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RHETORIC IN RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE: ELICITATION AND DIALOGUE AS DRAMATIC PAUSE IN NIGERIAN PENTECOSTAL SERMONS

Dr. Michael Olugbenga Ajileye[1], Dr. Chidi Eustace Okere[2], Dr. Chinomso Patricia Dozie[3]

[1]Department of Languages and Humanities, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, Nigeria Corresponding Author

[2]Department of Linguistics,Kingsley Ozumba Mbadiwe University, Ogboko, Nigeria

[3]Directorate of General Studies. Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of elicitation, as well as dialogic interrogation and dialogic repetition, as devices for dramatic pause in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons. Sermons are by their nature, usually monologic, in which the preacher monopolizes the conversation space from commencement to conclusion. The congregation usually is expected to sit through it all, listen and imbibe the message. This trend, noted mainly in orthodox Christianity circles, has been observed to often lead to boredom and attention fatigue in the audience. This study notes that Nigerian Pentecostal preachers, while still wholly in control of the sermon, appear to have effectively reversed its monologic nature by employing elicitation and dialogue as audience-engaging and attention-arresting devices to introduce unique pause effects in their sermons, thereby creating that general impression of vitality and activity often associated with the Nigerian Pentecostal brand of Christianity. This study identified these devices as discursive practices embedded in the social practice of Pentecostal preaching, which are among the principal ways in which its ideology is circulated and reproduced. This present study constitutes a part of a general intellectual investigation, which involves the identification of specific discursive patterns that characterize Nigerian Pentecostal Christian sermons and to determine how they are intertwined with the general ideology of persuasion as a goal.

KEYWORDS: *rhetoric, elicitation. dialogue, Pentecostal sermons*

INTRODUCTION

Religious discourse, alongside all intra-faith linguistic interaction among clergy and laity for evangelical, ecclesiastic and other social functions, has evolved over the years into a sociolinguistic phenomenon each with its unique language code within its social community. Religious institutions have had to accommodate the changes brought about by a de-traditionalized, de-centralized, and rationalized social climate. According to Singh (2011), even though these changes are mediated by language, scholars in the past have tended to place more emphasis on the epistemological status and nature of religious beliefs than on religious language itself. However, despite the low-level interest in religious discourse by linguists and anthropologists, the interface between language and religion just cannot be ignored. Holistically, language, including its subparts at both macro and micro levels, is the medium of every communication, even though the basis of communication can differ based on context, genre and situation. Religion, on the other hand, is extensively influential all over the world. It possesses and has demonstrated the potential to affect all parts and aspects of society including lifestyle, science, education, marriage, behaviour, peace, chaos, and ethics. Pentecostal Christianity, on the other hand, is a form of Christianity that emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit and the direct presence of God in the life of a believer. In Nigeria, Pentecostal Christianity assumed a formidable stature in the last quarter of the 20th century. It is a fact that all religions are growing. "Orthodox" denominations of Christianity, Islam, as well as indigenous and even some far-eastern religions have blossomed to create a veritably pluralistic religious public space. However, Charismatic and Pentecostal groups have shown phenomenal levels of growth. According to Jando (2014:6),

> "Since its inception, the Pentecostal movement has experienced tremendous growth in terms of the proliferation of its churches and its membership strength. Indeed, the explosion of the movement in Nigeria and elsewhere is a glaring reality. Recognizably, Pentecostalism has penetrated the mainline churches. Obviously, Pentecostals are proliferating almost on daily basis and are winning many converts. The growth of Pentecostal churches, which seems uncontrollable, is substantiated in the heavy presence of its churches in every nook and cranny of the Nigerian society."

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According to Barret (1982), one in four Christians in the world is a part of the Pentecostal Movement, while the Centre for the Study of Global Christianity estimated that, there are about 279 million Pentecostal Christians and 305 million Charismatic Christians in the world (Pew Research, 2011). An interesting fact is that this brand of Christianity has had great influence on the orthodox churches as well as on non-Christians. Achunike (2004) confirms this when he asserts that the mainline churches have adopted different names for their own brands of Pentecostalism. For instance, in the Catholic Church, it is called Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Nigeria. It operates as Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion (EFAC) and in Methodist Church it is called Methodist Evangelical Movement (MEM).

The origin of Nigerian Pentecostal Christianity, like most others around the world, can be traced through the American Pentecostal movement to the 1900 three-year-long Azusa Street Revival organized by Evangelist Charles Parham in Los Angeles, California. This American root of Nigerian Pentecostalism is still evident in the mode of their activities including the songs and especially the language of ministration. According to the Pews Forum Survey (2006), in Nigeria, there are over 5000 Pentecostal denominations as at the time of the survey; and the number continues to grow. This work will attempt an ethnographic appraisal of Nigerian Pentecostal Christianity, which in recent years has developed into a social phenomenon with its own unique language code. The research will attempt to analyze the structure of utterances by both clergy and laity for evangelical and ecclesial functions, especially in the sphere of sermon preaching and teaching.

One major characteristic of the Pentecostal movement is the attached modernism and blend with contemporary social cultures. Old 'orthodox' values are largely dropped as part of the strategies to "capture the youth for Christ". The movement is considered to be more amenable to social change and more readily accepts and adopts new technologies into their programmes. This group pioneered electronic evangelism in Nigeria and recently has massively keyed into the use of the internet and social media for their activities. Ojo (2004: 2) observes that "Pentecostalism in Nigeria presently constitutes a major social movement and Pentecostal spirituality continues to affect millions of citizens in various ways." The Pentecostal sect of the Christian religion in Nigeria is often seen as a "modern version" of the religion. The notion of "modernity" attached to the sect consists in several factors ranging from the non-formal clergy establishment, unofficial clergy accoutrement, relaxed orthodox practices like head-covering, relaxed gender restraints, and appropriation of digital media technology among others. One factor which, more than any above, has entrenched the notion of modernity is the language factor. One of the major defining characteristics of Nigerian Pentecostal Christianity is the real or attempted Americanization of the language of ministration. A "good" Pentecostal minister is therefore one who is seen to be fluent in the English language; where one of the properties of fluency is speaking the language with an American drawl or accent. Another major characteristic of the NPCL is the oratorical performance rather than the message content of sermonic ministrations. The style of preaching is exuberant, enthusiastic, and charismatic, interspersed with songs, questions, declarations, and folk style. This is in sharp contrast with the liturgy, polity, and ethos of the 'orthodox" sects like the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist denominations. The oratorical content of Nigerian Pentecostal sermons, especially the use of dramatic pause for rhetorical effect in sermons, is the focus of this study.

The Population of the study

The target population for this research consists of all Pentecostal denominations in Nigeria, while the accessible population consists of the Pentecostal denominations in Imo State. The actual numbers of Pentecostal denominations in Nigeria and Imo State are unknown because new denominations daily spring up all around the country, many of them in unmarked buildings and shanties. The most readily available source for this information is the 2006 figures provided by the Pews Research Centre. The Pew Forum's (2006) Pentecostal Survey estimates that six in ten Protestants in Nigeria are Pentecostal in belief. From an estimated number of 2,000 independent organizations in 1997, Pentecostal churches reportedly increased to about 5,000 in the year 2000, suggesting a growth rate of about 1000 a year. The projected growth rate between the year 2000 and the present will put the number of Pentecostal denominations well above 10,000.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

This study is limited in scope by the sheer number and spread of the Pentecostal denominations in Nigeria. Due to the nature of the study, and the need for exactitude and detail, the researcher employed simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques.

At the first stage of simple random sampling, a total number of ten (10) Pentecostal denominations within Imo State were randomly selected. Sermons were directly recorded at some of the selected churches, while already recorded audio recordings of sermons were procured from some. Some of the selected churches have digital audio recording facilities with which sermons are regularly recorded and distributed or sold to church members and any other person who might require them the sermons were recorded or already recorded recent sermons procured. All recorded sermons were then transcribed for analysis.

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The second stage involved employing purposive sampling to select five (5) of the recorded and transcribed sermons. The research corpus thus comprises five (5) sermons in English that were purposively selected. The corpus set amounts to 54,273 words in total.

List of Sample Sermons

S1 - Recorded Sermon 1: "The Woman with the Issue of Life" by Pastor Mrs Henrietta Jacobs of the New Wave Assembly.

S2 - Recorded Sermon 2: "Establishing Liberty and Advancing the Kingdom" by Pastor Dennis Inyang of the Sure Word Assembly

S3 - Recorded Sermon 3: "Abba Father – Part 3" by Pastor E.A. Adeboye of the Redeemed Christian Church of God. *(Procured at The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Umuanunu Junction Obinze, Owerri West, Imo State.*

S4 - Recorded Sermon 4: "Season of Change" by Rev. Simeon Afolabi of the Firstlove Assembly, Owerri.

S5 - Recorded Sermon 5: "Blessings from Psalm 23" by Pastor A. C. Ohanebo of the Watchman Catholic Charismatic Renewal Ministry.

Research Instruments

This study attempted to analyze language usage in a natural setting, such as the analysis of language use in specific contexts and situations. The study is descriptive and qualitative and relies on qualitative description using words rather than statistics. The study evaluates the sermons of Nigerian Pentecostal denominations as valid samples of typical Pentecostal Christian discourse by analyzing the rhetoric of its discourse, the forms and functions of its codes, the forms of its speech acts, and the characteristics of its language and specific terms. By the nature of the research, the recording of speech sounds for data collection is required. Data was collected through audio recording of sermons using digital audio recorders in some of the churches and procuring already recorded sermons in audio formats from others. The transcription of the recordings was done using the *SpeechTexter*® application which requires direct audio input through a microphone connected to the computer in order to convert speech into written texts. In terms of the quantitative examination, selected tools of corpus analysis comprising *AntConc321*® and *Design215 Wordlist Maker, Version 1.6* were used.

Methods of Data Analysis

This study analyzed the sample sermons using a socio-pragmatic approach by considering elements of the language and, in addition, attempted to establish social, situational and cultural factors for the identified discursive patterns. Transcribed recorded sermons were transcribed and analyzed in order to identify texts embedded in the rhetorical patterns of elicitation, dialogic interrogation and dialogic repetition used as devices for dramatic pause in sermons.

Rhetoric

Rhetoric is an art of discourse, which studies and employs various methods to convince, influence and, at the same time, please an audience. Often, we find rhetoric in religious discourse and political speeches. They aim to make comparisons, to evoke tender emotions, to censure rivals all to the end of persuading listeners. Rhetoric has thus become an identified characteristic of Pentecostal sermons. This is a fact that researchers like Adedun and Mekiliuwa (2012) and Obuasi (2014) have established in their works. This work aims to determine how Pentecostal preachers in Nigeria use elicitation and dialogic repetition as rhetorical or persuasive devices in the course of elucidation of a particular point of view or in the clarification of an issue in such a manner that differentiates them and establishes for them a community of unique identity.

Dramatic Pause

Dramatic pauses are the verbal punctuation marks of sermons. They involve the use of certain expressions which serve as gap fillers in a sermon. Wharryl (2003) referred to this device as a "Textual Boundary Marker", with the functions sub-classified into three categories: text type change, topic/sub-topic boundary, and topic continuity. According to Wharry (2003:210)

> …a significant function appeared on the surface to be simply as verbal filler, but these expressions actually functioned not only to give preachers time to think about their next statements or to fill space while members of the congregation were caught up in the spirit.

Preachers often use this device to initiate new subsections of the discourse, to set key terms apart, to mark discourse boundaries and mainly to allow a powerful idea to sink in. As a transitory device, it also indicates a shift in discourse and marks a change in discourse direction. It is also used to highlight surprises in the text, to activate the congregation into entering a feeling or thought or simply to

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stimulate anticipation. Such expressions include: *"Praise the Lord!", "Oh, my God!", "Hallelluyah, somebody!" etc.,* which the preachers use at intervals both as gap-fillers and to activate the attention of their audiences.

There are several kinds of pauses in speech: transition pause, sense pause, reflective pause, pause-for-effect, pause-for-emphasis and dramatic pause; each of which serves similar but slightly different purposes in spotlighting specific parts of a speech. However, this study is specifically concerned with the dramatic pause as employed by Nigerian Pentecostal preachers in their sermons.
The Dramatic Pause is a very effective rhetorical and oratorical device in persuasive speeches such as sermons and political discourse. The dramatic pause consists of a short moment of silence with no dialogue or sound. Also known as the "pregnant pause", the dramatic pause is often used to effectively control pace and intonation in speech. Many Pentecostal preachers are known to use filler words (praise the Lord, Amen, praise the name of the Lord, Hallelujah, etc.) as dramatic pauses especially when studying their sermon notes. The dramatic pause as a rhetorical tool helps a speaker to build an intellectual and emotional connection with their audience. It gives the listeners some time to process what has just been said, as well as priming them to stay engaged for what comes next. The dramatic pause differs from the traditional pause in speech, which usually is used to parcellate speeches into smaller units much as a comma does in writing or mark the end of a complete unit of speech and to separate one thought from another, much as a period does in writing. The dramatic pause, on the contrary, is employed not in the traditional sense of marking units of speech but solely to create oratorical effects. Dlugan (2012) described the dramatic pause as "part rhetorical and part theatrical" pause used whenever one wants to generate some drama or suspense.
The dramatic pause as a rhetorical device has the multiple advantages of giving both the speaker and the audience time to reflect as well as boosting the oratorical profile of the speaker as an accomplished public speaker. Waknell (2009) outlined what he referred to as The Four Aims of Presentation to include:

1. **Be heard:** (ensure that the listener can hear properly)
2. **Be understood:** (convey clearly the intended meaning of the message)
3. **Be respected:** (ensure the message is understood so that the audience can accept, believe and act on it as intended)
4. **Be remembered:** (ensure that the impact of the message remains with the listener)

This study identified some commonly utilized devices employed by Nigerian Pentecostal preachers as dramatic pauses: elicitation, dialogic repetition, and dialogic interrogation.

Elicitation
Elicitation as a rhetorical device is a dialogic strategy that has to do with the elicitation for participation and active involvement of the congregation in the sermonic discourse. Akhimien and Farotimi (2018:7) refer to this device as:

> the process of demanding a response, verbal or non-verbal from an interlocutor by questioning. The clergy uses this strategy often to get his audience participate in the service. This is audience participatory device. For instance, shake hands with one or two people and say my God reigns. When he says (?) the entire congregation does this. What this implies is that the audience are steer (sic) up to get involved and his belief about God he transfers to them.

Some writers have also referred to this device as a "summons'. This, according to Osisanwo (2003), is one of the vital techniques used in taking turns. It is also an attention-catching device that Pentecostal pastors often use in catching the attention of the audience or at transitional points of his sermons.

This device serves mainly to keep the attention of the congregation/audience, while at the same time creating the impression that the listeners are active participants in the discourse. The use of dialogic strategies in sermons is a form of meta-discourse that helps the understanding of sermons not only as a persuasive engagement but as a form of social and communicative engagement between preacher and congregation. It elevates the roles of listeners and positions them as conversational partners in sermons. It also helps to temper the preacher's voice of authority. It was observed that Pentecostal preachers make copious use of this device not only as fillers but more importantly at moments before or immediately after a crucial point is made. It creates suspense and heightens anticipation when used before, and gives time for the point to sink in when used after. The use of this kind of audience engagement device during preaching is a technique employed by preachers to encourage listeners to be active and responsive. The sermon thus takes on the shape of a conversation, rather than a monologic presentation.

Generally speaking, this process is a call for a response, which could be verbal or non-verbal. Pentecostal preachers often use this strategy to get their audience to participate in the sermon. As an audience participatory device, listeners may sometimes be asked to perform a speech action such as making a declaration for or against something, providing an answer to a question, or simply repeating what was said by the speaker. The required response may equally be a mental behaviour such as getting up to shake hands with one or two other people, standing up and waving hands to the Lord, or silently thinking out an answer to a question. In the course of this study,

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we discovered that response elicitation in discourse is also a control-activation and control-check device. As a control-activation device, the preacher uses the device to establish his authority over the audience. The exercise of this control is underscored by the fact that all or almost all in the audience are constrained to do his bidding. For example:

Pastor: *You are not in church! Let's share the "Goodness" and go home.*
Congregation: *No, ride on!*
Pastor: *No, let's share the "Goodness"! Surely, Goodness and mercy"….*
Congregation: (interrupting) *Ride on/Fire on, Sir!*

In the sermon above, the preacher used this device in a most powerful form. The statement *"You are not in church!"* is an indication that the preacher was not getting the feedback required. The "threat" to close the service "and go home" was the activator for animating the congregation and securing their attention. This device also grants the power of turn-allocation to the preacher, as he/she gets to activate the audience to participate in the sermon. There was hardly any deviation observed in the audience in the denominations sampled. As a control-check device, preachers use this device to check on the attention and the different linguistic and non-linguistic forms of feedback from the audience. This helps ascertain the perlocutionary effects of the sermonic discourse on the audience.

Taiwo (2006) posits that the context in which the communication takes place goes a long way in determining the kind of response to be elicited as a single speaker cannot dominate the discourse space for too long unless the situation places some constraints on his/her audience to continue to participate in the conversation. Elicitation, as a rhetorical device, also manifests in many forms in sermons as rhetorical questions and dialogic interrogation.

Rhetorical Device	Subset	Presentation	Sample Sermon Source
Elicitation	**Dramatic Pause**	*i.* Let's go!	S1, S2, S4
		ii. Somebody, look into the scriptures.	S1, S6
		iii. Rise to your feet and declare your new level, declare who you are.	S1
		iv. Somebody lift up your voice; open your mouth, open your mouth.	S1
		v. Hey, I don't know how many of you will join me in this assignment. Join me in this assignment to make man whole.	S1
		vi. Let me hear it better.	S1,S2,S3, S4
		vii. If you're glad to be here, shout a louder Amen	S3, S4
		viii. Can somebody say Halleluyah!	*All*
		ix. If you believe that say Amen.	S2, S4
		x. Halleluyah, Come on!	S5
		xi. I hope you are getting me.	S2
		xii. Can someone say Halleluya.	S2
		xiii. Someone shout Halleluya.	ALL
		xiv. If you know you are free, can you shout Halleluya!	S2
		xv. Put your hands together for Jesus.	S1,2,4,5
		xvi. Put your hands together for Jesus. Let's give him praise!	S2
		xvii. If you're glad to be here, shout a louder Amen	S2
		xviii. Go ahead, talk to the Almighty God.	S3
		xix. Let somebody shout Halleluyah.	ALL
		xx. Shake hands with one or two people and tell him or her, "God is going to bless you mightily tonight."	S3
		xxi. I gotta hear your Amen!	S4

Table 1: Occurrence of elicitation in sample sermons

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Dialogic Repetition

Dialogic repetition involves the preacher asking the audience to repeat some words, clauses or sentences after him or her. It is a clear deviation from the monologic pattern of the orthodox denomination preachers and engenders performative discourse. Like all other types, this device elevates the roles of listeners in preaching and positions them as conversational partners. Dialogic repetition, like other kinds of repetition, is a powerful force in discourse. Repetition generally helps emphasize an idea or concept, call attention to a character trait or draw attention to a seemingly minor detail. Repeated words, information, idea and the structure of an utterance are often used to manipulate a listener's attitude and interest. Effective use of repetition in sermons creates different effects. These range from reinforcing the overall message of the preacher, as well as creating a sense of rhythm, resonance, atmosphere and emotion. This study discovers that this is one stylistic device that presents in various forms, most of which are copiously used by Pentecostal preachers. Dialogic repetition helps draw more of the audience's attention to the sermon through programmed restatements by making them vocalize the preachers' thoughts and words in synchrony. According to Adedun and Mekiliuwa (2010), the overall effect of this is to heighten the emotional tone of the speech thereby making it more memorable. According to them, repetition in discourse is a form of "back channelling, gap filler, a cohesive device in discourse", which performs the purpose of a memory aid used to reinforce or emphasize points made by speakers.

For example

Pastor: Say I forbid sickness from coming to me.
Congregation: I forbid sickness from coming to me.
Pastor: Sickness and disease, I forbid you.
Congregation: Sickness and disease, I forbid you etc**.**

In the example above, the preacher not only used the exchange to reestablish rapport with the audience and to bring the emotional tone of the sermon to a high, it is also bound to create a sense of harmony in the congregation as they actively participate in the declarations alongside the pastor, as well as generally helping the preacher to drive home some critical points and contributes to the rhetorical impact of sermons.

Rhetorical Device	Subset	Presentation	Sample Sermon Source
	Dialogic Repetition	i. **Pastor:** Somebody lift your hand and say 'I have capacity, but I am asking for more, Lord.' **Congregation**: I have capacity, but I am asking for more, Lord. **Pastor:** I am asking for more. **Congregation:** I am asking for more. **Pastor:** I am asking for more. **Congregation:** I am asking for more. **Pastor:** Lift your hand and say "there is more to me!" **Congregation:** There is more to me! **Pastor:** Say there is more to me than I can imagine **Congregation:** There is more to me than I can imagine	S2 S1
		ii. **Pastor:** Say I forbid sickness from coming to me. **Congregation:** I forbid sickness from coming to me. **Pastor**: Sickness and disease, I forbid you. **Congregation**: Sickness and disease, I forbid you.	S2
		iii. **Pastor:** Can you lift your hand and say I am free. **Congregation:** I am free. **Pastor:** In Christ I have liberty. **Congregation:** In Christ I have liberty.	S2

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		Pastor: I am free. **Congregation:** I am free. iv. **Pastor:** Can you say I am free from the power of darkness. **Congregation:** I am free from the power of darkness. **Pastor:** I am free from the forces of evil. **Congregation:** I am free from the forces of evil. v. **Pastor:** My liberty cannot be curtailed anymore. **Congregation:** My liberty cannot be curtailed anymore. **Pastor:** Because I am free! **Congregation:** Because I am free! vi. **Pastor:** Say Father, we have come to you tonight as your children **Congregation:** Father, we have come to you tonight as your children vii. **Pastor:** Let me hear you say Please carry us in your arms and bless us. **Congregation:** Please carry us in your arms and bless us. **Pastor:** Say We have all come as children, Lord **Congregation:** We have all come as children, Lord viii. **Pastor:** Can somebody say Restore! **Congregation:** Restore! **Pastor:** One more time, say Restore! **Congregation:** Restore ix. **Pastor:** Season of what? **Congregation**: Season of change. **Pastor:** I can't hear you.. **Congregation**: Season of change! **Pastor:** You will know indeed that this is…? **Congregation:** A season of change! **Pastor:** Key into the spirit! Help me to tell your neighbour, "Key into the spirit!" **Congregation:** "Key into the spirit!" **Pastor:** I can't hear that! Key into the spirit! **Congregation:** "Key into the spirit!" **Pastor:** Say again, "Key into the spirit!" **Congregation:** "Key into the spirit!"	S2 S3 S5 S3 S6 S4 S4

Dialogic Interrogation

Dialogic interrogation in sermons involves the preacher asking direct questions that require direct responses from the congregation. The preacher often employs it to check on the audience's attention to achieve his perlocutionary goals. A secondary function is that it equally

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serves to sustain the attention of the audience. Yet another function of this device is to make listeners reevaluate their understanding of the sermon content, as well as to provide reassurance to listeners that they have, indeed, got the message (Long, 2005).

i. **Pastor**: Upon every man! Upon how many?
Congregation: Every man! (S1)

ii. **Pastor**: Are you there?
Congregation: Yes, Sir (S4)

iii. **Pastor**: We have been freed from what?
Congregation: Fear!/From fear! (S2)

Rhetorical Device	Subset	Presentation	Sample Sermon Source
	Dialogic Interrogation	*i.* Upon every man! Upon how many?	S1
		ii. Are you there?	S2,S5,S6
		iii. True or false?	S5
		iv. We have been freed from what?	S2
		v. He has delivered… He has what? …He has what?	S2
		vi. I have been delivered from what?	S2
		vii. This is the what?	S2,S5
		viii. That God has given us what?	S2
		ix. I told you that you have what...? Your new name is the woman with the issue of what?	S1
		x. Did you see it there?	S1, S4
		xi. Are you connecting the two…this word… to your new name?	S1
		xii. When? I'm asking you, Church, when?	S1
		xiii. Do you know that the Bible says that God will never afflict you? Do you know that?	S1
		xiv. Have you found it in Scripture?	S1
		xv. He says if you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your what?	S1
		xvi. Have you seen that God created you to be made whole?	S1
		xvii. Anyone who can at least look at the face of the nation in the past six months…between December and now, you will know that indeed this is what?	S4
		xviii. **Pastor:** Are you with me? **Congregation:** Yes, Sir! **Pastor:** Then about two months ago, they called him Acting President. Then about a week ago, they called him what? **Congregation:** President!	S4 S2
		If you can read the face of the nation, you will know, truly, this is… what?	S1, S2, S3, S5
		Congregation: Season of change!	S2, S3, S5
		xix. Are we together?	S2
		xx. Please are you flowing with me?	
		xxi. Come on, is someone getting that?	S4
		xxii. Come on, tell me, which one does he have?	
		xxiii. How many of you know the song? You want to sing it for me?	
		xxiv.	

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Both elicitation and dialogue are constantly employed as rhetorical tools in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons, and the multi-sensory experience created by their use goes beyond mere spoken words. Their use engenders a deep connection between the preacher and the congregation and activates the emotional involvement and engagement of the congregation. Elicitation and dialogic interrogation in sermons serve to engage the congregation, making the sermon more interactive and participatory. They enhance understanding by demonstrating different interpretations of scriptures, promote reflection by encouraging the congregation to connect scripture passages to their lives, and facilitate learning by allowing for questions and discovery of answers. They also introduce an element of spontaneity and joy, often bringing transformative laughter to the congregation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated the significant role of rhetoric in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons, specifically the strategic use of elicitations and dialogue as a dramatic pause to engage congregants and facilitate spiritual experience. By analyzing these sermons' linguistic and discursive features, we have uncovered how Nigerian Pentecostal preachers skillfully employ rhetorical devices, especially dialogue and elicitation as dramatic pauses, to create a sense of community, foster emotional connection, and convey religious authority. The findings of this research contribute to our understanding of the complex dynamics of religious discourse and highlight the importance of rhetoric in shaping the beliefs, practices, and identities of Nigerian Pentecostal communities. Furthermore, this study underscores the value of interdisciplinary approaches to the study of religious language, combining insights from linguistics, religious studies, and performance studies to illuminate how rhetoric animates religious experience. Ultimately, this research invites further exploration of the intersections between rhetoric, religion, and culture, and encourages scholars to continue examining how language shapes our understanding of the sacred and the self.

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