

## A RHETORO-PRAGMATICS ANALYSIS OF CHRISTIAN PRAYERS: FORM, STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS

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### Abstract

This study investigates the rhetorical-pragmatics of prayers usually located within the exordium/introduction of African or African-America Charismatic Christian sermons. For the study, a corpus of prayers from the Holy Ghost Service, the pre-eminent ritual event of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, RCCG, Lagos-Nigeria was gathered through three main sampling methods: a) purposive (non-probability), b) stratified, and c) random sampling were employed. Through purposive sampling commencing from 2006-2012 seventy-two (72) HGS sermons were first selected for the 6-year period. To select prospective HGS sermons from the population of HGS sermons performed over the 6-year period, using an interval of every three years, all the 2006, 2009 and 2012 HGS sermons were tabulated. Two HGS lists, one each for March and December were drawn for each selected year. Every *n*th HGS sermon was then selected from each list. Going by these lists, (3) March and (3) December HGS were selected for the period 2006 to 2012 to generate a sample of 6 HGS. Insofar as the present study represents a descriptive and exploratory study, this (6) HGS sermons sample is deemed appropriate to providing data that could be reasonably handled in this study. Study findings indicates prayer is an illocutionary act, one that through the force of utterance contribute to unfolding events perceived as action willed or permitted by divine beings and assented to or challenged by human beings, therefore prayer is a form of religious expression and can be considered as discourse that deserves rhetorical analysis. Also, that prayer as speech act has a defined and patterned structure codified through usage from ancient times: (a) address or invocation; (b) arguments in support of the request; and (c) the request. This is the classical structure of prayer which is found in many religious texts and practices. So, ‘the three-part prayer’ would equally represent the implementation of a logically constructed rhetorical structure which is executed by religious adherents in support of a request to an Unseen deity. Finally, that the purpose of prayer appears to be the development of argumentation and persuasion in support of the request by the one who prays or is praying

### Introduction - Prayer as Discourse

FitzGerald postulates a prayer as “an illocutionary act, one that through the force of utterance, contributes to unfolding events perceived as action willed or permitted by divine beings and assented to or challenged by human beings” (56). Thus, a prayer as move in the HGS will consists of speech act(s) which work at two levels of communication. On the one hand, we have a vertical plane of communication, in which one addresses deity or God and asks Him a specific grace. On the other hand, prayers are communication acts which take place on a horizontal plane. Prayer is such a complex act that it involves cognition, language, spirituality, and psychology. According to FitzGerald, it is “a discursive art in which capacities central to our human experience with language come together with respect to super sensory, superordinate, supernatural reality, typically imagined in the form of culturally significant otherworldly audiences-divine beings with whom human beings enjoy rich, complex relationships” (2).

Individuals, as indeed religious group, pray in order to help them navigate the events and circumstances of their lives. Hence, prayer helps individuals come to terms with their realities and the role of their agency. Prayers are also communal and thus collective intentions underlie them. One hopes that by joining the prayers of a collection of people the prayers will have greater effects. Frequently goals and desires that are tangible and measurable are identified in prayers. However, whether or not these goals and desires are achieved seems completely irrelevant to why people pray or are of second order importance to them. Although there may or may not be tangible effects of

prayer, those who pray admit that they perceived responses or results which most times are unpredictable and unexpected.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework deemed best suited for this study would be such that combines rhetorical insights and pragmatics rigour on the generic structure of the sermons. The suitability of this model is that it can be applied to the analysis of the two organisational units (Exordium/introductions and Peroratio/conclusions) focused on in this investigation. Sermon in terms of purpose, style, composition, and execution bears many resemblances to academic writing, although it may not be rigidly described as strictly academic. Sermons like academic writing also necessarily involve reader-hearer orientation, topic development, topic support and meta-discourse. Further, these elements could be applied to the two organizational units focused on in the investigation of sermons (introductions and conclusions). In the absence of more suitable approaches, an integrated framework which combines Swale's genre-rhetorical approach and Halliday & Hasan's Generic Structure Potential has been adopted suitable for this study.

The organising principle of the Swalesian approach which is based on his concept of 'moves' is adopted for this study. A move is a sub-communicative functional unit used for an identifiable purpose. It must necessarily contribute to the overall communicative purpose of a discourse or text. Moves vary in size, but they must contain at least one proposition. Also, a move may or may not be coterminous with such structural units as a sentence or paragraph. A 'move' may also be described as a stage/level/phase of discourse organisation and presentation. The Genre Analysis in this study further draws from the theoretical insights proposed by Michael Halliday and Ruqiyah Hasan in their Generic Structure Potential model (henceforth, GSP). GSP, according to Halliday and Hasan, is built on the assumption that a specific set of values realises the field, tenor and mode of discourse and that these "permits statements about the text's structures" to be made (56). The values are labelled 'Contextual Configuration (henceforth CC)' and plays a pivotal role in the structural unity of texts. Further, CC reveals the relationship between a text and its context.

The primary mode of distribution and manifestation of prayer is language. Language is the vehicle through which prayer is structured and transmitted. The forms and functions of prayer vary infinitely. Not all the forms and functions of prayer are, however, observable. Prayer may be spoken, thought, sung, whispered alone, acted out in groups, recited from memory, or spontaneously created. Hence, it could be said that there are two main forms of prayers:

- (i) The silent prayer: these prayers are not readily observable and therefore cannot be analysed linguistically, and
- (ii) Prayer as an observable linguistic phenomenon

Experience in and observation of faith-based communities has proven that both types are perfectly legitimate forms of prayer. However, it is prayer as an observable linguistic phenomenon that is very pervasive in our data, and forms the scope of analysis in this section. Specifically, we limit the focus of investigation to observable principles and patterns by which prayer is conceptualised and formulated. This section, therefore, investigates both the linguistic forms and functions of prayer. Thus, the investigation here explores:

- (a) How HGS prayer is structured in language;
- (b) What forms HGS prayer does take, and
- (c) How HGS prayer acts functions to accomplish these linguistically.
- (d)

### **Discourse, Rhetoric and Religion**

In a certain sense, the relationship between discourse, rhetoric and religion is obvious. Discourse, rhetoric and religion are intimately linked with words. The spoken and written words play essential roles not only in rhetoric and religion, they jointly constitute the 'field' (in Bourdieu's terminology) where language is necessarily used to address the transcendental; to speak about the divine or the sacred, and/or to express religious feeling or awareness or even unbelief. All these phenomena can be grouped under the term 'rhetoric,' they relate to forms of

expression and to the art of discourse being as it were, sites for knowledge codification, cultural transmission, teaching, social practice, etc.

### Forms of Religious Expression

Religious discourse includes: sermons, prayers and religious hymnodies. It refers to writing or speaking about God or the Unseen. Discourse about God pre-eminently consists of narration of the deeds and eulogy of the Unseen, and His Power over nature and man. Narrative and eulogy as discursive forms fall within ancient rhetoric; eulogy having been studied from before Aristotle onwards. Narrative has always occupied a place of importance in the theory of rhetoric, progymnasmata, that was taught in all schools throughout the Graeco-Roman period.

However, it need be stated too, that there is anti-religious discourse, when rhetoric is used in a polemical way to deny the existence of God, and offend the religious opponents as well as to refute religions. This type of rhetoric of blasphemy is also common place. Religious discourse includes: sermons, prayers, testimonies, tracts and religious hymnodies. This study focuses only on prayer within the HGS sermons, to the extent that they are structural components of Pastor E.A Adeboye's HGS sermonic introduction.

Describing form and/or structural elements in prayer is as useful as analysing speech acts of prayers.

### Form and Structure of the Prayer Move in the HGS Sermon Exordium

There exists variation in how prayer is structured across many religious groups, and even within each religious group. Prayer involves people, places, sacred objects, rituals, clothing, and more. There are many types of prayers. We will primarily refer to the structure of HGS prayer linguistic manifestations. The linguistic manifestation is primarily speech. Additionally, linguistic analysis of prayer structure requires knowledge about paralinguistic aspects such as who prays, what the subject of prayer is, and where and when prayer takes place. The patterns in these paralinguistic aspects also reveal conceptually "appropriate" forms of prayer as it exists in society.

The HGS sermon prayers take two general forms:

- (i) individual prayers which are 'casual', flexible, spontaneous, independent individual prayers and
- (ii) the congregational religious service prayers which are formal, rigidly defined, predetermined, and 'Bible-based' service prayers.

We should perhaps comment that the HGS prayers are structured in language using imperative syntax, polite diction, and appropriate topics. The HGS prayers are also speech acts. The focus of the prayers in excerpts 1 and 2 S1-2006 March are an address to a sovereign being and this prayer makes requests, and does so politely:

#### Preacher prompts the audience to prayer....

- 1) I want you to lift your voice to Him and say, **Father, make this night very special for me! Go ahead! Talk to the Almighty God! Let me be the one who will never forget tonight! Make tonight very special for me! Let it be a night to remember a night to remember and I will glorify Your Name! Make this night extra special for me O Lord God Almighty...In Jesus mighty Name we have prayed (Amen!)**

#### Preacher prompts the audience to prayer....

- 2) Lift your voice to Him and say **Father, open the heavens tonight! Stretch forth Your mighty hand and touch me. Go ahead! Talk to the Almighty God! Open the heavens tonight! Stretch forth Your mighty hand and touch me! Touch my soul! Touch my spirit! Touch my family! Touch me tonight! Open the heavens O Lord! Stretch forth your mighty hands and touch me... In Jesus mighty Name we have prayed!(Amen!)**

#### Audience response: pray as directed by the Preacher

As the above excerpts demonstrate, the HGS prayers are as short and concise as possible-although the prayer length is relative. Pastor E.A. Adeboye, the preacher, gives the prayer point that individual HGS attendee prays, which subsequently transmits to become formal scripture-based congregational prayers. This negates the often-drawn distinction between the ‘fluid’ individual prayer and ‘rigid congregational prayers’ in terms of their structures. Also, is the preponderant use of proper nouns like **God, Jesus**, even the pronoun ‘**you**’ **Him** and inclusive pronoun **I, we** in the prayers to negotiate agency. The inclusive pronouns are speaker-agency identification strategies. They are also used to draw attention to common goals in the prayers and to show solidarity.

In religious services the leader recognises the efficacy and limits of his/her agency as well as the audience. So, during the religious services, the service leader identifies the service goals and offers prayers that draw attention to the limits of both his/her as well as the group’s agency to achieving such goals and directs the group’s motivation toward the community’s goals. From the situational and social contexts of usage, when inclusive pronouns are used such as I, we, etc, it is apparent some occurrences of the pronouns actually refer to the speaker alone. Nevertheless, inclusive pronouns are used as politeness strategies to mitigate the preacher’s commands or admonition to the congregation. This is so in (1) above. For instance, in (1) where the preacher says, ‘**I want you to lift your voice to Him and say...**’, he actually intends the congregation to perform this action, for, evidently, the speaker is already ‘lifting his own voice and praying...’ The subject of these pronouns therefore is: + speaker + addressees.

Negotiation of agency requires the one praying to identify goals, wants, or desires he/she wants addressed by the being prayed to. These goals can be thought of as the purpose of prayer. The goal in these two prayers is precise: ‘make this night very special for me!’. The preacher and the audience seek to only influence the likelihood of these specific events happening by involving the community of practice’s God or agency. Humans use prayer to perceive and evaluate the limits and efficacy of their agency. Prayer is motivated by needs or wants as people pray because they cannot accomplish their goals by themselves. Prayers are therefore externally directed.

Excerpt 3 is a prayer asking ‘God’ for ‘whatever’ the individual praying desires.

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### Preacher prompts the audience to prayer....

- 3) Brethren, at this moment, **whatever you want from God, you can get. Go ahead! Talk to Him now as an individual.** Glory be to Your Holy Name! **Let’s begin to bring our prayers to a close...** In Jesus mighty Name we have prayed! (Amen!)

#### Audience response: pray as directed by the Preacher

The goal of the prayer is also precise but the clause ‘**Let’s begin to bring our prayers to a close... In Jesus mighty Name we have prayed!**’ marks the end of the prayer. Unlike excerpts 2 and 3, excerpt 4 below is not concise.

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### Preacher prompts the audience to prayer....

- 4) **If you are not already on your knees let’s be on our knees before Him and worship the only one who can promote us.** Alpha, Omega, Alpha, Omega you are worthy of my praise today, Eternal rock of ages we worship You, Alpha, Omega, the beginning and the end; the one who was, the One who was, the One who is to come, Almighty God King of Kings, Lord of Lords! The Bright and Morning Star, the Lion of Judah! Your name is Wonderful, Counsellor, You are the mighty God; You are the everlasting Father, You are the Prince of Peace. We bless Your holy Name! Accept our worship in Jesus’ Name! Thank You for Your goodness; for Your kindness, for Your faithfulness, for Your power, for Your holiness! Accept our thanks in Jesus Name! There is no one like You! You are the Almighty, the Great Physician, the Great Provider, the Great Defender! You are higher than the highest, You are better than the best, You are richer than the richest; You are wiser than the wisest! You are older than the oldest, Glory be to Your Holy Name! Accept our worship in Jesus Name! Tonight, father demonstrate Your goodness, demonstrate your holiness (Amen!),

demonstrate Your faithfulness demonstrate Your power! **Arise O Lord and scatter all Your enemies, Scatter sickness! Scatter disease! Scatter demons! Scatter sorrow! Scatter barrenness! Scatter failure!** My lord and my Saviour! Everyone here tonight that has come to see You whatever may be their problem solve their problem! **Anyone here tonight as an agent of the devil, arrest him! Arrest her! Show them You are the Almighty.** At the end of everything, let your name be glorified! Thank You Almighty God! In Jesus mighty Name we have prayed! Amen! Let somebody shout Alleluia! (Alleluia!)

#### Audience response: pray as directed by the Preacher

The non-specificity in the excerpt guarantees each individual, with varying needs, so, appropriately prays. The goals and motivations of an individual are often substituted for those of an institution in religious services and especially in prayers. Pastor Adeboye deliberately constructs his artistic proofs, for example, the sentence ‘**If you are not already on your knees, let’s be on our knees before Him and worship the only one who can promote us**’ is stylistically fronted to achieve multiple meanings. This establishes:

- (a) his ethos (Adeboye’s practical wisdom, goodwill and virtue),
- (b) logos (the idea of the pastor kneeling) and
- (c) Pastor Adeboye asking his audience to also kneel before the Sovereign God (is grounded in reason) and pathos (his emotion: happiness at worshipping before God, dread of the wrath of God, which only mercy attenuates, and reverence for the sovereignty of God etc.).

The goals in excerpt 4 range from precise (go on your knees **to thank God for promotion, to worshipping and thanking Him because He is great**, etc.) to the intangible (seeking justice and resisting evil: **Arise O Lord and scatter all Your enemies, Scatter sickness! Scatter disease! Scatter demons! Scatter sorrow! Scatter barrenness! Scatter failure! and Anyone here tonight as an agent of the devil, arrest him! Arrest her! Show them You are the Almighty**)

The prayer in excerpt 5 below centres on asking for ‘**a Taste of Heaven**’ which is the recurrent theme and marks the dominant or thematic significance in the whole prayer text. ‘**A Taste of Heaven**’ is even reiterated (12) twelve times; once in each of the twelve sentences. It is also the title of the December 2006 HGS sermon.

#### Preacher prompts the audience to prayer....

- 5) Now lift your voice to the Almighty God and pray this one prayer loud and clear and say **Father, give me a taste of heaven tonight!**<sup>1</sup> Go ahead! Talk to the Almighty God! **Father, give me a taste of heaven tonight!**<sup>2</sup> **Almighty God give me a taste of heaven tonight!**<sup>3</sup> **Give me a taste of heaven tonight Lord!**<sup>4</sup> **I want to have a taste of heaven tonight!**<sup>5</sup> **This very night! O Lord God Almighty! give me a taste of heaven tonight!**<sup>6</sup> **I know if I just have a taste of heaven everything will change, everything will become different!**<sup>7</sup> **“Lord give me a taste of heaven tonight!**<sup>8</sup> **give me a taste of heaven!**<sup>9</sup> **Almighty God give me a taste of heaven!**<sup>10</sup> **give me a taste of heaven tonight!**<sup>11</sup> Blessed be Your Holy Name! **Give me a taste of heaven tonight!**<sup>12</sup> In Jesus' mighty Name we have prayed! (Amen!)

#### Audience response: pray as directed by the Preacher

As the audience in a communication respond to linear movement among contrasting, complementary episodes, so do sermon listeners respond to discursive developments which continue the *same* unit (topic, claim, attribute, theme, or characteristic). The repetitive linguistic form ‘a taste of heaven’ (as sermon title, religious claim, or attribute) in this prayer is developed consistently through maintaining the principle of restatement. Indeed, linguistic strategies and devices such as repetition is deemed ‘beautiful’ or ‘impressive’ and serve aesthetic means and functional purpose. For example, it is used to ‘persuade’ the hearer/reader. It is used here to show how persuasion can be effected along a variety of paths of reader orientation, for drawing and guiding them to, willingly or even unwillingly, participate in the preacher’s discourse. Sometimes repetition is sustained and immediate, and

sometimes it may be dispersed throughout a piece. However, in excerpt 6 it is carefully sustained and vigorously reinforced.

The rhetorical-pragmatic structure of the prayer in excerpt 48 above is:

**Preacher prays for the audience....**

- 6) **(God) Father**, Your children have come. Tonight, **meet** every need. **Let** every problem be solved. **Save** souls. **Heal** the sick. **Set** the captives free, **let** there be joy today. **Let** there be victory today. **Let** there be testimonies today. **Let** Your Name be glorified today! Thank You Father! in Jesus' Name! (Amen!)

**Audience response: 'Amen' (so, let it be)**

- (a) Prayer target/address/invocation: **(God) Father**  
 (b) Arguments in support of the request:  
 i. **Your (HGS) children (in obedience) have come**  
 ii. **Tonight (December 2006-and every time the sermon is listened to) and**  
 (c) The 9 prayer petitions or requests: (1.) **meet every need**. (2.) **Let every problem be solved**. (3.) **Save souls**. (4.) **Heal the sick**. (5.) **Set the captives free**. (6.) **Let there be joy today**. (7.) **Let there be victory today**. (8.) **Let there be testimonies today**. (9.) **Let Your Name be glorified today!**

The repetitive linguistic form 'let', a verb, in this prayer, is developed consistently through maintaining the principle of restatement via its repetition five (5) times. In the tradition of orators and public speakers, Pastor Adeboye here draws attention to 'parts of the prayer' through the use of parallelisms or restatements to express several ideas or thoughts in a series of similar structures. The overall effect of this is that it heightens the emotional tone of the prayer, thereby making it more memorable. Repetition of lexical items in prayers also perform the function of reinforcing or emphasising the 'prayer points' made by the speakers.

In excerpts 7,8 and 9 S3-2009 March below, the directives are driven by the verbs 'send', '(Don't)let'-repeated five (5) times and 'let's', its variant form once, and 'cover'. These verbs are used in the prayers to ask God to allow something to happen. Also, important too is that the prayers have a generic structure consisting of invocation and petition which are all obligatory elements of the prayers:

**Preacher prompts the audience to prayer....**

- 7) **I want you to lift your voice to the Almighty God and say Father; send** your Light into my life and **let** me begin to shine, talk to the Almighty God...in **Jesus** Mighty Name we have prayed.

**Preacher prompts the audience to prayer....**

- 8) Then **you lift your voice to Him and say Father**, please **don't let** my sun set in afternoon. **Let's** talk to the **Almighty God**. **Don't let** my sun set in the afternoon, **don't let** my sun set at midday, **let** my sun shine all day long, **Almighty God** be merciful unto me; **don't let** my sun set. Thank you, **Jesus!** In **Jesus** Mighty Name we have prayed.

**Preacher prompts the audience to prayer....**

- 9) **Now I want you to join hands with your neighbour, and I want you to pray with the person you are holding and say Father; cover** this child that I am holding with your Glory like a blanket, lift your voice and pray unto Him... thank you **Jesus!** Blessed be your Holy Name. In **Jesus** Mighty Name we have prayed.

### Audience response: pray as directed by the Preacher

Targeting prayer via attribution to deity reflects the idea that the expression of desires by those who pray must be directed externally. Two logical assumptions undergird this position. The first is that individuals who pray express their desires to a deity because they would like these wants to be satisfied by Him/Her/It, etc. The second is that the external expression of these desires by the individuals implies that these desires cannot be satisfied internally. Prayer targeting, therefore, functions to negotiate agency awareness. The prayer target in the above excerpts is “**Him, Father, Almighty God, and Jesus**” while deity is treated as a pragmatic person who can be addressed, summoned or entreated. The relations being projected, using the prayer target in these prayers, is a gendered relationship.

There are three different rhetorical-pragmatic models or analogies for conceiving of the addresser-addressee relationship in religious discourse:

- (a) the monarchical,
- (b) the familial and
- (c) the personal fellowship.

The monarchical address includes such labels like **Mighty King, Almighty God**, etc. and is the most power-oriented. In contrast, ‘Father’ projects the relation as both familial and personal. In Gricean sense, invocations can also be said to have such quantity as conversational implicature: the additional function of praise. In the table below, we further demonstrate the rhetorical-pragmatic patterning of the prayer.

**Table 1: Characterising Agency, Petitions and Concept of the Addresser-Addressee Relationship in HGS Texts**

Excerpt	Divine Agency	Petition	Concept of the addresser-addressee relationship
7	Almighty God Father (God), Jesus	1. <u>send</u> your Light into my life 2. <u>let</u> me begin to shine,	Monarchical, familial and personal
8	Him (God), Father (God), Almighty God Jesus	1.please don't <u>let</u> my sun set in afternoon; 2. Don't <u>let</u> my sun set in the afternoon, 3. don't <u>let</u> my sun set at midday, 4. <u>let</u> my sun shine all day long, 5.Almighty God be merciful unto me; 6. don't <u>let</u> my sun set.	Monarchical, familial and personal
9	Father (God), Him (God) Jesus	<u>cover</u> this child that I am holding with your Glory like a blanket	Monarchical, familial and personal

The prayer target or invocation in prayers most often precedes the petition, although it can be placed elsewhere. For example, the petition may precede the invocation-although this does not feature in our study samples. In excerpts 7,8 and 9 above, the prayer target may or may not be structurally conflated with the petition. Where it is structurally conflated with the petition as in excerpts 7,8 and 9, the invocation is understood as the subject of an imperative. Where the reverse is the case, implicitly or explicitly, it becomes the indirect object of a performative.

The same pattern emerges in excerpt 10, S4-2009 December, below. Although preceded by what we term ‘worship prayer exchange’. It is a general sermon opener often accompanied by soft music. It is nonetheless the only ‘prayer’ for the HGS December, 2009 Exordium. In this excerpt, the directive act of the prayer is driven by the verb ‘**let**’ and it is used to ask God to allow some experience to happen to the ones praying. The agency ‘**Father**’ is personal and familiar while the petition is: “**...the kind of miracles I have never experienced before, let them happen to me tonight...**”. Thus, this prayer also has the generic template which consists of prayer target or

invocation and petition. Both of prayer target or invocation and petition are obligatory elements of the prayers:

**Preacher prompts the audience to prayer....**

- 10) **I want you to pray just one prayer and say Father, the kind of miracles I have never experienced before, let them happen to me tonight...** in Jesus mighty name we have prayed.

**Audience response: pray as directed by the Preacher**

Excerpts 11 and 12 are two prayers from the Exordium of S5-HGS 2012 March sermon. While it follows the pattern of all the prayers we have thus considered, it is distinct particularly in the recursive ordering of the invocations used.

**Preacher prompts the audience to prayer....**

- 11) **Lift your voice to Him and say Father, don't let me miss my breakthrough tonight,** go ahead talk to the Almighty God... in Jesus mighty name we have prayed.

**Audience response: pray as directed by the Preacher**

In excerpt 11, the verb 'let' drives the directive act in the prayer. It is used to ask God to **not let someone praying the prayer miss his/her 'breakthrough tonight'**. 'Father', the invoked agency is both personal and familiar to the praying audience while the petition is stated: "...don't let me miss my breakthrough tonight...". The generic template of the prayer in excerpt 11 consists of the obligatory elements of invocation 'Father' and petition '**letnot someone praying the prayer miss his/her 'breakthrough tonight'**'.

**Preacher prays for the audience....**

- 12) **Eternal rock of ages, the Only one of Israel, the Ancient of days, the One who has no beginning and has no ending, the One who never grows old, the Alpha as well as Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Author and the Finisher of our faith. Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of peace, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the King that is coming again, Saviour, Healer, Deliverer, Provider, Friend, our King, our Lord; the Lover of our soul, the Lifter up of our head, the Horn of our salvation, the Resurrection and the Light,** glory be to your holy name. <sup>1</sup>Thank you for the Holy Ghost Service, that you started twenty-six years ago, that has grown bigger and bigger year by year. <sup>2</sup>Thank you for the souls that have been saved, <sup>3</sup>thank you for the people you have healed, <sup>4</sup>thank you for the barren that has become fruitful, <sup>5</sup>thank you for the captives that you have set free, <sup>6</sup>thank you for the poor that you have made rich, <sup>7</sup>thank you for the forgotten that you remembered, <sup>8</sup>please accept our thanks in Jesus name. **Tonight Father, prove yourself again, save soul, heal the sick, set the captives free, every one of us here today, give us at least one major breakthrough. By the time we leave here let it be said that God has visited His people again, thank you Almighty God.** In Jesus mighty name we have prayed.

**Audience response: 'Amen' (so, let it be)**

The generic template of the prayer in excerpt 12 consists of the obligatory elements of petitionary prayer: invocation, petition and thanks giving. However, between the three-part structure of the prayer: the first part (the invocation) and the last part (the summon) is an interpolation of a medial part (praise/thanks giving), used psycho-stylistically to express obeisance to a supernatural power.

**A. The invocation:** As can be seen in this excerpt, the form of attribution for the deity in the prayer can either be combined or used recursively: for example:

- (1.) Eternal rock of ages,
- (2.) the Only one of Israel,



- (3.) the Ancient of days,
- (4.) the One who has no beginning and has no ending,
- (5.) the One who never grows old,
- (6.) the Alpha as well as Omega,
- (7.) the Beginning and the End,
- (8.) the Author and the Finisher of our faith.
- (9.) Wonderful,
- (10.) Counsellor,
- (11.) Mighty God,
- (12.) Everlasting
- (13.) Father,
- (14.) Prince of peace,
- (15.) the Lion of the tribe of Judah,
- (16.) the King that is coming again,
- (17.) Saviour
- (18.) Healer
- (19.) Deliverer
- (20.) Provider
- (21.) Friend
- (22.) our King
- (22.) our Lord
- (23.) the Lover of our soul
- (24.) the Lifter up of our head
- (25.) the Horn of our salvation
- (26.) the Resurrection and the Light

Pastor Adeboye having thus taken time to copiously and properly attribute all essences to the deity, thence summoned Him to act on behalf of those praying.

**B. The summon/petition:** This is done via five (5) imperatives: “**Tonight, Father, (a) prove yourself again, (b) save soul, (c) heal the sick, (d) set the captives free..., and (e) give us at least one major breakthrough**. Also, it is important to note that the summons in this prayer is further accentuated and subsequently achieved with summoning intonations by the leader.

**C. Praise/Thanks-giving:** The structure of the praise/thanks giving itself is recursive:

- (i) **Thank You** for the Holy Ghost Service, that you started twenty-six years ago, that has grown bigger and bigger year by year
- (ii) **Thank You** for the souls that have been saved
- (iii) **Thank You** for the people you have healed
- (iv) **Thank You** for the barren that has become fruitful
- (v) **Thank You** for the captives that you have set free
- (vi) **Thank You** for the poor that you have made rich,
- (vii) **Thank You** for the forgotten that you remembered
- (viii) Please accept our thanks in Jesus name.

Through this prayer structure, we can conclude that the possibility of recursion can itself be used to achieve a cognitive effect and that the same structure can be relevant in two ways. That is, fulfilling two functions, address and praise.

Data S6-2012 December perhaps exhibits the greatest number of prayers of the HGS sermon introductions with seven (7) prayer excerpts. Like in the previous examples, the directives are driven by the verbs ‘**lift**’, ‘**say**’, ‘**let**’ in excerpt 11, in excerpt 12 by the verbs ‘**say**’ and ‘**let**’, the verbs ‘**visit**’ and ‘**let**’ in excerpt 12; and the verbs ‘**let**’ and ‘**do**’ in excerpt 13. These verbs are used in the prayers to ask God to allow something positive to happen. Again, the generic templates of these petitionary prayers consist of the obligatory elements of invocation and petition. Via these structures of address and praise, two functions in religious discourse, are not only achieved but sustained by Pastor Adeboye.

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**Preacher prompts the audience to prayer....**

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- 13) **I want you to lift your voice to the Almighty God and say Father; before the sun rises let me sing a new song; a new song of joy, a new song of breakthroughs, a new song of victory, a new song of Signs and Wonders....**

**Audience response: pray as directed by the Preacher**

The force of this prayer is achieved by a performative: excerpt 13 “**before the sun rises let me sing a new song; a new song of joy, a new song of breakthroughs, a new song of victory, a new song of Signs and Wonders.**” A prayer offered on behalf of someone either physically present or not is called an intercessory prayer. Excerpt 14 is functionally an intercessory prayer. Its generic template consists of an invocation and petition too.

**Preacher prompts the audience to prayer....**

- 14) **Please join your hands with your neighbour and pray for him/her and say Father, for this your child that I am holding, let this be a night of Signs and Wonders...** In Jesus mighty name we have prayed.

**Audience response: pray as directed by the Preacher**

The force of the prayer in excerpt 14 above is achieved by a performative: “**Father, for this your child that I am holding, let this be a night of Signs and Wonders...**” In terms of intentionality, this representation projects words onto the world, essentially using language in the prayer to try to bring about a future state of affairs. The prayer above also maps into the tenor of discourse which refers to variables such as: the participants in the discourse, and the subsisting relationships between them, such as preacher-congregation, teacher-pupil, parent-child, etc?

Gregory isolates and distinguishes between two types of tenor: personal and functional tenor. The former involves personal-addressee relationship and refers to social roles of the participants, while functional addressee relationship has to do with the speaker’s or writer’s purpose in the situation (156). Personal tenor realises the interpersonal function of language. In other words, it projects the role relationship that exists among the participants. Using both personal and functional tenor here, Pastor Adeboye, via this prayer, aims at getting the audience to bond by praying for one another ‘**Please join your hands with your neighbour and pray for him/her...**’. The tenor of discourse also determines the choice of an option from the system of mood, where the pattern of clause types realised is either declarative, imperative, interrogative and/or exclamatory. The clause in this prayer is imperative.

Excerpts 15 and 16 are forms of prayer called ‘prayer of praise/thanks-giving’ used to express obeisance to a supernatural power.

**Preacher prays for the audience...**

- 15) **Thank You for January, thank You for February, thank You for March, thank You for April, thank You for May, thank You for June, thank You for July, thank You for August, thank You for September, thank You for October, thank You for November, thank You for December.**

**Preacher prays for the audience...**

- 16) **Glory be to your holy name. Thank You for what You did here on Monday, thank You for what You did on Tuesday, thank You for what You did on Wednesday, thank You for what You did yesterday, thank You for what You are about to do today and thank You for what You will do in our tomorrow, accept our worship in Jesus name.**

**Audience response: ‘Thank You/Thank You, Lord’**

The invoked subject in both excerpts ‘You’ refers to God no doubt. Also significant is that the word ‘thank you’ explicitly recurs in both extracts to further express the motive of the prayer:

‘praise/thanks giving’. These prayer forms function rhetorical-pragmatically either as preparatory grounds for asking deity for things to be done for those praying or even thanking Him in advance for acceding the requests by answering the prayers. We can conclude that the recursion of the divine agency as exhibited in these extracts has been adeptly used to achieve a cognitive effect and that the structure fulfils an additional rhetorical-pragmatic function of praise/thanks giving for answers by deity.

As excerpts 15 and 16 above demonstrate, prayer is theistic, presupposing that there exists a personal God with whom it makes sense to communicate, no matter how mysteriously. Specifically, pragmatic conception of the personhood of God connotes the possibility of dialogue with Him. So, since God is a pragmatic Person, it makes sense both to “**talk to God**” and “**thank Him/ask His intervention**”.

Presented below, in a table, are the recursive structures in excerpts 15 and 16 of the prayers, all driven by the phrase ‘**thank You**’.

**Table 2: The Recursive Structures in the Prayers**

Excerpt 15	Excerpt 16
i. <b>Thank You</b> for January,	i. <b>Thank You</b> for what <u>You</u> did here on Monday,
ii. <b>thank You</b> for February,	ii. <b>thank You</b> for what <u>You</u> did on Tuesday,
iii. <b>thank You</b> for March,	iii. <b>thank You</b> for what <u>You</u> did on Wednesday,
iv. <b>thank You</b> for April,	iv. <b>thank You</b> for what <u>You</u> did yesterday,
v. <b>thank You</b> for May,	v. <b>thank You</b> for what <u>You</u> are about to do today and
vi. <b>thank You</b> for June,	vi. <b>thank You</b> for what <u>You</u> will do in our tomorrow,
vii. <b>thank You</b> for July,	
viii. <b>thank You</b> for August,	
ix. <b>thank You</b> for September,	
x. <b>thank You</b> for October,	
xi. <b>thank You</b> for November,	
xii. <b>thank You</b> for December	
xiii. <b>Thank You</b> for the Holy Ghost Service, that <u>You</u> started twenty-six years ago, that has grown bigger and bigger year by year.	

The two extracts in excerpts 17 and 18 are equally prayers of ‘**praise/thanks-giving**’ used to express obeisance to a supernatural power. Many things make the last two prayers in our analysis interesting in terms of its linguistics. First, it is supposedly agentless, **God**, the subject, to whom the prayer is offered, being only (immediately) recoverable from the ‘spiritual’, ‘physical’ and ‘psychological’ context of the prayer: The Holy Ghost Service. Second, the directives in the prayers are driven by the verb ‘**visit**’, and ‘**let**’, in excerpts 17 and in excerpt 18 by the words ‘**let**’ and ‘**do**’:

**Preacher prays for the audience...**

17) **Tonight, visit Your children, before the sun rises everybody here present and all those who are listening all over the world, before the sun rises again let all of us sing a new song.**

**Preacher prays for the audience...**

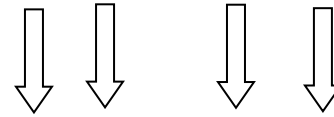
18) **Let this be a night of Signs and Wonders. Do something in our lives you have never done before and at the end of it all let your name be glorified.**

**Audience response: ‘Amen’ (so, let it be!)**

The linguistic structure of the prayer in excerpt 17 is interesting. It is a compound-complex sentence with the elements:



(Tonight), (visit) (Your children), (before the sun rises), (everybody here present and all those who are listening all over the world), (before the sun rises again), (let), (all of us), (sing) (a new song).



Verb    Subj        Verb    Obj

### Conclusion

The study of the form and/or structural elements in the HGS prayer as well as the analysis of speech acts or linguistic functions has shown that; almost all the HGS prayers are not only ‘double directive acts’ but constitute what may be called ‘prayers of supplication’. While directive acts enable the speaker to get his/her hearer to do something for the speaker; ‘double directive acts’ will, for instance, in a religious communication, refer to utterances made by the preacher leading the prayer to get either of the hearer(s) or deity being prayed to or both to do something for the participants. Again, prayer targeting is also very crucial and is dependent on the individual’s religious background. Religions differ on how and to which deity they pray. In other words, certain appropriate targets of prayer are deployed differently. Protestant Christianity recognizes the idea of the Holy Trinity: God the Father, Jesus Christ (His Son), and the Holy Spirit. Muslims only pray to Allah while Hinduism identifies and prays to thousands of deities. All of these are examples of prayer targets. Invocation or agency selection is strategic, and involves taking into account the purpose, content, and urgency of a prayer when selecting a divine authority. Agency selection considers not only the relative importance of the prayer, but also who is best suited to receive it. Within the context of HGS prayer which we have studied, supplication means a humble, earnest entreaty or request. The prayer request made must be and is always heartfelt, fervent and earnest. Prayer is more conceptually defined by its functions than its forms.

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