good person, intending to do good with *more* money, you can do *more than* without it	Enenche	Comparative reference
3.	And today, many sitting down *here* are partakers of *that* prophetic mandate and many more are coming into it today	Oyedepo	Demonstrative reference
4.	He has enough money to start the work and no loan from any bank.	Enenche	Ellipsis
5.	Kingdom prosperity is a walk, not a game	Oyedepo	Ellipsis
6.	money affects the quality of *human* life… it affects the quality of *man's* worth life	Enenche	Substitution
7.	He had to stop what was working to force you to stretch so you can come into greater *provision*, greater *favour*	Osteen	Substitution
8.	even though he was rich, *yet* for your sake *and* my sake, he became poor	Oyedepo	Conjunction
9	Jesus went to the cross to avert every curse, *therefore*, the curse of poverty on your family linage is broken forever.	Oyedepo	Conjunction
10	determine how you want to touch human lives *first*, *then* you can go for the money that will help you to do it	Enenche	Conjunction

The person reference (no. 1) captured on the table shows how personal pronouns (in bold) are used as cohesive devices. The pronouns, 'they' and 'them', were used to refer to the Israelites, who were mentioned in a previous sentence, while

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the pronoun, 'he', was used to refer to 'God'. The comparative references (no. 2) show the degree of similarities and difference between the ideas the preacher was describing while demonstrative references (no. 3) act as the pointers of what the preacher was referring to. The ellipsis (nos. 4 & 5) achieved cohesion by eliminating the subject and verb in the second clause. In the case of substitution (nos. 6 & 7), the second words in bold ('man' and 'favour') were used to substitute the first words in bold ('human' and 'provision'). The preachers used conjunction (nos. 8-10) to join ideas (no. 8), show cause-effect relationship (no. 9), and reveal sequence of occurrence (no. 10).

Lexical Cohesion in Selected Sermons

Table 2 shows how lexical cohesion is achieved in the selected sermons through the use of repetition, synonyms, antonyms, metonyms, and collocations.

Table 2: Lexical Cohesive Devices in Selected Sermons

s/n	Excerpts	Preacher	Cohesive Device
1.	And they came to him *every day, every day every day*	Copeland	Repetition
2.	We know we have his *favour* but it feels like that *favour* has been taken away.	Osteen	Repetition
3.	*refuse* every form of addiction to money; *reject* every form of addiction to money.	Enenche	Synonym
4.	when he *authorised* him, he *empowered* him	Copeland	Synonym
5.	People that will *help* you and not *hinder* you	Osteen	Antonym
6.	But when you *sow* to it, that seed has *harvest* in it	Copeland	Antonym
7.	I was supposed to step up and pastor the *church*	Osteen	Metonym
8.	possess *kingdom* vision	Enenche	Metonym
9.	Father, we thank you *in Jesus name*	Copeland	Collocation
10.	it only defines *divine favour*	Oyedepo	Collocation

Table 2 shows instances, where lexical cohesive devices were used in the selected sermons. The captured devices are repetition, synonyms, antonyms, metonyms, and collocations. The repetitions were used for making emphasis while the synonyms, antonyms and metonyms were used to ensure clarity. However, the audience can only understand what is communicated if they understand the meaning of the related terms. Collocation was used to evoke reactions from the audience (no. 9) and to reduce ambiguity (no. 10). All these devices were used to connect meanings in the sermons.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis of this study reveals the use of grammatical and lexical cohesions in the sermons delivered by Pentecostal church preachers. The study identifies the use of references, conjunctions, substitutions, and ellipsis as devices for grammatical cohesion, thereby affirming the observations of Okeke (2019). It also observes the use of repetition, synonyms, antonyms, collocations and metonyms to achieve lexical cohesion and hence affirms the findings of Asimah and Israel (2022). Furthermore, the content of data analysis shows that the identified cohesive devices are used to direct the listener's attention to the item the preacher is referring to as well to show similarities and differences. In addition, the cohesive devices enable the preachers to connect ideas, reveal time and sequence of occurrence, show relationships, and ensure clarity.

Conclusion

Technology has provided an avenue for religious organisations to reach out to their members in different parts of the world. It is currently used as a medium for broadcasting sermons and conducting other religious activities. The sermons broadcasted on social media platforms, such as YouTube, are logically organised to move from one idea or information to another. This study identifies the use of cohesive devices to ensure the connectedness of the ideas in sermons as well as to ensure clarity. In other words, cohesion is important in sermons because it ensures that the audience receive the messages they contain as a singular coherent piece of information.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Religious organisations should use social media and other tools of the internet to broadcast their sermons.
2. Further studies should be conducted on the use of cohesion in sermons delivered by preachers of other religious sects.

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