

Research paper

A Stylistic Analysis of Selected Christian Religion Print Advertisement in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State

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Print advertisements, a denominator of social realities have been approached from varied linguistic orientations. Studies that have dealt with how religious groups and churches utilize print advertisement to elicit patronage are discovered as inadequate. Anchored on the principles of linguistic stylistics, this study therefore investigates some religious advertisements with a view to determining how meaning is stylistically indexed in religious discourse at the graphological level. Qualitative research method with the analysis of corpus of selected texts was adopted at the graphological level of stylistics. Data for the study consisted of a total of thirteen (13) religious advertisements which are purposively sampled from selected church handbills, posters and flyers. The language of religious advertisement indicates how people's linguistic choices are influenced by their religious persuasions and beliefs. The advertisers employ diverse linguistic features such as pictorial elements, graphological devices of italicization, icons, capitalization, punctuation marks and figures. The choice of the words is very simple, and there are elements of code – mixing. Also, a lot of images common to the Christendom are used such as the sign of the cross and the pictures of dove, clock and cup of wine, as an indication that the adverts are meant for Christians. The study provokes a deep understanding of how language gives expression to religious discourse. The advertisers' understanding of the people of the religious inclination inform their choice of language and semiotic features.

Key words: Religion, Language, Advertisements, Graphology, Stylistics.

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INTRODUCTION

Stylistics, traditionally regarded as a field of study and an approach to the analysis of texts using linguistic description is central to the process of communication in both spoken and written texts. This justifies Sebeok, (2000) comprehensive definition of the concept as:

a branch of linguistics which studies the characteristics of situationally distinctive uses of language with particular reference to literary language, and tries to establish principles capable of accounting for the particular choices made by individuals and social groups in their use of language.

This, therefore, gives room for the need to analyse the highly valued written flyers, posters or religious handbills, using stylistic methods towards identifying the various features that make religious advertisements unique.

Concepts of Style and Stylistics

Stylistics is simply defined as the study of styles. The implication of this simple definition is that style is both crucial and central to the study of stylistics. Since the fundamental concern of stylistics is with style, it becomes expedient to consider the definitions of the duo. Faniran & Adetuyi, (2017) believe that style and stylistics are concerned with the evaluation and description of the use of style. In the light of this, evaluative approach subjects a text such as religious flyer to a critical assessment in order to be able to make value judgements in relation to aesthetic quality following the house-style of the church. Descriptive approach offers a scientific description of the set of distinctive characteristics which mark a text out, as belonging to a particular genre or profession.

In essence, stylistic approaches can and have been employed to study non-fictional or non-literary texts like advertising, academic writing, ministerial sermons/speeches, news reporting and other semiotic regimes as T.V and pictorial advertising. This corroborates Kamalh Ikenna (2015) who explains stylistics

as an academic discipline is a 20th century invention that has historical ties with (classical) rhetoric the art of speech, an art concerned with the use of public speaking and as means of persuasion

The oral performance justifies the primacy of speech making in the religious domain such as religious rally, sermon and religious persuasion through evangelism that later translates to print advertisement.

Leech and Short (1995) refer to style as the linguistic characteristics of a particular text. Here, the study of style will examine the linguistic features of the text such as its lexical, semantic, structural and graphological features.

On style, Holman (2001:432) says it is *the arrangement of words in a manner which at once best expresses the individuality of the author and the idea of the intent in the author's mind*. The best style, for any given purpose, is that which most clearly approximates a perfect adaptation of one's language and of one's ideas. Style is a combination of two elements: the idea to be expressed in one's language or one's idea and the individuality of the author.

Verdonk (2001) observes that

Style does not arise of a vacuum but that its production, purpose, and effect are deeply embedded in the particular context in which both the writer and the reader play their distinctive roles.

It should be noted however that churches use language persuasively and creatively to achieve their aesthetic purpose so as to win them to a particular programme or the other. The style of presentation identifies the message as an advertisement through convincing information. The style will display in short form, invitation and prospects of the religious programme such as *Jesus is waiting for you; come and experience instant miracle etc.*

The abstractness of religious practice has posed a lot of controversies or difficulties which can only be solved through various forms of study or analysis. The peculiarity of certain speech situations has been suggested as supporting religious interpretation by some scholars famously evident in Augustine's conversion to Christianity (Boyer 1999). Upon hearing the words "take and read, take and read" spoken in a 'sing-song' voice by an unseen child from the other side of a wall, Augustine understood them to be a command from God. This absurdity calls for an understandable stylistic analysis of religious language to create the needed meaning of religious activities. Since advertisements of church rallies are sometimes contracted to advertising agencies or improvised bodies, there is a need to analyse some selected texts in their levels of stylistics which this paper focuses.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A lot of studies have been carried out on advertisements generally. Works by Odeunmi and Babajide (2007), Akhimien (2007), Oyeleye (1997), Oyekola (1999), Adedimeji (2002) attest to this fact. However, most of these works centre on speech act analysis, semantic analysis and a few of stylistic analysis. It has been discovered that there has been a dearth of studies on the analysis of Christian religious advertisements. Therefore, this study examines the peculiar style of Christian religious advertisements with a focus on print advertorials popularly known as handbills. This exposes the peculiar and recurring features in Christian print advertorials and the stylistic effects of these features. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by attempting to provide the contextual meaning of how language is used in print advertorials by Christian leaders.

Justification of the study

There are several aspects of the language of Christian print advertorials that can be investigated from newspapers,

magazines, outdoor rallies and with each having different styles and messages carrying out to the targeted audience. However, this study focuses on the stylistic features in the language of Christian print advertorials, thus Christian religious advertisements are selected for this study. The choice of handbill for religious advertisements is premised on easy accessibility and also for distribution. Since it is a linguistic study, particular attention is paid to the stylistic features and stylistic effects of the print religious advertisements. Also, the graphic elements such as pictures, use of icons and symbols are analysed since graphic accents as well as the stylistic effects and features combine to convey meaning to persuade the public to action. Therefore, the scope will not cover phonological analysis and speech act but graphonological analysis.

Methodology/presentation of corpus

There are thirteen Christian print advertisement flyers coded 'Figure1-13' which are extracted in the analysis of the advertisements from the selected churches in Ibadan, purposively used as samples for this study. The study adopts the qualitative research method with the analysis of corpus of selected church print advertisements at the graphological level of stylistics, such as italicization, punctuation, underscoring, capitalisation and other pictorial elements.

The language of Christian religious advertisement

Language is an important instrument of effective religious communication because it plays a dominant role in different practices and doctrines. *It has helped (and is helping) most religionists to relate their religious experience and awareness to wider human social experience and knowledge* Odebunmi & Babajide (2007:30). They further explain that it would be very impossible to express our religious beliefs without language. It is therefore necessary to examine how Language is used to communicate effectively in different contexts of religious interactions. In a constantly changing and increasingly globalised world, religions still play a significant role of influencing social and consumer behaviour. Most sects, on major highways, streets, distribute handbills, to attract new converts and many have more subtle ways of getting the public's attention. Therefore, new churches increasingly use language in the print media to promote or advertise their churches and programmes. Religious advertiser does a lot of activities with language by narrating relevant events and officially inviting the public to his or her programmes. Also, other important acts such as directing, instructing, asking, promising, assuring and pronouncing are also done through religious print adverts.

Language has a powerful influence over people and their behaviour or reactions. This is especially true in the fields of marketing and advertising. The choice of language to convey specific messages with the intention of influencing people is very vital. In essence, religious adverts are marked out by their peculiar use of language or cunning intentions underlying advertisement. These intentions, of course, have the tendency to deceive the target audience and lure them to act to the benefit of the advertiser.

Previous studies on language of religious discourse and advertisement

A good measure of scholarly attention has, over the years been drawn to how language is deployed in religious discourse towards the use of language as a medium of expression. Religious discourse, just as the name suggests, is unarguably the discourse of religious institutions. Studies on religious language have identified highly distinctive discourse identities in such domains as prayers, sermons, Bible studies, invocation and other ritual forms. Crystal (1987) identifies religious English as probably the most distinctive of all occupational varieties. And religious advertisements which form the source of our data in this study fall under this discourse genre because they originate from religious leaders as well.

Scholars studying religious discourse have only analysed religion and stylistic studies, religious speeches, style used to achieve the goals of the religious advertiser, or even live face-to-face studio interviews of religious leaders (Odebunmi and Adetunji 2007:6). The success of religious discourse in whatever form, is rooted in the instrumentality of language, the reality of which is informed by the kind of language a speech community uses for the expression of its religious beliefs in public. They are however conscious of the fact that, they must succeed in attracting the targeted audience due to their selective choice of words. Religious world often try to device some well-tried strategies; the most potent of which is, unarguably the manipulation often to inform, persuade, impress, and attract the audience to attend a particular programme or the other.

Crystal and Davy (1969), deploys the use of language in religious discourse which has to be selective for a general or liturgical context. He further explains that whether one believes in the language or not, the fact still remains that its style has cultural function and a linguistic impart which is generalizable beyond the original religious context in which it appears. Religious language is not limited actually to those who practise religion because one must fully understand the

primary purpose and meaning of such language within its own context.

The work of Lamidi (2004:197) on 'Language of religion' is situated within the context of Nigerian religious discourse, where Islam, Christianity and Africa Traditional Religion are the most popular religions. Thus, only the first two have extremely large number of adherents and he explains that the first distinguishing feature of the language of religion is its simplicity, which is possible through the choice of ordinary words which the average user can comprehend. The choice of words makes it easy for many people who understand the target language to read the religious books and get the fact without being stressed.

Religious advertisement and religious discourse have a lot to do with religion; hence, it is reasonable to start any discussion on religious advert from the concept of religion which is the domain for which we situate this study. The term, religious advertisement, is very difficult to define owing to the fact that it is difficult to encounter works that specifically address religious adverts (Odebunmi and Adetunji 2007:6). Although some works have been done on religious discourse, much is yet to be done on religious adverts.

Also, what is common to all religious adverts is the use of catchy words to persuade audience and to attract people. The use of phrase is prominent in religious handbills, posters, flyers for economy of space, but once the target audience sees it, they can understand. Thus, the use of ambiguity in a text poses difficulty for the reader to interpret. While not many sects lease billboards alongside major highways to attract new converts, many have more subtle ways of getting the public attention. The new religions and cults are increasingly using the media to promote their causes and bolster their ranks.

According to an online article on religious adverts written by CRI statement, new religious movements have long made use of the media to promote their messages and gain credibility. Herbert W. Armstrong, the founder of the Worldwide Church of God, began preaching on a small radio station in Oregon in 1934. He quickly expanded through his '*The World Tomorrow radio and television shows*', and added magazines such as '*The Plain Truth*'. By 1985 the church annual income exceeded \$140 million, according to February 1986 issue of '*Christianity Today*'.

Discussion of Data Analysis

The following stylistic features are prominent in the selected Christian religious print advertisements as reflected in the analysed data:

Graphological features are visual devices described by Chandler (2002), quoting crystal and Davy (1969:18), as the analogous study of a language's writing system or orthography as seen in the various kinds of handwriting or topography. Graphology transcends orthography, hence refers to the whole writing system; punctuations, capitalizations, spacing, italicisation, underlining, unusual font lettering and all sorts of signs and symbols used uniquely to demand attention of the reader or analyst. The choice of typography, including the way a text is laid out on the page, can provide additional dimensions to the meaning conveyed by the words and sentences. Ojo (2009). Another stylistic feature that adds beauty and meaning to print (religious) advert is the graphic production and representation of the letters. The graphic representation entails all the visible and projected items that are displayed in a text. Major graphic elements that are striking as far as lettering (which includes icon, symbols, letters and figures), is concerned are colour separation and combination to make some stylistic effects, spacing of letters, words and captions and so on.

Use of Icon and Symbols

According Chandler (2002:6), icon is a mode in which the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified (recognizably looking, sounding, feeling, tasting or smelling like it)- being similar in possessing some of its qualities such as a portrait or a cartoon while '*symbol*' according to the same author views it as a mode in which the signifier does not resemble the signified but which is fundamentally arbitrary or purely conventional so that the relationship must be learned such as language in general (plus specific languages, alphabetical letters, punctuation marks), number, traffic light.

In Figure 6 and 11, there is a symbol of a clock showing the time for the programmes. Figure 6 shows that the programmes is 11:00am and 5:00pm in Figure 11.

This symbol of clock is an indication of time for sessions of the programme. The morning session begins at 11:00am while the evening session starts at 5:00pm.



Also in Figure 11, there is a symbol of a glass cup of wine to indicate fresh and unique refreshment or drink because the theme of the programme is “*The new wine*”. Also, this is to show that wine is meant for people who are free of tension and with a pleasurable scenario.

The glass cup indicates the freshness of the revelation of a miracle awaiting the attendees. It will be a turn around for the people and they will be blessed.



Apart from alphabets, icons, figures and symbols are yet another means religious (print) adverts use to convey their messages. They use these elements to attain word economy and for stylistic effects. Icons such as bullets (with different format) arrows showing direction, circles, boxes and lines are the observable ones. In Figures 1, 2, 7, 8, 9 and 11 are bullets of different forms that are used to introduce features and subthemes of the programme.

Figure 4 and 9

Featuring

- Salvation
- Deliverance
- Healing
- Blessings
- Breakthrough

Figure 9

Ministering

- Elder G. Okinola
- Pastor (Mrs.) Okunola
- Pastor Oladosu and other anointed men of God

In Figures 7 and 11, a small arrow is used to inform the readers about the venue of the programme. It also depicts that the handbill is meant to inform and persuade the audience, therefore, intensifying the functions of advertisement in stylistic analysis.

Capitalization

The purpose of capitalization and bold print is to arrest reader's attention. Capitalization is used to compress the message. Bold prints appear in very strong, darker, clear, bright and thick forms; the purpose is to arrest reader's attention for readability, clarity, vividness and focusing, for emphasis that special attention is drawn. Consider the following texts:

Figure 8: Revival Programme

The theme of the programme written in upper case in a designed enclosure is to draw people's attention to the major idea to be focused in the programme.



From ridicule to miracle

The device being used here by this church is that they want the public to know that this particular programme is a special revival programme and not their usual monthly programme. Therefore, the phrase "A *special Shiloh*" is capitalized for emphasis so as to draw attention of the reader. Again, from the theme "*Ridicule*" and "*Miracle*". There is more emphasis on '*ridicule*' and '*miracle*' in bold print foregrounded for emphasis.

Also in Figure 11, **Living Faith Church Couple's Forum**

Theme: The New Wine

These Forum & New are foregrounded in upper case, boldly written for prominence and emphasis to attract the readers that the programme is certainly special and different from other Church activities.

In Figure 7, the theme of the programme is "**Owuro Ajumo Gbare**", the word "Gbare" is in a different font from "Owuro & Ajumo" and also in a bold print, which expresses the certainty of readers' expectation of miracle in such programme.

Figure 1 theme is this same **Jesus**:

Here, 'Jesus' is in different font and in bold print; this enables the reader to know the possible package of the programme.

Figure 7, 9 and 13 are also notable. **Theme: COME UNTO ME.** Figure 9, the theme whom SHALL I SEND and Figure 13, Theme: GOD OF FULFILMENT. Figure 7: 3 days POWERFUL PROGRAMME appear in capital letters. For instance, Figure 7 is an example of Yoruba words "Owuro Ajumo Gbare".

Italicization

Italicization appears as another common graphological device in most of the data. It is adopted at times to indicate direct speech that provides stylistic variation. Some examples can be seen in the following texts:

Figure 2: *Revival ! Revival !! Revival !!!*

TOTAL
FREEDOM
Deeper Life Christian Ministry

Figure 7: *His Glory Evangelist & Prophetic Ministry Inc.*
Presents
3 Days
POWERFUL

Programme
Theme:
OWURO AJUMO GBARE
Prophet Jolaoluwa
Guest Minister
Lady Evang. Victoria Odediran



PASTOR KUNLE ODETUNDE JESUPEMI
Host

Figure 6: *Honourably Request the pleasure of presence of Host/Pastor in-charge*

Figure 14: Iya Ijo

Baba Ijo
Minister in charge/founder
Baba Alakoso Imole II

Thus, italicization can serve the purpose of indicating what goes on in the mind of a character (either the audience or inventor) but which is not said or pronounced.

Punctuation Marks

Punctuation marks include comma, hyphenation, question mark, semi colon. The prominence of punctuation marks can be seen in the under listed examples.

Figure 4, 6, 7 and 9 are good examples of comma and full stop. e.g. Figure 7: Alimi Layout, beside custom house, Ire-Akari Estate, Idi-Mango, Doyin, Iwo Road Expressway, Ibadan. 08034274901, 08050575276,08024943357.

Here, comma is used to mark off the names of the street listed for the audience to understand. If the comma is not indicated, the address might be mixed up and this might cause confusion to the targeted audience. Therefore, it is necessary for religious leaders to express themselves in a simple form for their audience to know what they are up to.

The use of hyphen in Figure 4, 5 and 7 is meant for compounding the date.

Figure 4: 7th -12th June, 2017

Figure 5: August 7 Monday – 11th Friday, 2017.

Figure 7: Thurs 28th – Sat. 30th Sept., 2017

Generally, the comma separates sequential elements and it is employed for a very short pause while the semi colon is used for a pause longer than that of a comma but not as long as that of the full stop.

Figure 11: (a.k.a. Winner's Chapel), Ondo

The use of dots in between a.k.a serves two functions: Full stop and as abbreviation. Stylistically, this serves as a device for inviting the audience coming for the programme. Also, the word '*Winners*' with apostrophe after letter "s" is meant to express possession too. It is effectively used to attain clarity of the message of the advertisements.

Pictorial Elements

The value of picture in the texts cannot be over emphasized. Picture is one of the elements that are noticeable in print advertisements. In religious adverts, pictures are incorporated into the printed materials to attract the readers, project Jesus Christ and His gospel, promote churches and publicize pastors and church owners.

In our data, the aforementioned roles of pictures are well and more represented. Also, apart from these pictures, pictures perform semantic roles by creating a mental picture of the message advert, creating an imaginative nature of the programme or bringing forth an old memory in an individual reader. Nevertheless, pictures are often used as background for the message on the paper as the case may be in the text and to inform the reader about the people in charge of the churches to host the programme as we record it in Figure 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9 11 and 12. Every other text has one or two pictures that are loaded with meaning. For instance, we noticed in our corpus that pictures, aside from the fact that they serve as background in the adverts, they also serve the purpose of marketing. That is, they market the pastors in charge of the programme or other invited men of God who are already registered in the mental model of the public. This justifies the value of semiotics in stylistics.

Figure 12: The picture of the ministers holding a microphone is displayed. The readers, picture speaks volume on the

message of the religious advertisements especially the “*theme* of the programme “*power as of old*”.

The picture of an eagle here exposes the mightiness of God that will be experienced during the programme because the bird does not struggle to attain its heart desire.



Figure 7 and 12: Apart from the fact that the pictures in these texts serve as background, they also echo the themes of the programme. In the Figure, there are pictures of the cloud with water used as the background for the theme. The picture connotes the appearance of God recorded in the Old Testament, of the Bible in His characteristic manner of appearing to His people in dialogue.

In conclusion, some of the religious print media advert producers are always selective and cautious of whatever they project because each representation could be meaningful to the readers.

Lettering and use of figure

Gone are the days, when artists design posters and handbills, but these days, handbills and print religious adverts are designed on the computer. The computer has multiple types of lettering and design depending on the choice of the producer, nature of the work and probably the consumers. The configuration of the computer makes it possible to select (from the range) sizes of graphics. In view of these, our data have unequal size of letterings, ranging from computer font size of 10-35 (ten to thirty-five). It is noted that the size of the paper largely determines the fonts of the letterings. So, there is every possibility that a big poster will possess big lettering so that the reader can read from a close range without touching it, while a handbill will bear a moderate size of lettering that will accommodate the intended information to be sent. The lettering will not be too big to the extent that the words will be roughly jam packed and the lettering will not be too small to an extent that readers will strain their eyes before reading as we almost have in Figure 11, 12.

Figure 4: Bethel Int'l Reformation Centre of Destiny
 Figure 6: Jesus Is The Way Evangelical Ministry
 Figure 5: Last Minute Miracle Crusader

Generally speaking, the lettering in the texts are all well spaced (through some are more spacious than the rest) Figure 2, 3, 6, 8 and 10. It will be in variations depending on the intention of the advertisers.

Figure 3: V.D. Church Int'l
 Figure 9: The Redeemer Bible Church
 Figure 13: The Narrow Gate Evangelical Church

In addition, some letters and words are artistically foregrounded as visual device. They are designed in order to add beauty to the production, add meaning to the information and attract the readers. Some of the notable graphological features discovered in the selected texts are italicization, capitalization, pictorial elements, asterism, underscoring and all sorts of signs and symbols used to demand attention.

Figures are deliberately used to inform readers about the date and time of event and used in place of words for the sake of economy.

CONCLUSION

Though this study has a scope of graphology, it has shown the relevance of style in a religious print advertisements. The study reveals that the linguistic style differentiates a religious leader from the others through the use of graphological devices strategically to convey their messages.

They employ style as a veritable instrument in making their posters or flyers captivating and eye catching. This is done

to attract the crowd expected for the programme being advertised. Again, the use of Yoruba expressions in some texts is a strategy to allow non-elitists to understand the concepts of the advertisement in simple indigenous language. The effective use of visual devices of capitalization, italicization, punctuation marks, asterism, underscoring allows the advertisers to adopt the device of foregrounding in the graphological aspect of the Figures.

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