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Speech Acts Analysis of Prophecies and their
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Abstract

Purpose: This paper examines the speech acts performed in prophecy by Prophets in Ghana.

Methodology: Qualitative data was used comprising two prophecies and two directions of four prophets in the study. Appropriate data for the study has been elicited through audio recording of a T.V broadcasting of Prophecies by some selected prophets. The data obtained has been autographically transcribed and translated into English for easy analysis.

Findings: The results show that speech acts such as assertives, commissives, directives, expressives and declaratives are all performed in prophecies. The study also reveals that the prophets are perceived to be 'destiny changers' without them, their 'clients' will not have salvation (Quayesi-Amakye, (2013). This explains why these people rely so much on prophets and become inactive and helpless to themselves.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: The study is creating the awareness of the general public to how end-time prophets employ language to exploit their church members, for that matter the general public. Austin (1969) in his book, 'How to do Things with Words' talks about locutionary act, illocutionary force and per illocutionary effect of words on individuals. The study therefore cautions the general public to face the problems of life head on and not the problems of life head on and not to fall prey to these religious charlatans (Quayesi-Amakye (2013).

Keywords: *Churches, Prophecy, Language & Speech*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Language is a semiotic tool used in our Ghanaian churches to carry out several functions including the presentation of sermons, prophecies, directions, naming and greetings. Religious language is a distinct variety of language, used within any society (Asiedu, 2016). The kind of language a speech community uses for the expression of its religious beliefs is usually one of the most distinctive varieties it possesses. This paper studies speech acts in prophecies of Prophet-led churches in Ghana. It details how language is manipulated and brings out critical issues in prophecies and their directions.

The paper employs the Speech Acts Theory of Searle (1969) and Austin's (1962) illocutionary meaning for the analyses.

The airwaves are flooded with the activities of Prophets, which mostly thrive on the material plight of the great masses of Ghanaians. Coupled with the deteriorating national conditions, many people resort to the prophets and this is the rationale behind this paper. In theological and social science research papers, it is massively discussed at length the activities of later day's prophets. This paper drives inspiration from their work but differ in terms of theory and perspective. This paper solely looks at speech acts performed in prophecies and their influence on their clients in Ghana.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The study employs Searle's (1969) Speech Act Theory as its theoretical framework and supported by Austin (1962) levels of utterance meaning. In Austin (1962), the understanding of speech acts has three levels of meanings, thus: locutionary meaning, illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect. A locutionary act is the statement that is uttered by the speaker which has a given purpose. An illocutionary force is the intended meaning in the utterance that is spoken by the speaker which sometimes has a different purpose from its utterance. A perlocutionary effect is the effect of what is being said on the listener (Austin, 1962). The present study draws on Austin's ideas to analyse the influence of prophecies in the prophet-led churches in Ghana.

According to Searle (1976), a speech act is the use of language to perform several functions such as to promise, warn, prophesize and to express beliefs. Searle also introduced indirect speech acts which he defined as a case in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another, (Searle, 1975). The inclusion of indirect speech acts in Searle's Speech Act Theory paved way to unveils how people use language to accomplish certain tasks. He classifies speech acts into five broad categories: assertives, commissives, directives, expressives and declaratives.

Assertives are utterances that commit the speaker in various degrees to the truth of the expressed proposition. Example of an assertive is compliant, conclusions, assertions, statement of facts and boasting. For instance, 'believe in my anointing,' 'I cast out the devil in you', out; Commissives are speech acts that commit the speaker to future actions. A speaker commits himself through the

use of the first-person pronoun 'I' or 'We' (Huang, 2007). Examples are promises, threats. For instance, 'I will make your tears turn into laughter', 'I will change your destiny', 'I will put your enemies to shame'; Directive utterances direct the hearer to do something or change the hearer's cause of action. Examples are commands, advice, warning, etc. For instance, 'meet me, God's servant...'; Expressives are acts that express joy or sadness (Searle, 1976). For example, 'Papa 1,' 'Mama Yei', Prophet 1, 'you are a true man of God'. Others express their happiness by dancing, singing, rolling on the floor and naming their children after their respective prophets. Declaratives are special class of speech acts that bring immediate change in the world. Declarations can always be successful when they are made by the right person and at the right place. Members of this class bring about the corresponding between the prepositional content and reality (Searle, 1979). For instance, a priest, pastor, prophet or judge, can make these propositions: 'I pronounce blessing on your life, 'I sentenced you to two years imprisonment, 'what God has put together, man shall not put asunder' (Searle, 1979; Huang, 2007; Rosemary, 2019). Because of the insights this theory offers for the present study, I deem it fit to employ to analyse my data.

Prophecy is the prime example of religious language which has particular ties to religious dissent. As one of the oldest distinct modes of religious expressions, it almost constituted a proto- language of a religious invocation and went through a period of a particular popularity during the late Middle Ages. Prophets or Seers are known to proclaim or interpret the word or will of God in situations of crisis. It is observed that among the New Prophetic churches, the prophet's role is quite significant, and occupies an important place in the lives of the faithful who almost and always place their word on a par with scripture.

These prophets seem to have created a condition for such an attitude in their following. For in these New Prophetic churches, there is a huge emphasis on the prophetic word and the person of the prophet. The seekers appear to define their lives and future on the word of the prophet (Quayesi-Amakye, 2013). Also, they use scripture to underline their activities and practices. For instance, 'Jesus Saves Ministry', 'Power House', 'Heaven Dome'. They use these linguistic elements to encourage their clients to have total belief and trust in their person.

Wolters (2005) states that, the inability to cope with bad life has necessitated the patronage of the Prophet- led churches where ritual of transformation is employed to negate evil. The writer observed that, Ghanaians generally ascribe to the causality of misfortune to somebody, often the witch. Thus, it is impossible to encounter a prophetic figure or service without some reference to the activities of a witch. Hence, witchcraft becomes the culprit of evil causality which demands rejection. Therefore, the witches' activities cannot be ignored if people want to enjoy life to the fullest.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This paper employs qualitative research design in its analysis. The prophetic language of the Prophets is worthy of study. The qualitative approach emphasize detailed description of a

phenomenon, (Reinard 1994). This paper investigates speech acts in prophecies and language of directions of the prophets in Prophet-Led Churches.

The data were speech acts exploited in prophecies by four (4) selected Prophets in some of the Prophet –Led Churches or Ministries in Ghana. The researcher recorded two (2) prophecies and two (2) directions from these prophets on TV stations for analysis. They were randomly selected since they use similar language in their operations. The directions were of two types; prophetic direction, ‘Akwankyerε’ and directing the clients to their worship centres.

The data recorded and analysed was the directions to the worship centre since the prophetic directions were not disclosed on air. The direction to the worship centre were also of two types: one with objects and the other without objects.

The data were recorded by an android cell phone across the selected TV stations and orthographically transcribed and translated into the English language for analysis. However, most of the utterances were transliterated, code mixed and code switched to reflect the original expressions of these prophets. The researcher analysed the prophecies before the directions to the worship centre and their influence on the individual and the economy.

The approach was qualitative content analysis. It is the interpretation of language in the context of use, (McCarthy, 2000). The data was categorised into two phases; prophecies and directions respectively. Two prophecies were recorded and analysed. Two directions were also recorded and analysed; this phase is focused on the manipulation of language and its influence on their clients in society.

In all, the data were made up of four texts; two prophecies and two directions across the selected TV stations by four (4) prophets.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This part of the paper analyses the data and discusses the findings. The study is sought to unveil: the kinds of speech acts exploited in Prophet Led Churches. It draws attention to the effects of language manipulation by these prophets on their clients as well as the socio-economic, religious, and political development in Ghana. The researcher seeks to caution that the way to understand religious language is not try to apply some metaphysical classifications of possible forms of discourse as it is done in scientific circles (Wittgenstein, 1992. p, 163). Religious statements have a propositional content which may be true, descriptive and factual and so on, depending upon how people react to activities of faith.

4.1 Analysis of Speech Acts in the Two Prophecies and their influence

In the first prophecy, the prophet made use of three speech acts which are assertive, directives and commissives. In the first part of the first prophecy, the prophet mentioned certain things that has happened in the life of the client which were confirmed to be facts by the client. Searle (1979) says

an assertive is an utterance that commits the speaker in various degrees to the truth of the expressed proposition. From the data, the prophet started with some interrogatories: ‘who came on to the land and was fighting you?’ ‘A certain man’. The client replied. The prophet says, ‘I can see something moving in your body’. The client says, ‘it is true’. The prophet goes on to say, ‘that man kept something inside the land and that thing is causing you to fall sick...’. ‘Your heart is heavy and you cannot sleep in the night?’ ‘And you thought it was ordinary?’. These were facts as was confirmed by the client. This shows that the insights of the prophet were true assertions about the client.

After these assertions, the prophet exploited directive acts. Searle (1976) says directives are a category of speech acts that directs or informs the addressee to do something or change the addressee’s cause of action. The data reveals the prophet’s advice on what the supposed landowner did and said on the land and that is causing the sickness in the client. The prophet says, ‘the supposed landowner kept something inside the land and that thing is causing his client to fall sick but he thought it was ordinary’. This is meant to change the client’s cause of action from ordinary sickness to spiritual sickness. The prophet says, ‘I can see in the spiritual realms: ‘I saw a shape with two heads and when I asked God, he told me that somebody has bribed it to kill you’. This is another statement that is meant to change the client’s cause of action to think of ‘causal factor’ (Amakye, 2013). But the prophet assures him; ‘you are lucky to come here on time’. ‘You are free, hence forth. The prophet changed the client’s mind set to think that the choice he made by coming to his (the prophet) place was the one sure way of gaining salvation and deliverance. The prophet concluded that prophecy by employing a declarative. Declaratives are successful only when they are made by the right person in the right place (Searle, 1979, P, 16).

They are normally performed by someone in authority (Searle, 1971). The prophet now says, “I stand in the name of Jesus to cancel any spiritual covenant that has caused these sicknesses. This statement was pronounced by an anointed prophet of God and in the chapel. It’s therefore bridged the propositional content and reality by faith. After that declaration, he says, ‘Papa’, ‘it is over, ‘you are now free,’ ‘you will come back and testify to the glory of God’. This shows the illocutionary force of the declaration that has bridged the propositional content and reality, (Austin 1962). The man came there sick but leaves there healthy. This makes the client believe in the person of the prophet. He therefore becomes helpless on his own.

In the second prophecy, the Prophet calls out a maiden and says, ‘there is an inheritance in the form of a stool in your house’. ‘Yes’. Replied the lady. The Prophet says, ‘that stool is preventing anyone who is interested in you and wants to marry you’. ‘The stool is also causing your failure in exams and any kind of help that somebody intends to help you’. The lady says, ‘it is true’. These are facts as confirmed by the lady. All the things he pointed out about the lady were true. After that, he says, ‘it is time for anything that is blocking your success, in the name of Jesus, ‘I cast it out’, ‘Say Amen’. ‘From today on wards, ‘you are free; ‘the way has opened for you’, OK?’ From

the above, the Prophet exploited commissives and declaratives to set the maiden free and assure her of success in the future. He told the maiden that the way has now opened. The prophet (speaker) is committing himself with the maiden that there will be no more promise and fail. She's free. This implies that, going forward, the lady will never encounter helplessness of any form, be it marriage, work or business.

In both prophecies, none of the prophets diagnosed a psychiatric, psychological, or a social problem of their clients. Both of them attributed their clients' problems to the wicked one. Therefore, their clients do not see the need to do anything to solve their own problems but to look up to the prophet for their deliverance. This has a negative influence on the client and the development of the economy.

4.2 Analysis of Directions and their influence

The directions to the worship centre were of two types:

1. There is a type that the prophet shows the way to the worship centre and
2. There is a type in which the prophet asked the client to come along with an object to tell their fortune or destiny (hyebre). The data captured the two sides. However, it does not include the prophetic direction (Akwankyere) as mentioned earlier.

In the first recorded direction, the prophet says, 'meet me, 'the servant of God at 'A' chapel, Kumasi'. 'Tell somebody to tell somebody that on this 'B' day there is 'A' chapel, Kumasi'. If one observes the pragmatic implications of the imperatives, they are not mere descriptions but performative verbs, (Embugushiki, 2010). He is commanding and redirecting the interested public to 'meet him' and to 'tell somebody'. That is a directive meant to change the listener's direction and course of thinking. Directives change a listener's direction (Searle, 1969). This type of speech act includes commands, advice, request and warning. He goes on to say, 'tell somebody to tell somebody'. The perlocutionary effect is that the prophet is not only commanding someone to stop any other activity but also order someone to tell another, (Austin, 1962). Getting towards the middle of that direction, the prophet employed interrogatives which are also meant to make their clients to believe in their person: 'Are you suffering in life?' 'Is somebody haunting you?' 'Are you sick?', 'You are frustrated?' 'Do you want God to give you a helper?' 'Do you want to marry?' 'You want a child?' 'What do you want?' The prophet used these interrogatives to touch on the likely problems of the vulnerable public to give him audience and to come and worship with him instead of engaging themselves in any productive economic venture. At the concluding part of this direction, the prophet employed a request: A request is the use of language by a speaker to ask of something from a hearer (Searle, 1969). He says: 'meet me at B-chapel, Kumasi,' 'and God will pass through me and save you'. This is different from an advice.

For a request, the speaker asks of something from a hearer but for advice, the hearer has a choice to choose from, what is best for him/her. Therefore, the prophet requested the interesting public to

come to his prayer ministry that will solve their suffering. Quayesi-Amakye (2013 p.165) says, 'Believe in God and you shall stand firm, believe in his prophets and you shall prosper' (2 Chron. 20:20b). This request is to make the public believe in him and go to worship in his ministry. He concluded this direction by giving them the times of meetings and the assurance of God to set them free. E.g., 'Meet me this Wednesday and every other Wednesday, 8: 00'. 'You can come and sleep over the Tuesday night and the following day, Wednesday, you will see wonders. These utterances have perlocutionary effects on their clients (Austin, 1962). It makes them put their total trust in the prophet which renders them helpless to themselves.

The second direction opens on, 'meet me at 'A' community centre this 'B' day'. 'Tell that your relation to come with you and their lives will never be the same'. 'Don't let somebody tell you that a prophet is coming before you hear'. 'Stop whatever you are doing and come and meet me'. These verbs the prophet manipulates are performatives because they carry action to change the hearer's direction: 'meet me', 'tell that your relation', 'don't let somebody tell you', 'Stop whatever you are doing'. These are directives acts in the form of command, request, pieces of advice and invitations. Downing and Locke, (2006 p. 205) say there is no clear division between these acts. The only difference depends on the relative authority of the speaker towards the addressee. The prophet further employs commissives: 'By the time I finished prophesizing and upon getting home, your tears will turn into laughter'. Huang, (2007) says a speaker can commit himself through the use of the first person singular personal pronoun, 'I' or the plural pronoun 'we'. The prophet commits himself to turn the tears of the clients to laughter. He promises that all the things that the evil person(s) have planted in their lives will be destroyed when he finishes combating them with the 'red cloth'. He also made use of interrogatives to ascertain their problems and to assure them of God's saving hand.

Quayesi-Amakye's (2013) investigation showed that the New Prophetic churches or ministries prophets hold many things in common. This is revealed in the present study. At the concluding part of his direction, he says, 'come along with a bottle of clean water.' 'Those who are seriously sick, add one apple and a bottle of drink'. These are some of the objects used in prophetic ritualism. He promises to use these objects to give them prophetic direction (Akwankyerε) that would lead them to attain salvation. He also commits himself with these objects by assuring them that whatever the evil one has planted against their lives: in terms of work, marriage, business, prosperity and so on will vanish (ebe tu ako). These are some of the objects the prophets use to manipulate their clients as confirmed by Quayesi-Amakye, (2013. p.167 paragraph, 23). These types of directions render the people helpless. They only believe in the prophet of God for their salvation. What makes the situation worse is the fact that the little resources that their clients have is used as offertory, thangs giving (afɔrebɔ) to God leaving their families in more distress.

4.3 Findings

The study was set out to answer one research question; what speech acts are performed in prophecies and their influence on the congregation? This paper sampled two prophecies across some TV stations analysed. The analysis of the two prophecies showed that all the illocutionary acts theorized by Searle (1976) occurred but the expressive acts were the least. Their utterances illustrated the illocutionary acts of assertives, commissives, expressives, directives, and declaratives, but three acts were widely used assertives, deriectives and commissives.

The adjoining part of the question was examining the perlocutionary effects of the prophecies on the congregation. The data revealed the prophets' power over all evil forces of their clients and that they were the only instruments of God, through whom one receives prosperity, protection and deliverance from God. They all used the phrase 'meet me....,' and 'God will pass through me'...therefore renders the people who go to seek their help helpless inactive towards the development of themselves and society.

4.4 Summary and Conclusion

The general aim of the study was to conduct a speech act analysis of prophecies in Prophet- Led Churches or Ministries. In light of this, the study sought to address one major concern. The data was discussed and the content analysis revealed the performative function of language and how it influences the life of their congregation. The study employed qualitative content analysis to reveal the speech acts exploited in prophecies and the negative repercussions on society: it will help the destitute in society to identify truth from falsehood. This study will help these prophets to redesign proper ways or prognostic and diagnostic formulae to entail and integrate national development, and discourage inaction, laziness, and engineer in clients the spirit of' innovation and initiative to confront life head on.

5.0 RECOMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following:

1. The government should support the vulnerable with soft loans to build their capacity and make them self-reliant to reduce the over dependence on 'men of God' as asserted by Quayesi-Amakye (2013).
2. The professional counsellor, psychologist, psychiatrist, lawyers and medical personnel should be made to work and be largely available to solve the varying degree of problems of the citizens so to make clear the illocutionary force of language manipulation by speakers (Austin,1962) in this case, 'men of God'
3. The state media houses should extend their sensitization of fraudulent activities by frausters to cover religious content to reduce religious fraud as discussed on some TV and radio stations by crime officers of the state.

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