Forms and Functions of Interrogation in Charismatic Christian Pulpit Discourse.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The use of interrogation is a common practice in most daily human conversations. It is however, more common in some kinds of discourse than others. For instance, in cross-examinations in courts of law, political interviews, job interviews, doctor-patient talk, and teacher pupil discourse, it is easy to see the syntagmatic chaining of discourse in terms of an exchange with an initiation (I) representing the question from one speaker and a response (R) which is the answer from another. Scholarly works on the use of interrogatives in discourse are enormous (see Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Stubbs, 1983; Bloor and Bloor, 1995; Eggins, 1993, *etc*).

> The focus of this paper is a kind of discourse that appears rather like a monologue, but still makes use of interrogations, thereby seeking responses from the listeners.

Sermons, or pulpit discourse as we call it in this work, are messages delivered by speakers vested with some spiritual authority within the church or any gathering of Christians. They are not known to be typically characterized by the use of many interrogatives because the speakers set out to inform the listeners with a view to transform their lives through the messages. The preacher controls the discourse and the situation places constraints on the co-interactants to listen while he speaks (see Taiwo forthcoming). Despite that most sermons are typically full of declarative sentences, charismatic Christian preachers use interrogative forms for specific purposes in their messages. This article therefore, looks at the forms and functions of such interrogatives.

The research made use of audio and video recorded data as well as personal observations of pulpit messages given by charismatic Christian preachers in South Western Nigeria. An attentive auditioning of these messages produced the various forms of interrogation

used in this work, their functions and the interpretations given to them judging by the responses of the listeners.

2. THE USE OF INTERROGATION IN ENGLISH DISCOURSE

Traditional grammar structurally recognizes four types of sentence: Declarative, Imperative, Exclamatory and Interrogative. These types are also distinguished on the bases of their uses and functions (meaning types) (see Kersti and Burridge, 2001) The formal and functional types together with their purposes are identified below.

Table 1: Formal, Functional and Purposes of Interrogation in English Discourse

FORMAL TYPES	FUNCTIONAL TYPES	PURPOSES
Declarative	Statement	to state, tell or convey information or make something known
Imperative	Command	to make others to behave in certain ways
Interrogative	Question	to seek or elicit information
Exclamatory	Exclamation	to express surprise, disgust or annoyance at something

The neat correspondence between the formal and functional types of sentences as seen in the table above may not always be so in real communication. Pragmatists identified what they call illocutionary force of a sentence, *i.e.* what the speaker intends his utterance to be interpreted as, as opposed to the actual utterance. (See Austin, 1962 and Searle, 1969). For instance, Wales (1989) asserts that a declarative sentence may have the illocutionary force of a question simply by changing the pattern of intonation from a normal falling to a rising (represented by a question mark in writing), *e.g.*:

1.   *You were there?*

Valimaa-Blum (2001) corroborates this by showing that "the same linguistic expression can be used to perform several illocutionary acts", *e.g.*:

    2.   Have you finished eating?

The question above has the illocutionary force of wanting to know whether the addressee is over with eating. It may equally have the illocutionary force of wanting the addressee to leave the room because the speaker wants to have a private discussion on some issues with a visitor.

Interrogatives are popularly used instead of imperatives for polite requests, *e.g.*:

    3. Could you shut the door please?

It then means that for any interrogation to be properly interpreted, the propositional content, *i.e.*, the linguistic meaning, as well as the illocutionary force, *i.e.*, the intended meaning have to be understood.

Scholars on interrogative syntax have identified some types of interrogatives in English. The broad types identified from the typologies presented by these various scholars are the following:

(a)   **Yes-no Questions**, otherwise known as Polar Questions, Closed Questions Or Nexus Questions (Jespersen, 1933), Confirmation-denial Questions (Robinson and Rackstraw, 1972).

(b)   **Wh-Questions,** otherwise known as Information-seeking Questions

(c)   **Alternative Questions**

(d)   **Tag Questions**

(e)   **Rhetorical Questions**

(For more details on these interrogative types, see Quirk, *et al*, 1985; Aremo, 1997 and Kersti and Burridge, 2001). We shall discuss the types briefly in the next section.

Yes-no Questions can be described as questions that allow for an affirmative (yes) or negative (no) reply. According to Aremo (1997:342), in a typical Yes-no question, the

operator (the only auxiliary or the first of the two or more auxiliaries in a verb phrase) is moved before the subject and is pronounced with a rising intonation. Eggins (1993: 173) puts this in another way – "the structure of the polar question involves the positioning of the finite before the subject", for example,

> ### 4. *Are they coming tonight?*

In 4 above, the operator or the finite verb *are,* is fronted, while the subject **they** is placed next to it. The rising intonation is indicated by the question mark. In cases where the related declarative contains a fused finite/predicator (*i.e.,* simple past and simple present forms of verb) there is need to introduce a finite element to be placed before the subject. This finite element is typically the "do" auxiliary, *e.g.*:

> 5.   Declarative: ***Tunde copied the work from his book***

> 6.   Interrogative: ***Did Tunde copy the work from his book?***

6 is a non-basic sentence formed from 5, a basic sentence by inserting the finite element "do". In a Yes-no question clear constraints are on the interpretation of the utterance which follows. Hearers therefore will try and interpret whatever follows the question as meaning either "yes" or "no". According to Stubbs, 1983: 105),

> this is not to say that only the forms "yes " and "no" can occur; but that whatever does occur is already pre-classified as meaning either "yes" or "no".

For instance, an answer such as "I don't think so" can be interpreted as negative.

Wh- Questions are questions formed with one of the closed class of interrogative pronouns (***who***, ***what***, ***where***, ***when***, ***why*** and ***how***). According to Quirk, *et al* (1985: 806), wh-questions typically expect a reply from an open range of replies. It may appear that wh-questions are syntactically constrained in the sense that a where- interrogative is normally followed by a place adverbial and a when- interrogative , by a time adverbial, *e.g.*:

7.   Q: *Where is my book?*   A: *On the table. / *At five o'clock.*

8.   Q: *When is daddy coming?*   A: *At five o'clock. / *On the table.*

It is easy to identify counter examples where there are no such constraints, *e.g.*:

9.   Q: *Where is John?*   A: *He's not well today.*

The answer in 9 can still be interpreted as "At home", but using the latter "might be conversationally inappropriate on its own, since some reasons might be required" (Stubbs, 1983: 108).

Alternative Questions are a special kind of Yes-no question in the sense that the structure is like that of a yes-no question (the subject follows the operator or the finite verb). They differ only in the fact that they possess two or more alternative answers. In alternative questions, there is a presupposition of the truth-value of only one of the propositions, *e.g.*:

10.   *Will you have tea or coffee?*

Tag Questions are a type of question in which the interrogative structure is left to the end of the sentence where the operator is "tagged on" to the pronoun subject and the question expects a "yes" or "no" answer. The central purpose of a tag question is to seek confirmation, *e.g.*:

11.   *He came late, didn't he?*

Kersti and Burridge (2001) identified other functions of tag questions:

(i)   regulating conversational interaction and politeness, for instance, a parent may

        say to a child who misbehaves in the presence of visitors

12.   *You don't do that, do you?*

(ii)   indicating interest in participation in an ongoing discourse, *e.g.*:

13   *I guess I can come in now, can't?*

(iii)   seeking empathy form listener (s), *e.g.*:

14.   *I am not as bad as he portrayed me, am I?*

For further discussion on the functions of tag questions, see Kersti and Burridge (2001: 122 *ff*).

Rhetorical Question is common in formal speeches of persuasion made by public speakers, politicians and poets. It resembles questions in structure, but is really used for making emphatic statements. Quirk *et al* (1985: 1478) assert that "in communicative effect, it [rhetorical question] is similar to tag question since it seeks confirmation of what the speaker has explicitly assumed (by preceding declarative) to be agreed as truth."

In a rhetorical question, the speaker does not expect an answer, for example,

15.   *Is there anybody here ready to die?*

Sometimes, rhetorical questions reflect how the speaker thinks*, i.e.*, his internal reflection and at the same time, it directs the hearer's mind to the points being made, *e.g.*:

16.   *How shall I put it now?*

17.   *But, where was I?*

Some rhetorical questions have the functions of a directive (with abusive component), *e.g.*:

18.   *Why don't you go and jump in to the lagoon?*

3.   **CHARISMATIC CHRISTIANITY**

Charismatism is a movement that came into being in the mid 20th Century. The movement, according to Burgess and McGeed (1990) is a trans-denominational movement of Christians (both independent and denominational) who emphasize "life in the spirit" (p.4). From the United States, the movement spread to other parts of the world. The growth has been tremendous in Africa, especially in the urban areas. The spread in the urban areas could be adduced to the fact that their messages address contemporary urban problems such as unemployment, loneliness, inadequate health care and poor social services (see Ojo, 2001:4).

Charismatics emphasize the outflowing of the Holy Spirit and dwell on the importance of exercising extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues (an evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit), healing, prophesy, teaching, and so forth. They are committed to the spread of the gospel and in the modern times engage in the use of modern technologies, such as the radio, television, and the internet to facilitate the dissemination of the gospel (see Hackett: 1998:7). Success of this movement in evangelism, according to Burgess and McGeed (1990) may well constitute the most dramatic increase of believers in the history of the Christian church. The rapid growth in charismatic Christianity brought a considerable variety of worship pattern, cultural attitude and methods of evangelism.

In their bid to evangelize, charismatic activities, especially in developing nations of Africa are not limited to churches and crusades. They also extend their preaching to public places such as buses, taxis, markets, offices, hospitals, schools and prisons using the Bible, tracts, stickers, audio and video tapes (see Ojo, 1995; Hackett, 1998). Some of the fast growing charismatic Christian organisations that exist in the area of this study include: The Living Faith Ministries, Foursquare Gospel Church, Deeper Christian Life Ministries, The Redeemed Christian Church of God, The Sword of the Spirit Ministries and Mountain of Fire and Miracles.

4.   LANGUAGE USE IN CHARISMATIC MOVEMENTS

The charismatic movement, like other social institutions has norms guiding members' behaviour. Members share certain of the community's language expectations, some of

which according to Fairclough (1988) include knowledge of language codes, knowledge of principles of norms and use, and knowledge of situations and the world. Despite the fact that linguistic behaviour may vary to some extent, from one charismatic organization to another, there is a generally recognized linguistic behavioural pattern. Charismatic movements are marked by vigorous activities and in all these activities, language plays prominent roles. Charismatic Christian services are full of warmth with messages in forms of sermons, prophesies, testimonies, announcements and songs. At every point in the service language is characterized by norms, which vary along lexico-semantic dimensions. The language and norms of prophecy differs from those of prayer or sermon.

A close observation of the linguistic behaviour in charismatic movements shows that it differs a lot from that of orthodox Christian bodies. Charismatic services are generally known to have a boisterous atmosphere. For instance, the usual graveyard silence one usually notices during sermons in orthodox Christian services is not a feature of charismatic services. Charismatic preachers are more flexible and less formal in the delivery of their messages. They often carry the listeners along by encouraging their participation. It is not unusual to often have messages being interjected by unsolicited comments from the congregation. Such comments include phrases such as "oh yeah", "hallelujah", "ride on pastor", and so forth. Interjections may also be in form of a rapturous noise or an applause (which sometimes drown the message) expressing approval of something said by the preacher. There are also non-verbal behaviour such as clapping and waving hands to show an approval of the message. The preacher may solicit responses such as a repetition of something he has just said, making the congregation to fill a gap in his statement and so forth. All these are strategies employed by charismatic Christian preachers to ensure the attentiveness of their listeners.

The most active use of language in charismatic worship service occurs during sermons. Sermons are messages given for the purpose of transforming the lives of the listeners. Preachers appeal to the faith of their listeners by encouraging them to pursue righteousness and hope for the best. They also use the message to warn, chastise, and challenge the listeners to tap into their potentials. The preacher controls the discourse and only allows the congregation to participate at his will in the course of the discourse. The

use of interrogation is one of the features of a charismatic sermon. And they are used with the view to achieve some of the purposes listed earlier. Some of the questions we shall attempt to answer as far as the use of interrogation in Charismatic Christian discourse is concerned include the following:

(i)   What kind of interrogative forms do charismatic Christian preachers use?

(ii)   Why do they use such interrogative forms?

(iii)   What kinds of responses do they expect (*i.e.*, the illocutionary force) of their interrogation?

(iv)   What kind of responses do they get to their interrogation?

(v)   When there are ambiguities in the interpretation of their interrogation, how do they resolve these?

5.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Our findings reveal that three types of interrogative forms are commonly used by charismatic Christian preachers – wh- questions, yes-no questions, and rhetorical questions. These questions, as we have observed earlier in Section 2 are used sometimes to perform some illocutionary function, which are different from their traditional function of elicitation of information.

Most of the wh- questions used were usually unambiguous – the answers were sometimes too obvious. For instance, these preachers sometimes made statements, which were related directly to the questions they were asking and the questions were then seen as a way of making some points and ensuring that the preachers were being followed. In other words, the illocutionary function of the question was not primarily to elicit response but to stress or underscore some points in the discourse, *e.g.*:

> **19.   God is on your side. Who is on your side?**

> **20.   All things become new. How many things become new?**

Answers to the questions above lie in the statements preceding them. The function of the questions above is more of that of a hearing/check, *i.e.*, they were meant to check whether the listener was following or not (Olateju, 1998:34). The kind of discourse we are dealing with here is one in which the preacher does most of the talking and the questions come in only when he needs to be sure he is carrying the listeners along as he is making his points.

Interrogative forms were also used to make points clearer in the discourse. It was observed in the data that charismatic Christian preachers asked questions and chose to provide the answers. When this happened, it was very clear to the congregation that such questions were not meant for them. Such questions were usually open-ended and the questioner did not provide any clue or enough clues to guide the listeners. The contexts always made it clear that only the questioner could answer his own questions, *e.g.*:

> 21. *Why will our bodies be transformed? What reasons? Several reasons, one…, two…*

> 22. *Each time we see these things, we rejoice. Why? Because the end is near.*

It may not be easy for the congregation to respond to the questions the way the preachers had. The style (the questioner answering his own question) was common in sermons that were like teaching sessions, where the teacher raised questions based on biblical principles and used the answers to teach these principles. This style may even be more complex when the answer seemed too remote from the question asked and the whole thing looked like a riddle, *e.g.*,

> 23. *Where is Moses without the rod of God in Egypt? Suicide.*

The complexity of this question lies in the fact that ordinarily, listeners have the tendency to interpret it as a rhetorical question. This is because it appeared to be probing something, which calls for a thoughtful consideration, rather than expecting a verbal response. With the answer given by the preacher, his wh- word (where) was not actually expecting a place adverbial answer. The preacher was quick to demonstrate that it was not

a rhetorical question, but one used to convey a message which people would not normally think seriously about. The answer "suicide" would normally be appropriate for a 'what' question and not a 'where' question. It also underscores the importance of "the rod of God" and the danger Moses and his followers would have faced before Pharaoh without it.

Charismatic Christian preachers were also seen to use interrogative forms to which they deliberately provided the wrong answers. In such instances, the contexts aided the responses. The illocutionary function of such an act is to actually ensure that the congregation was attentive, *e.g.*:

24.   ***What is in your hand? A book?***

The wrong answers provided (**A book**) itself is a question (pronounced with a rising intonation). The point being made here is that the Bible is not just an ordinary book, but the word of God, which is powerful.

Another strategy used by charismatic Christian preachers to ensure attentiveness is the use of wh- echo questions (see Quirk, et al 1985: 835). The wh- element is used to question a part of a statement made earlier by the speaker or a well-known Bible passage or principle. The preacher would expect the congregation to repeat part of his message as a way of having its content confirmed, *e.g.*:

25.   ***Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you what***?

The wh- here is questioning the nominal item "rest", which is the completion of the Matt. 11: 28 passage quoted from the Bible by the speaker.

When polar questions were used as an interrogative form in messages, they might also have obvious answers, which the preacher wanted his listener to supply either as an affirmation or denial of the proposition in the question, *e.g.*:

26.   ***Is there any body here who is ready to go to hell?***

The expected answer is obvious – a negative response "no" because every member of the congregation understands the implication of the answer given – hell is a place no Christian would want to go to.

Despite that sometimes answers to Yes-no questions are obvious, the preacher may occasionally go ahead and provide the response. His purpose is to strengthen the proposition made earlier, *e.g.*:

27. ***Can you use another man's knowledge to procure an appointment? No.***

The question and answer in 27 was used to show the importance of a personal relationship with God rather than a dependence on human intermediaries. The figurative use of "another man's knowledge" stands for "a human intermediary", while "an appointment" represents "a relationship with God".

In all the instances we have treated so far, the interrogative forms were used to elicit verbal responses, which were either given by the congregation or the preacher himself.

Interrogation in charismatic Christian discourse does not only have the illocutionary function of eliciting verbal responses. Some interrogative forms were sometimes used to elicit non-verbal responses, which came in form of kinesics, and mental behaviour. In most cases when the non-verbal response was kinesics, the preacher normally used wh-questions addressed directly to the congregation, *e.g.*:

29   *A friend of mine would tell me this "God is not asleep". How many of you know that God is not asleep?*

A commonly used form of kinesics identified in the data is the raising up of hands to show identification. Rhetorical questions are generally known not to expect verbal responses. They were however observed in the data to elicit mental responses, mainly a meditation on the question being asked, *e.g.*:

30. ***You think witches and wizards don't know you?***

The form of 30 is a declarative given the illocutionary function of an interrogative. Wh-rhetorical questions are used to set the listener thinking and thereby having a fresh insight into an already familiar idea, principle or story, *e.g.*:

31. *How can a man be cripple at the Beautiful Gate?*

32. *You carry the rod of God in your hand? Why must you allow Pharaoh to keep humiliating you?*

The language in 32 is figurative. The allusion here was made to the story of how Moses confronted Pharaoh and led the Israelites out of Egypt. For the contemporary Christian the **rod of God** in Moses' hand can be compared with 'the Bible' while **Pharaoh** can be likened to 'the devil', who would not want 'Christians' – or more accurately 'the Spiritual Israelites' – to reach their 'promised land' – heaven.

Polar rhetorical questions were also used for the same purpose mentioned above, *e.g.*:

33. *Do you know that the differences between extraordinary and ordinary is "extra".*

The questions in 30, 31 and 32 as we can see, were meant to challenge the listeners to tap into their potentials. They are common in messages that have to do with believers exercising dominion and authority, prosperity messages and deliverance messages. The general quietness and meditative mood of the congregation when these questions were asked showed that the questions were achieving their purpose.

Sometimes there were ambiguities in the interpretation of some rhetorical questions, *e.g.*:

34. *When you die, what do you take to heaven?*

The question may not absolutely have the illocutionary force of a rhetorical question because the congregation had an accurate answer to it. The preacher, on such occasion as this, had a way of passing across the message that he did not intend the question to be answered, but for the congregation to think about.

What we have identified and discussed in this work represents the general style of interrogation in charismatic Christian pulpit discourse. We are aware that different preachers have their own styles and this depends largely on their background and training. The submission at this point is that interrogation is a common approach to discourse control and sustenance in charismatic Christian sermons.

6.   CONCLUSION

This study has been able to establish the fact that interrogation is a tool in the hand of charismatic Christian preachers, not only to elicit information from the congregation, but to regulate their linguistic behaviour in the process of the discourse. The preacher also sometimes answered his own questions and even when the answer to a question was obvious from both the linguistic and social contexts, the preacher still attempted his own questions in order to make his point.

We also observed that interrogation was also used to elicit non-verbal responses, which could be inform of kinesics and mental behaviour. Since the essence of preaching is to transform the listeners, preachers appealed to their mental faculties by interrogating them and making them have new insights into the topic of the message being preached.

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