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## **THE LANGUAGE OF RELIGION AS DISCOURSE: ANALYSIS OF THE SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES IN PROVERBS CHAPTER NINE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the language of religion by applying a discourse-linguistic perspective to our reading of Proverbs chapter 9. The paper critically discusses the syntactic structures of the text provided, this include: words; groups; clauses sentences. The words are monosyllabic, disyllabic, trisyllabic and one polysyllabic word. Archaic such as ‘crieth’, ‘getteth’, ‘reproveth’, ‘thy’, ‘thou’ are also found in the text which depict religious language used in old English and they are used to achieve cohesion in the text too. The groups and clauses which make up the sentences in the text extend to give up the compound, complex and compound-complex sentences. The syntactic structures in the text also use pattern repetition in some of the lines and verses. For instance, “wisdom hath builded her house”, she hath killed her beasts”... These are seen in lines, 1, 2 and 3. Finally wisdom which is the theme of the text is likened to a woman who bears children. Moreso, wisdom is describe as a woman standing on the city streets, crying out her warnings to the people. The analysis is done using the systemic grammar approach. This grammar states that language is a system, and a set of options in making meaning. This paper further looks into religion, the language of religion discourse and discourse analysis.

**Keywords:** *The Language of Religion; Syntactic Structures; Proverbs Chapter 9; Discourse Analysis.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This paper interrogates the language of religion by using discourse analysis to analyse the syntactic structures of Proverbs chapter 9. The language of religion is a part of discourse because it represents text and spoken discourse. The language of religion is a type of language said to form a unique type in terms of its condensed nature.

This study on Proverbs chapter 9 from the Holy Bible will mainly feature aspects of the syntactic features which are the groups, clauses and sentences that run into verses. This study on the linguistic analysis of Proverbs chapter 9, will contribute greatly to the existing literature in the language of religion.

### **1.1 THE LANGUAGE OF RELIGION**

The language of religion raises ethical questions with a focus on the science of moral or sets of ideas or beliefs of a person, group of people in terms of practice of faith-based concepts. The language of religion is so removed from the language of everyday conversation, and often foreign tongue is used as the official liturgical language of a community or denomination. For instance, Roman Catholic doctrine is known for the use of Latin. Also Islam uses the Arabic language. Uhunmwangho posits that “in a religious worship, the setting is such that certain words central to liturgy of the particular religion will be opened to the congregation” (2000). He also states that the language of religion “employs a deliberate evocative use of terminology and phraseology which we must be alert to in order to appraise the primary purpose and meaning of language. This implies that the lexical items in the language of religion bring to the mind the deeper and concomitant messages that the liturgy is meant to expose.

In the words of David Crystal and Derek Davy, “there are three influences to bear in mind in the particular cultural and linguistic background to the language of religion. These influences are; the linguistic originals, speakability, appropriateness and intelligibility”(1969). Linguistic originals means that the language conforms to the sacral character, as well as the sense of the text in the original language. There are significant doctrines which are difficult to alter without an accusation of inconsistency or heresy being levelled.

Moreover, the vocabulary of the language of religion is extremely distinctive. The language of religion like legal language allows the use of archaism. For instance ‘hath’, ‘builded’, ‘reproveth’, ‘getteth’, ‘knoweth’ as seen in Proverb 9 (Bible, King James version ), the text used for the analysis in this paper. Also, Religious discourse is bound to display a number of theological terms, which provide the verbal basis for formulation of person’s beliefs (Crystal and Davy 1969). These terms are characterised with the appropriate use of linguistic structures.

## 1.2 PROVERBS

A proverb is a pithy saying that usually draws comparison between two forms of behavior in order to impart moral or religious wisdom to its receiver. Biblical proverbs are religious, but they focus a concrete divine revelation. Nevertheless their judgment always entail a timeless quality like the moral of a myth or a folktale. The biblical notion of wisdom implies acquiring skill or ability in the areas of justice and moral goodness. Proverbs are also known as collection of succinct, witty and pungent reflections on life. Hence, those who wanted to do well at court saw in this body of wisdom the very best counsel to learn on. The veracity of the foregoing is illuminated by the fact that Solomon who had a reputation for a wisdom that was pristine and unparalleled, was responsible for development of the Israelic court. It is argued that a greater portion of this collection of wise sayings while unconnected with religion, is basically a consequence of profound good sense. This is not to deny however, that buried in their depths is a belief that all wisdom emanates from God.

The book of Proverbs mirrors a society characterised by the triple evils of unhealthy competition, cynicism and secularism. A society that needed the wisdom of God for acquiring a disciplined insight, uprightness, justices and fair dealing; for teaching sound judgment and knowledge. The book reflects the fact that the surest path to discipline is the wisdom from above. The book of proverbs is a collection of articles about wisdom. It is in the old Testament part of the Bible. Its main author was king Solomon. The book of Proverbs begins with Solomon's advice to his son. Wisdom speaks in the first person and refers to the reader as 'my child, instructing the reader on various topics for wise living. The voice wisdom assumes different forms. On the one hand, wisdom refers to itself in feminine terms, using the pronouns, 'she' and 'her'. Wisdom describes itself as a woman standing on the city streets, crying out her warnings to the people. However, wisdom also identifies itself with God. Pursuing wisdom, is the same thing as obeying God, and wisdom claims to have been God's partner in creating the world.

Proverbs chapter 9 is one that celebrates wisdom as a hostess that invites humanity to feast along the path of wisdom, the way of perception that culminates in life, in contradiction to the impulsive woman; the attractive and lustful way, the way of the world, the way of disregard for the godly or the sacred, the way of indiscipline, the way which is devoid of an exit, yet pretends to offer the good things of life', condemns one to the vales of shoe (total separation from God which is the wisdom from above). In this chapter, we can conclude that it is a reflection of the general message of the entire book Proverbs.

### 1.3 DISCOURSE

Discourse originated from the Latin word, ‘discursus’ which means conversation or speech (Kamit Wisniewski, 1998). Discourse refers to a wide area of human life. But our discussion on discourse here is based only on the vantage point of linguistics; which include a linguistic analysis of the levels of language. Linguists notion about discourse differ. Some linguists claim that ‘discourse’ is used in reference to texts, while others claim that discourse denotes speech. Michel Foucault views discourse as “practices that systematically form the objects with which they deal” (1994). Discourse is seen with its relation to language as “any form of language above the sentence level” (Stubbs 1), and any form of language in use (Brown and Yule 1). The term discourse applies to both spoken and written language used for any purpose especially for communication (Uhunmwangho 92).

Crystal states that discourse is “a continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence, often constituting argument, joke or narrative”(25). Discourse is seen by Schiffrin as “any unit of language beyond the sentence which includes both dialogue and non-dialogue forms in their spoken or written forms” (167). To Widdowson discourse “is not simply patchwork of preordained sentential meanings, but as a dynamic process of meaning creation” (107). From all the definitions of discourse by linguists and other language scholars, we may submit that discourse refers to spoken and written language which is used for communicative purpose. This study is concerned with the written aspect of discourse as it is the analysis of a chapter in the Bible.

### 1.4 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Discourse Analysis (D.A) is a general term for approaches used to analyse written, oral or sign language use, or any significant semiotic event. Semiotics is a branch of discipline that is concerned with the investigation of symbolic and communicative behaviour. In modern linguistics, discourse analysts not only study language use beyond the sentence boundary, but also prefer to analyse ‘naturally occurring’ language use. A natural language, either in its spoken and written form, is a language that has a finite number of letters or sounds in it, although, there may be infinitely many distinct sentences in the language, each sentence can be represented as a finite sequence of these sounds or letters (Lyons 7). Discourse analysis is defined as the analysis of connected speech, and writing and their relations in which they are used. It is the examination of language use by members of a speech community. D.A involves looking at language form and language function and includes the study of spoken interaction and written texts. To Teun Van Dijk, “discourse analysis is the study of language to the explication of the structure and meaning of texts” (2).

Discourse analysis identifies linguistic features that characterise different genres as well as social and cultural factors that help in the interpretation and understanding of different texts and types of talk. Uhunmwangho states that “discourse analysis is the study of functional use of language, and can perform for us the useful role of interpreting not only spoken but written texts” (92). To Osisanwo “the study of the organisational structure of discourse is known as discourse analysis” (5).

In analysing discourse behaviour, two methods usually occur, one is to analyse how people manage their discourse behaviour both with respect to their cultural background, and their interactive goals at the time of talk, while the second method involves how to discover explicit rules for the management of conversational problems, such as turn-taking ( Schiffrin 56; Grimshaw 28; Labov130 ; Omo-Ojugo 40).

The two methods can be used in an approach to discourse analysis, and this depends on the linguistic – discourse involved in the analysis. These two methods can be applied to religious language discourse. The method of discourse analysis used in this study is that of how people manage their discourse behavior to that of their cultural background; the language of religion forms part of a people cultural background.

## **2.0 ANALYSIS OF THE SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES IN PROVERBS CHAPTER 9**

We shall now focus on our selected text from the Holy Bible.

- 1 Wisdom hath builded her  
house, she hath hewn out her  
seven pillars:
- 2 She hath killed her beasts; she  
hath mingled her wine; she hath  
also furnished her table.
- 3 She hath sent forth her maidens:  
she crieth upon the highest places  
of the city,
- 4 Whoso is simple, let him turn  
in hither: as for him that wanteth  
understanding, she saith to him,
- 5 Come, eat of my bread, and  
drink of the wine which I have  
mingled.
6. Forsake the foolish, and live;

- and go in the way of understanding.
7. He that reproveth a scorner  
getteth to himself shame; and he  
that rebuketh a wicked man getteth  
himself a blot.
8. Reprove not a scorner, lest he  
hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and  
he will love thee.
9. Give instruction to a wise man,  
and he will be yet wiser: teach a  
just man, and he will increase in  
learning.
- 10 The fear of the LORD is  
the beginning of wisdom: and  
the knowledge of the holy is  
understanding.
- 11 For by me thy days shall be  
multiplied, and the years of thy life  
shall be increased.
- 12 If thou be wise, thou shalt  
be wise for thyself: but if thou  
scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.
- 13 A foolish woman is clamorous:  
she is simple, and knoweth nothing.
- 14 For she sitteth at the door of  
her house, on a seat in the high  
places of the city,
- 15 To call passengers who go  
right on their ways:
- 16 Whoso is simple, let him  
turn in hither: and as for him that  
wanteth understanding, she saith to  
him,
- 17 Stolen waters are sweet, and  
bread eaten in secret is pleasant.
- 18 But he knoweth not that the  
dead are there; and that her guests  
are in the depths of hell.

## 2.1 SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES

The syntactic structure has the components of words, groups, clauses and sentences which run into verses. The lexical items are well selected; majority of them are monosyllabic, they include; 'give', 'to', 'wise', 'man', 'and', 'she', 'yet', 'teach', 'just', 'fear', 'Lord', 'beasts' 'by,' 'me', 'shall', 'call,' 'bear', shalt', 'thou', 'saith' 'him', 'not', 'shame', 'dead' and 'hell' Majority of these lexical items are also disyllabic, such as; 'wisdom' (wis – dom), 'holy', (ho-ly), 'crieth', (cri-eth), 'increased; (in creased), 'wiser, (wis- er) 'wanteth', (want-eth), 'getteth', (get-teth,) 'thyself', (thy-self), '(cornest)', 'alone'( a – lone) , 'foolish', (fool-ish), 'furnished;(fur-nished), 'pillars; (Pil – lars), (wo-man), 'city' (ci-ty), 'simple' (sim-ple), 'woman'(wo-man), 'whoso'(who-so), 'places' (pla- ces) 'scorner', (scor-ner), 'knowth', (know-eth), 'nothing, (noth- ing), 'hither; (hith-er) 'knowledge '(know-ledge) maidens' (maid -ens), 'forsake' (for- sake) , 'mingled' (min-gled), 'stolen' (sto-len), 'eaten', (eat-en), 'secret', (se-cret), 'rebut', (re-bute), 'reprove'(re-prove), 'highest'(high-est), and 'pleasant' (pleas-ant). While minority of the lexical items are trisyllabic, such as; 'instruction' (in-struc-tion), 'reproveth' (re-prov-eth), 'rebuketh' (re-buk-eth), 'clamorous' (cla-mo-rous), 'beginning' (be-gin-ning), 'understanding' (un-der-stand-ing), 'multiplied' (mul-ti-plied) and 'passengers' (pas-sen-gers) .Moreover, one of the lexical items is polysyllabic, 'understanding' (un-der-stand-ing). The dash in the foregoing is used to differentiate each syllable. The constituents of these syllables render easy rendition to the text.

The text also uses archaic words to achieve its cohesion and unity. These words include; 'hath', 'crieth;', 'hither; 'reproveth', 'getteth; 'rebuketh', 'thy', 'thou', 'sitteth', 'knoweth', 'whoso', 'builded', 'wanteth' and 'saith'. These words confirm the use of archaic lexical items in Proverbs in particular and biblical language of the old English, which Kings James version of the Holy Bible still maintains. The use of archic lexical items also differentiate this text from other versions of the Bible which use modern English The use of upper case in the 'LORD' in verse 10, line 1 is an aberration. It is also foregrounded because it draws attention to the reader. It also indicates the graphological features of religious discourse and the supreme nature of God.

The groups and clauses extend to give compound, complex and compound – complex sentences which represent the verses in the text. A compound sentence is one which contains two or more independent (main) clauses. It does not have a subordinate clause. The clauses in compound sentences are joined by conjunctions, commas, colons and semi – colons. Examples of compound sentences in the text are:



(1) “Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: she hath killed her breast; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table”.

The foregoing sentence is seen in verses 1 and 2 respectively. The clauses are broken down as follows:

- (a)           S           P    C  
               |           |    |  
 //Wisdom/hath builded/her house//
- (b)           S           P    A    C  
               |           |    |    |  
 //She/hath hewn/ out/her seven pillars//
- (c)           S           P    C  
               |           |    |  
 //She/hath killed/her breast//
- (d)           S           P           C  
               |           |           |  
 //She/hath mingled/ her wine//
- (e)           S    P    A  
               |    |    |  
 //She/hath/ also//
- (f)           P           C  
               |           |  
 //Furnished/her table//

2. “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning” (verse 9). The sentence is broken into the following clauses;

- a           P           S           C  
               |           |           |  
 //Give/instruction/to a wise man//
- b           S           P           C  
               |           |           |  
 //He/will be/yet wiser//
- c           P           C  
               |           |  
 //Teach/a just man//
- d           S           P           C  
               |           |           |  
 //He/will increase/in learning//

3 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding” (verse 10).

The clauses are as follows:

a                    S            P                    C  
                          |                    |                    |  
 // The fear of the LORD/is /the beginning of wisdom//

b                                    S                                    P            C  
    |                                    |                    |  
 //The knowledge of the holy /is/ understanding//

4 A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing (verse 13).

The foregoing sentence is broken down into clauses, thus;

a                    S                    P            C  
                          |                    |                    |  
 //A foolish woman/ is/clamorous//

b                    S    P            C  
                          |    |                    |  
 //she/is/ simple//

c                    P            C  
                          |                    |  
 //knoweth/nothing//

4 “forsake the foolish and live; and go in the way of understanding” (verse 6). The clauses are;

a                    P                    C  
                          |                    |  
 //Forsake /the foolish//

b                    P  
                          |  
 //Live//

c                    P                    C  
                          |                    |  
 //Go/ in the way of understanding//

5. “Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant”. This is got from verse 17. The clauses are;

a                    S            P            C  
                          |                    |                    |  
 //stolen waters/are /sweet//

S                      P              C

|                      |              |

b      //Bread eaten in secret/is/ pleasant//

The clauses and sentences demonstrate language use and most importantly, establish the use of syntactic structures in Proverbs 9. Consequently, the sentence structures in the text are well constructed for any linguistic analysis, such as we have done.

Further more, a complex sentence is one which has one independent (main or superordinate) clause and one or more subordinate clauses. Examples of complex sentences from the text, proverbs chapter nine, are seen below;

1      “He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot” (verse7). The clauses are analysed as follows.

S   P              C

|   |              |

a      //He that/reproveth/a scorner//

P              S              C

|              |              |

b      //Getteth/to himself /shame//

P              S              C

|              |              |

c      //He that/rebuketh / a wicked man//

P                      S              C

|                      |              |

d      //Getteth/himself /a blot//

2      “For by me thy days shall be multiplied and the years of the life shall be increased (verse 11)”. The clauses are analysed as seen below;

S                      P

|                      |

a      //Thy days /shall be multiplied//

S                                      P

|                                      |

b      //The years of thy life/shall be increased//

3 But he knoweth not that the dead are there and that her quests are in the dept of hell (verse 18). This is analysed into the following clauses:

- a  $\begin{array}{cc} S & P \\ | & | \\ //But\ he/knoweth\ not// \end{array}$
- b  $\begin{array}{ccc} S & P & A \\ | & | & | \\ //That\ the\ dead/are/there// \end{array}$
- c  $\begin{array}{ccc} S & P & C \\ | & | & | \\ //That\ her\ quests/are/in\ the\ depts\ of\ hell// \end{array}$

Consequently, a compound – complex sentence is one which has two or more independent (main) clauses and one or more subordinate clause. Therefore, there must be at least three clauses in a compound – complex sentence out of which two must be independent clauses. Examples of compound – complex sentences from the text are seen below.

1. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, whoso is simple, let him turn understanding, she saith to him, come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. The foregoing sentence is got from verses; 3, 4 and 5 from the text. The clauses are broken down as follows;

- a  $\begin{array}{ccc} S & P & C \\ | & | & | \\ //She/hath\ sent\ fort/her\ maidens// \end{array}$
- b  $\begin{array}{ccc} S & P & A & C \\ | & | & | & | \\ //She\ /crieth/upon/the\ highest\ places\ of\ the\ city// \end{array}$
- c  $\begin{array}{ccc} S & P & C \\ | & | & | \\ //whoso/is/simple// \end{array}$
- d  $\begin{array}{cc} P & S \\ | & | \\ //Let/him// \end{array}$
- e  $\begin{array}{cc} P & S \\ | & | \\ //Turn/understanding// \end{array}$
- f  $\begin{array}{ccc} S & P & S \\ | & | & | \\ //She/saith\ / \ to\ him// \end{array}$

- g           P  
          |  
//come//
- h           P           C  
          |           |  
//Eat / of my bread //
- i           P           C  
          |           |  
// Drink / of the wine //
- j           S           P  
          |           |  
//which I/ have mingled//

2.Reprove not a scorner, least he hate thee; rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee (verse 8).

The clauses are analysed as follows;

- a           P           C  
          |           |  
//Reprove not/a scorner//
- b           A   S   P    C  
          |   |   |   |  
//Least/he / hate/ thee//
- c           P           C  
          |           |  
//Rebuke/ a wise man//
- d           S           P    C  
          |           |   |  
//He / will love /thee//

3           if thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it (verse 12). The above sentence is broken down into different clause.

- a           S           P    C  
          |           |   |  
//If thou/ be/wise //
- b           S           P    C  
          |           |   |  
//thou/shalt be/wise//
- c           S           P  
          |           |  
//if thou/scornest//
- d           S    A    P    C  
          |   |   |   |  
//Thou/alone/shall bear/it//



her house,' she hath killed her beast', she hath mingled her wine. These are broken down into; NP + VP + complement. Moreover, "she hath sent fort her maiden,' 'she hath hewn at her seven pillars'. These are also broken down into; NP + VP + complement. This is known as syntactic equivalence. The effect is to give aesthetic and rhythmic value to the text. Repetition is also a lexical cohesive device in discourse.

### 3.0 CONCLUSION

This paper is made up of a linguistic analysis of Proverbs chapter nine bringing out the linguistic features which are the syntactic structures. The structures analysed include the words, groups, clauses and sentences which run into verses. All these were extensively analysed in this paper using systemic grammar approach .The analysis explicates and demonstrates language use in religion in general and Proverbs chapter nine in particular.

Finally, 'wisdom' which is the theme of the text, Proverbs chapter nine, is metaphorically referred to as God. The text actually explicate what Crystal & Davy, 1969 referred to as contemporary living usage.

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