THE LANGUAGE OF RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE: A PANACEA FOR RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The language of religion could serve as a medium for solving religious conflicts in Nigeria since the majority of the people belong to different religions. This paper therefore, discusses the use of religious language of in curbing religious conflicts in Nigeria. The work exploits the systemic linguistics grammatical model as its theoretical framework, which states that language is a network of systems. Consequently, the panacea for religious conflicts is discussed. They include the public speaker's competence, dialogue, and semiotic-language discourse, the language of advertisement, the language of poetry and music and the language of drama. Solutions are proffered in the use of language in breaking down conflicts of religion in Nigeria.

Keywords: Religion, discourse, conflict, panacea, religious language, Nigeria.

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Introduction

Language is a tool used for communicative competence. According to Uhumwangho and Adaghonyin (69), language is not simply a tool of social conduct, but the effective means by which human beings formulate models of conduct. If the last statement is true, then language could serve as a panacea for religious conflict. Language is a reposition of culture and humanity's primary means of communication. Since religion is made of people's culture, language becomes so

paramount for curbing religious conflicts using the language of religion. The thrust of this paper is using the language or religion as a panacea for religious conflict, this paper will also discourse the language of religion, using systemic model for analysis systemic model, also known as NeoFirthian systemic grammar, postulates that language is a network of System and a grammar must have bearing on experience.

Definition of Terms

Some terms used in this paper are discussed extensively

Discourse

Discourse is from Latin origin, discourses' meaning conversation or speech. (Kamit Wisniewsk). The term discourse is related to several area in human lie. In language, discourse means language in use or socially situated text and talk. Other disciplines, such as history, philosophy, political science, anthropology have their own views about discourse. Discourse could be seen by them as speech or thought in a topic.

Crystal sees discourse as "a continuous stretch of language (especially spoken) larger than a sentence, often constituting argument, joke or narrative" (25). To Schifrin, discourse is

"any unit of language beyond the sentence which includes both dialogue and non dialogue forms in their spoken or written form" (167). Widowson also states that discourse "is not simply patchwork of preordained sentential meanings, but as a dynamic process of meaning creation" (107).

Foucault views discourse as practices that systematically form the objects which they deal (84). Discourse is seen with its relation with language by these scholars as, discourse as any form of language above the sentence level (Stubbs 1), discourse as any form of language in use (Brown and Yule1). Discourse applies to both spoken and written language, especially for communication (Uhunmangho 92). What is structurally important is the linguistic function and that it is the evidence of this kind that points to the existence of discourse (Uhunmwangho 93). From all indications, discourse refers to both spoken and written language used especially for the purpose of communication.

Panacea

Panacea is something that could solve all problems of a particular situation. It is a way to breaking down difficulties and problems that are persistence in a linguistic environment. Panacea is a solution to an existing problem.

Religion

Religion is a collection of cultural systems, belief systems and world views that establish moral value. "Religion is a virtue in the acts of all the virtues, namely, that which is due to God that also forms a part of Justice" (G.U. Ukagba and Anthony Sekhauno 25). They further state that "religion is one form of the virtue that inclines us to fulfill our obligations to God" (26).

James Leumba in his definition of religion, 'as a type of rational behaviour, purely from psychological standpoint. That religion has a future since it will ultimately model man in God's own image" (56). In the view of Gordon Allport religion is "the audacious bid man makes to blind himself to creation and to creator. Which means it is his ultimate attempt to enlarge and

"complete his own personality by finding the supreme context in which he rightly belongs" (142). Religion forms parts of a social discourse since it pervades the society and it is frequently in the social media. It is an integral part of life.

Based on the fact that religion has been expressed in many ways as people have turned to God or their gods, seeking blessings and solace because people need help in different ways from God, this study therefore examines different ways religious language discourse would be used in solving the problems of religion in Nigeria.

Conflict and Religious Conflict

Conflict is a disagreement or argument that is serious; it could be a protracted disagreement or argument. In the simple term, another lexical item for conflict is clash. The main cause of religious conflict in Nigeria is intolerance amongst different religion worshippers. There are different religious in Nigeria, but where religious conflict is prominent is the conflict between the Christian and the Muslims and this could be traced back to 1953. Therefore, religion needs language discourse for its use. But the use of language in religion could either promote conflict or breakdown conflict. Religious language should be well interpreted to suit its function and purpose.

The Language of Religion

The language of religion is so remove from the language of everyday conversation, and often foreign tongue is used as the official liturgical language of a community or denomination, for instance, Roman Catholic Church is known for the use of Latin. Also Islam uses Arabic language. Uhunmwangho posits that 'in a religious worship, the setting is such that certain words central to liturgy of the particular religion will be opened to the congregation". He also states that "the worshippers are expected to follow the mode of operation of the ceremony as directed by the officiating priest (2). Consequently, he posits that the language of religion "employs a deliberate evocative use of terminology and phraseology which must be alert to in order to appraise the primary purpose and meaning of language.

Furthermore, Uhunmwangho stipulates that "if the language of religion is to achieve its purpose, which is to win loyalty for Supreme Being, it has to be indoctrinating. The sentence structure must be fairly memorable and melodious (3). The last statement conforms with Christianity and Islam which many texts must be suitable for both saying and singing, and this has some phonological implications which could also be used in solving religious conflict in Nigeria.

Aquinas stipulates that the language of religion in the strict sense is an ethical language (Ukagba and Asekhauno 25). Ethics is a system of moral behaviour, derived from the Greek noun 'ethos', which means 'a custom, an institute. It is from the verb 'thics', which means to accustom (Ryuichi Abe 111). Ethics can also be send to be moral principles which include that of an individual. Aquinas further states that while religious language always involve some intellectual insight and some reasoning (so than an animal or human infant cannot possibly be religious) for most people, it will rest largely on belief. This belief may find its evidence in conscience or in the testimony of such wise men as the prophets. Although, the primary object of belief is God (Ukagba and Asekhauno 30). Religious language, therefore is not only ethical language, but also the language of faith.

David Crystal and Davis D. posit that "there are three influences to bear in mind in the particular cultural and linguistic background to the language of religion. Those influences are: the linguistic originals, speak ability, appropriateness and intelligibility" (25). Linguistic originals mean that the language should conform to the sacral character, as well as the sense of the text in original language.

There are significant doctrines which are difficult to alter without an accusation of inconsistency or heresy being leveled. On speak ability, crystal and Davy maintain that phonological features of religious language should be obvious and easy to pronounce, since its main use is in corporate public worship. Consequently, appropriateness and intelligibility means that the language to be used for large members of individuals, especially a religious language, should not be too difficult. Also, the language should not be too simple, but there should be a balance between the ordinary and the obscure. In fact, the current tendency is to orientate religious language towards what is normally referred to as contemporary living usage (Crystal and Davy).

 Further, the vocabulary of the language of religion is extremely distinctive. The language of religion, like legal language, allows the use of archaism. For instance, 'thou', 'they' and

'goeth'. Religious discourse is bound to display a number of theological terms which provide the verbal basisfor formulation of person's beliefs (Crystal and Davy 29). These terms are characterized with the appropriate use of linguistic structures.

Panacea for Religious Conflicts in Nigeria a. The public speaker's competence

In solving the problems of religious conflicts, there are three variables to bear in mind by the public speaker. These are: the subject matter of the discourse; the type of audience and the needs of that audience (Crystal 9). All these contribute to the complexity of the subject matter. Distinctive styles should be used for different subject matter. Moreover, the type of audience and its situation naturally exercise a pressure on language style. The variety of language and style would considerably depend on the type of audience in a congregation, pulpit or denomination. And the variety of language use should be geared towards solving the religious conflict in Nigeria.

The needs of the audience, which is the third variable, must be borne in mind. Such needs include maintaining intelligibility and keeping interest alive to avoid the audience's attendance being a waste of time. Also the audience should be able to comprehend the message delivered to them because incomprehensibility could also be attributed to a waste of time. These needs would a long way proffer a solution to religious conflict in Nigeria; if the needs are largely satisfied judiciously by the choice of linguistic form or concepts within the experience of the listener, and this would reduce any form of barrier related to the discourse. Therefore the public speaker should be competent in the use of language to curb religious conflict.

Dialogue

Dialogue is another solution to religious conflict. A dialogue is a conversation between two or more persons. It is a discussion between two or more persons or groups which is directed towards exploration of a problem. In the cause of solving religious conflict in Nigeria, dialogues should be employed wisely and meaningfully. Dialogue is one of the methods which language is employed in solving major issues, religious, political and otherwise (Ekuri and Saba, 200; Ekuri et al, 137). The religious heads and preachers should have dialogues with the religious groups under conflicts. This would be done through the application of different levels of language that would be suitable for that particular.

Semiotic-Language Discourse

Another way to solve religious conflicts is through semiotic language discourse. This is done by using handbills, posters and bill boards, by placing them in public places that people could see. The diagrams or images on the posters should vividly illustrate the language portrayed for the understanding of the people or views. The semiotic language discourse should play a positive role in making the different religious sects in Nigeria to understand that they are serving one God in different forms and processes, using different languages in communication. This buttresses Paul Tillich's on Religious language symbol, he attempts an approach to show that religious language is meaningful. He focuses on the manner in which symbols may have effects on human (22). Tillich first main point is that symbols are not signs. They point to something beyond themselves, but symbols participate in what they point to. For instance, a road sign just points to a fact about a road, whereas a symbolic flag participates in the power of the king or the nation. Tillich goes on to give four key features of symbols. These are pointing to something beyond themselves; participating in that to which they point; opening up levels of reality to which otherwise; participating in that to which they point; opening up levels of reality to which otherwise are closed to humans and opening up dimensions that correspond to aspects of reality. Tillich compares the symbolic language to a great work of art. He summarizes this by saying that the religious language could be likened to the great work of are, if we are to open up their meaning, then they cannot be substituted for anything else.

The Language of poetry and Music

The language of poetry and music is other functional way to solve religious conflict in Nigeria. Language is a system of communication among people, which consists of a set of speech sounds and writing. Poetry is a literary genre that is identified by its exploration of the resources of language. Poetry is as old as man and language, because no one could determine how long poetry has existed. Poetry is a medium of communication; therefore poetry is also a form of language.

Music is an organized sound. It could also be defined as a pleasing sound. Therefore the language of poetry and music would serve a vital means of curbing the religious conflict in Nigeria. Music is the food of love, when religious music is used to preach love for one another amongst different religions, peace, love and harmony will abound in Nigeria. Consequently, poetic language should be used for sermons, in the churches, mosques to mention but a few, for love and peace in the country. These should be recited regularly through poetry to the people in their own language, which could go a long way to solving the problem of religious conflict in Nigeria.

The Language of Advertisement

The language of advertisement is another important medium for breaking down religious conflict in Nigeria. Advertisement is a notice or announcement in a public medium for the promotion of goods and services, job vacancies events and the publicity of import matters. Different religions could be properly advertised through the media by using suitable language in buttressing the need for unit, love and peace for various religions in Nigeria.

The Language of Drama

Drama is one of the important ways to solve the problem of religious conflict in Nigeria (Udoka, 14; Anold, 43). The language employed in drama is vivid and most times arouse the interest of the spectators. Through the language of drama, there should be awareness; the need for harmony, (instead of conflict) should be well dramatized, both in the churches, mosques, public places and the media. Through these medium, religious conflict is minimized or totally eradicated in Nigeria. The effects of religious conflict should be dramatized and the solution should also be portrayed

Conclusion

This paper discussed the language of religious discourse as a panacea for religious conflict in Nigeria. The paper discussed religion, the language of religion and other terms that are related to the topic. It examined these areas of language that could help in breaking down the religious conflicts in Nigeria, which included; the preachers use of language, semiotic-language discourse, language of advertisement, the language of poetry and music, the language of drama. This work extensively portrayed that language has a fundamental role in the practical understanding, expression, presentation and furtherance of any set of religious beliefs and the invaluable assistance which linguistic could give. But there should be intellectuality between the religious teachers and the faithful on the one hand, and between the faithful and everyone else on the other. This paper stated that the major problem to religious conflict in Nigeria is language. Language barrier and language use have contributed so much to conflicts in religion in Nigeria.

This paper stated that language is much available to assist in resolving the current religious conflict in Nigeria, if language is applied meaningful to religion.

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