

Pragmatic Analysis of 2022 Billboard Messages of Some Pentecostal Churches in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the pragmatic features of 2022 billboard messages of some Pentecostal Churches in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. A total of ten (10) billboards which were purposively selected from churches within Uyo Urban, constitute the data for the study. Using Austin's (1962) Speech Act as the theoretical framework, the data were subjected to different pragmatic interpretations such as: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary force. The study showed among other things that Christian worshippers in the State were largely persuaded and motivated using some pragmatic components embedded in the messages, which served as a source of social mobilization for the people. The study has again buttressed the significance of language of billboards as a different variety of the English language with emphasis on its ability to persuade and mobilise the audience to achieve set goals.

Keywords: Communication, Speech Act, Pentecostal Church, Alternative solution, Anointing

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Introduction

Language is a vital tool for communication between individuals or groups. However, the choice of a particular language for a given society or environment serves as a vehicle for interaction and mutual co-existence. The language chosen enhances the culture, traditions, values, norms and technological development of that given speech community. It is pertinent that the choice and meaning of that language is valued when it is studied in the context in which it has been used. This is necessary because "meanings are constantly being reshaped (or refurbished) not by any legislation but through inevitable interaction in the 'semiotic contexts' of minute aspects of the general society of daily life" (Oyeleye 2005, p. 5).

Edem (2005) defines language as a means of communication between one another and between an individual and a group. While agreeing with Oyeleye's (2005) view or what he calls 'semiotic contexts', Edem (2005) asserts that,

The speaker must bear in mind the fact that certain subjects may be inappropriate if they do not suit the occasion and the circumstance. For example, can a preacher while in the pulpit openly urge members of his audience to vote for a named political party or can the slogan, "The Federal Ministry of Health warns that tobacco smoking is dangerous to your health" be received well by an audience of cigarette – producing factory workers? What this entails therefore, is that there are specific occasions and audiences for which subjects are most suited. In other words, the speaker's choice of topic may be influenced by the audience's reason for assembling (pp.14-15).

Public speaking as observed by Edem (2005) does not therefore function the same way as writing a novel for instance. The writer of a novel merely writes and leaves its readership to locate its audience. The public speaker however, probably hopes to influence the understanding, feelings, convictions or actions of his audience in some pre-determined ways. Because his speech is purposive in nature, he therefore composes it to achieve his desired objectives. It is perhaps for this reason that Oliver (1968) describes public speaking as an "organized manner of presenting an organized speech to achieve organized goals".

In other words, the speaker's general goal in any speech is to create in the audience the response he desires. The key word in this principle is; speeches are made to serve different purposes such as: to inform, to entertain, to convince, to persuade, to inspire, to incite (cf. Edem 2005, pp.15-16). Therefore, the specific purpose of the speaker should be put in the form of an explicit statement of exactly what he hopes to accomplish. If the speaker is to succeed in obtaining the desired responses, he must always keep his central purpose uppermost in his mind.

This paper investigates the 2022 billboard messages of some Pentecostal Churches in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria to ascertain whether they have any illocutionary and perlocutionary effects on Christian worshippers in the State taking cognizance of the pragmatic components of the messages under investigation in this work. What this means is that, this paper critically foregrounds some of the lexical patterning employed in the texts (billboards) with reference to both the lexical meaning and context of situation.

1.1 Previous Related Works

Udofot and Edem (2018) posit that a good speech event is a result of a careful planning by the public speaker who pays particular attention to details such as services, objectives, contents and import or materials meant for dissemination to the public.

Several attempts have been made by scholars towards unraveling the concept of the language of advertising with particular interest in religious (Pentecostal Church) advertising using different linguistic, stylistics and pragmatic approaches. This section therefore is devoted to a review of such previous relevant scholarly works.

Roberts and Ukpongetuk (2014) examine the lexico-semantic features of language of religion and advertising using the framework drawn from the linguistic theories of Hutchinson and Waters, (1987) Dudley-Evans and St. John (1989) on English for specific purpose (ESP). This work agrees with the present study because it used relevant data from these two disciplines to show the lexical complexities and semantic inconsistencies or difficulties but differs in the theoretical model which is Speech Act theory and focus on 2022 Billboard messages of some Pentecostal Churches advertising and not the language of religion which Robert and Ukpongetuk (2014) dwell on.

Odebode and Dabi (2015) on their part critically examine Speech Acts in billboard messages of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Redemption Camp, Nigeria. This work is similar to the present study because Speech Acts in Billboard Messages are examined but it is different because focus in the present study is not restricted to a particular church but some Pentecostal Churches in Uyo Urban, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, and while the former and this work used the pragmatic approach, the data used for the present work is different.

Chibueze, Ordu and Omoghie (2017) study the lexico-semantic interpretation of Pentecostal Church posters. The study among other things reveals that the construction of poster (texts) in a way is a linguistically conscious activity. The present work is different because emphasis is on the Billboard messages and how it conveys meaning and impacts on its target audience.

Edem (2001) examines the Language of Military Rule: A study of selected speeches of Nigeria's Military Rulers making use of Crystal and Davy's (1969) Linguistic Stylistic Model. The work observes that part of the problems that hindered the speaker's speeches from achieving the desired impact was because the two military leaders (Gen. Ibrahim Babangida and Gen. Sani Abacha – communication sources) refused to recognize that the audience is an equal partnership in the communication act. The present study relates with that problem as it examines how religious leaders use the Billboard messages to influence, persuade and mobilize their audience or followers to achieve set goals.

It is however, different in that, while it reviews the speeches of Military Rulers using Crystal and Davy's (1969) linguistic stylistic model, this study adopts Austin (1962) Speech Acts Theory making use of some pragmatic backgrounds in examining Billboard messages of some Pentecostal Churches in the area under investigation.

Edem and Ekpenyong (2021) examine Language and Religion: A Comparative Analysis of the Language of Sermons in some selected Orthodox and Pentecostal Churches in Uyo Metropolis, Nigeria. Adopting the Speech Act theory of Austin (1962), the study undertook the linguistic analysis of data at the lexico-semantic, graphological and grammatical levels.

They observe that the method of religious sermons varies from orthodox to Pentecostal Churches. This work is in agreement with Edem and Ekpenyong (2021) in that it deals with the language of religion though it is a comparative study and also made use of the same Speech Act approach. But it is different because attention in this work is shifted mainly to the pragmatic components of the Billboard Messages by some Pentecostal Churches selected for study.

Lawal (2000) examines 'Pragmatics in Stylistics: A Speech Act Analysis of Wole Soyinka's 'Telephone Conversation'. The work delves into the origin of pragmatics as an arm of linguistics and the place of Speech Act theory in a conversation act with a predominantly vindicative illocutionary force involving indirect mutual evaluation and prejudice. Lawal's and the present study are related to some extent particularly in the aspect of theoretical framework. Interestingly, while Lawal's work is stylistically grounded, the present study is pragmatically oriented.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Speech Acts is a technical term in linguistics and philosophy of language. It captures an action performed by someone through his words. The British Philosopher J. I. Austin (1962) who contributed the term (speech acts) to pragmatics claimed that by speaking, a person performs an act, or does something (such as state, predict, or warn) and that meaning is found in what an expression does. Simply put, the central aspect of the Speech Act Theory is that an utterance is part of an action within the framework of social institution and conventions. Austin (1962) proposes three levels of Speech Acts: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act.

A locutionary act is the actual utterance and its ostensible meaning, comprising phonic, phatic and rhetoric

acts which actually correspond to the verbal, syntactic and semantic aspects of any meaningful utterance. A phonic act produces an utterance-inscription. It is concerned with physical act of producing a certain sequence of verbal sounds (in the case of spoken language) or a set of written symbols, in case of the written language). A phatic act is an act of composing a particular linguistic expression in a particular language; it is an act of contextualizing the utterance inscription (Austin 1962). It is responsible for tasks such as assigning reference, resolving deixes and disambiguating the utterance inscription lexically and grammatically. (cf. Odebo and Dabi, 2015 p.18).

When considering illocutionary act, Austin is of the view that saying is doing. Hence, “by saying something, we do something else”. For example when someone orders someone else to come by saying “come”, and when a minister joins two people in marriage by saying “I now pronounce you husband and wife”. Illocutionary acts are performed in the utterance of what Austin calls performatives. Typical instances of these are “I demand an apology”, “I assure you there will be a change”. If holistically, in all these cases of performative sentences, the action that the sentences describe (demanding, ensuring) are performed by the utterance of the sentences themselves.

On the other hand, Austin explains that perlocutionary acts entail the consequences or effects of utterances on the audience in a linguistic encounter, such consequences or effects being special to the circumstances of utterance. Its actual effect such as persuading, convincing, scaring, enlightening, inspiring or otherwise getting someone to do or realize something, whether it is intended or not (Austin, 1962). For instance, the locution, “See a snake behind you”, has an illocutionary act of informing or warning so to speak. The perlocutionary act will be manifested by the addressee who either runs out of danger or screams for help.

The ten billboard messages selected from some Pentecostal Churches in Uyo urban are subjected to different pragmatic interpretations such as: locution, illocutionary act and perlocutionary force to account for the total meaning of the messages and determine the effect or otherwise of the said messages on their audience.

2.0 Data Collection and Analysis

Ten Billboard Messages of Some Churches which were purposively selected within Uyo, Akwa Ibom State’s capital, Nigeria within the first three months of the year 2022 were subjected to pragmatic analysis using the Speech Act approach of Austin (1962). This was with the view to underscore their locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary forces in order to account for their total meaning. This however, examines the given data on the above stand points and highlights the significant role played by the language of billboards as unique variety of the English language.

3.0 Presentation of Data

Table 1: List of Billboard Texts

S/N	Billboards Messages	Name of Church/Ministry	Date
1.	Akwa Ibom for Christ Crusade	Joshua Iginla Ministries	15-19 Feb, 2022
2.	The Just shall Live by His Faith	Humility Glory Mission	27th Jan. 2022
3.	Finishing Strong - Fathers of Faith one Day Prayer Forum	Believers Assembly	17th - 22nd Jan. 2022
4.	Convention Restoration 2022 Abundant Life	Restoration Grace Assembly	14th Feb. 2022
5.	February Outpouring of Fresh Oil and Gathering of Stars	Full Life Assembly	24th – 28th Jan. 2022
6.	Glory Reign	Salvation Ministries	26th – 27th Jan. 2022
7.	Experience Deliverance, Healing and Power at Bethesda Healing Crusade	Pastor Ezekiel Atang Ministries	26th – 27th Jan. 2022
8.	It’s your time, It’s Your Season	Holy Ghost Ambassadors	3rd – 6th Feb. 2022
9.	Pleasant Surprises	The Gospel Foundation	1st -6th March 2022
10.	Let there be Light	Fortress of Hope	1st – 6th March, 2022

4.0 Discussion

Text 1: “Akwa Ibom for Christ Crusade by Joshua Iginla Ministries”.

The above statement has the following pragmatic interpretations: the locutionary act of the statement is a declaration which is informing. The speaker (Joshua Iginla, a Lagos based Evangelist), is informing his audience or addressee on the benefits of handing over the reigns of Akwa Ibom, a State named after God, to the messiah. The illocutionary act is the belief that by so doing the socio-economic challenges facing the State shall be addressed especially at the beginning of the year if everyone heeds the call. The perlocutionary force is that since

Christ is the Universal King, whoever turns to him shall be saved and that salvation comes from no other than through Christ.

Text 2: “The Just Shall Live by His Faith” by Rev. Mrs. Sylvia Umoh.

Text 2 has the following pragmatic import. The locutionary act of the statement is that it is well with the righteous. The locutionary act is that the addressees can only be strengthened if they remain firm and upright otherwise, without faith one can achieve little or nothing. The perlocutionary force is the worshippers’ belief that God blesses those who are faithful and also those who believe in Him.

Text 3: “Finishing Strong – Fathers of Faith One Day Prayer Forum”

by Bishop Sunday Mbang, Dr. Uma Ukpai and Prelate Isaiah Isong.

This text has the following pragmatic deductions. The locutionary act of the statement is informing. This is based on the general assumption that for the present administration in Akwa Ibom State led by Governor Udom Emmanuel, a Deacon of the Qua Iboe Church, Uyo to have a happy ending or succeed in its’ completion agenda and or, what the present administration calls “**succession plan**”, that everyone needs to draw closer to God. This is based on the illocutionary act that God rules in the affairs of men and that power belongs to God and He gives to whosoever He chooses. The perlocutionary force is the firm belief between the government and the governed that if Akwa Ibom State Government for instance, intends to transit peacefully and complete its ‘lofty’ programmes, they are expected to handover everything to God who is seen to be the author and finisher of our faith. Hence, the premonition here is that God is absolutely in control that we should always seek his face in prayers and fasting or abstinence.

Text 4: “Restoration Convention 2022 “Abundant Life” by Rev. Charis Essienobong.

The above statement has the following pragmatic undertones. The locutionary act is informing the target audience about the said convention about the given message of hope and restoration to all Christian faithful in the New Year 2022. The illocutionary act is the messages that old things have passed away and have become new with the New Year which is expected to bring forth restoration, abundant life and good tidings as Christendom welcomes the New Year 2022. The perlocutionary force is the admonition that church worshippers should all have faith in God as they approach the New Year with great expectations.

Text 5: “February outpouring of Fresh Oil and Gathering of Stars 2022 at Noah’s Ark Auditorium” by Rev. and Mrs. Ntia Ntia.

The declarative sentence above can be subjected to the following pragmatic analysis. The locutionary act is informing the audience or a clarion call to all Christian faithful to rise up and embrace what the organizers call “**fresh outpouring or anointing**” in a Christian gathering that is christened “gathering of stars”. The illocutionary act is that, the addressee’s salvation and blessings which is always sought after, is conditioned upon a firm adherence to God and his teachings. The perlocutionary force however, is that, we should mend our ways and return to God which that “**February Outpouring**” provides an ample opportunity for such people to enter “**Noah’s Ark**” which is a very apt and symbolic, representation of the salvation of mankind.

Text 6: “Glory Reign” by David Ibiyeomie.

Text 6 has the following pragmatic interpretations: the locutionary act of the statement is informing that there is God and his glory reigns in the entire universe. The illocutionary act is that his power has no end. The perlocutionary force is that, the addressee or the speaker’s audience should always seek the Lord and feel his presence in their best interest.

Text 7: “Experience Deliverance, Healing and Power at Bethesda Healing Crusade” by Pastor Ezekiel Atang.

Text 7 as shown above could be sub-divided into the following pragmatic interpretations: the locutionary act of the statement is promising based on the envisaged deliverance, healing and power...” the reference to the biblical Bethesda healing for the crusade in focus is a metaphor to agitate the minds of the audience and draw inspiration from what happened at Bethesda and compares that with the Uyo Crusade and expectedly the result or outcome should not be different. The illocutionary act is the cliché that God is the same yesterday, today and forever. Hence, it is possible for what God did at Bethesda to replicate same healing in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria or anywhere. The perlocutionary force is that God is awesome with His power which is beyond human comprehension.

Text 8: “It’s your Time. It’s your Season” by Apostle Yenime Andy.

The statement could be subdivided into the following: The locutionary act of the statement is advising as the speaker is appealing to the sentiments of his audience for them to “rise up”. The illocutionary act is that of a teacher and his students, that if they miss this chance, they may stand to regret in future. The inference is that, it is possible for some of the students to disregard the clarion call. The perlocutionary force is that Pastors or Church Ministers are respected as messengers of God, oftentimes given big responsibilities as role models or opinion leaders in the society.

Text 9: “Pleasant Surprises” by Bishop Dr. Enobong Essien and Pst. Umo Eno.

Text 9 has the following pragmatic explorations. The locutionary act of the statement is promising. The

illocutionary act is that God can bring about ‘pleasant surprises’ that is, things never thought of can become real after all, the catch phrase further connotes a deeper meaning that “**what is impossible with man is possible with God**”. The perlocutionary force is that the audience is expected to be in very high spirit and expectant of surprises, testimonies and miracles during and after the said Crusade. The large crowd that usually accompanies such Christian gatherings is indicative of the significance of language as a tool of mass mobilization or social re-orientation. The use of Pastor Umo Eno, a major contender for the Governorship race in 2023 under the ruling party in the State, Peoples Democratic Party PDP, as one of the speakers at the crusade could be a strategy by the organizers to attract more participation after all.

Text 10: “Let There Be Light!” by Rev. Prince Amba.

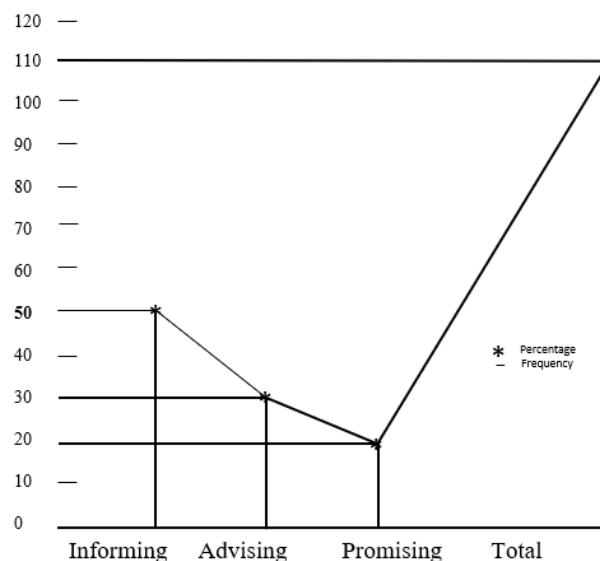
Text 10 has the following pragmatic imports. The locutionary act of the statement above is advising the audience again about the miraculous works of God. The illocutionary acts is that through his Apostles or agents, if the people hearken to God’s teachings, He can meet them at the point of their needs. The perlocutionary act is that, since God is said to be all-knowing, He can do anything for those who fervently believe in Him as exemplified by a cliché used by many new generation church leaders thus, “**what God cannot do doesn’t exist**”. In other words, what this implies is that, what God can do is absolutely incredible.

4.1 Statistical Analysis of the Data

From the data available to us we have a cacophony of speech acts that tend to inform or educate the public which occurs five times (50%). This was followed by advising illocutionary act at three times (30%) and promising speech act which occurs two times (20%). Against this background, the data analysed above can be summarised with a line chat as follows:

Table 2: Frequency of Illocutionary Acts

Illocutionary Act	Frequency	Percentage
Informing	5	50%
Advising	3	30%
Promising	2	20%
Total	10	100%



A line chat illustrating statistics of illocutionary Acts.

With the great shift of the pendulum of the Billboard messages which favoured informing illocutionary acts which have 50% and advising illocutionary acts had 30% while promising act stood at 20%, as shown in Table 2 and line chat above. We can succinctly posit that the 2022 Billboard messages of some Pentecostal Churches in Uyo Urban, Nigeria are pointers to the genuine concerns of the church leaders to persuade, mobilise and draw the people closer to God, by giving proper information and advice while making promises of better life also added value to their teachings.

5.0 Summary and Conclusion

The study has shown that Billboards constitute a vital medium where thought provoking messages are shared between the speaker and the Christian congregation which brings about diverse interpretations through the application of the Speech Act Theory of Austin 1962. These messages coupled with “power packed” prayer

crusades were ostensibly tailored or arranged at the beginning of the New Year between January and March 2022 to attract Christian worshipers and new converts who are enjoined to invite Jesus Christ, the messiah, into their homes at the beginning of the year. The Billboard messages consist of “change, fresh anointing, experience deliverance and healing, let there be light, it’s your time, it’s your season etc” aptly captured the mood and expectations of the people who are faced with difficulties, uncertainties and despair which constitute an illocutionary act. The perlocutionary force is manifested by the peoples’ yearnings for direction as exemplified by massive turn-out of Christian worshippers at various crusades in search for fresh anointing, salvation or hidden treasures of life.

From the foregoing, this work has shown that billboard messages are proper channels of communication as exemplified in the given data. The study has also shown that these messages constitute a distinct and a unique variety of the English Language whose impacts on its target audience cannot be ignored.

The work agrees with other research findings that language is a tool for human communication as shown in the avalanche of the informing illocutionary acts from the data studied but posits that effective use of language is highly dependent on the user and the user’s intention vis-à-vis the expected outcome.

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