

## GRAMMATICAL AND LEXICAL COHESION IN A CHURCH SERMON

By

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### Abstract

Extant literature on church sermons in Nigeria is fairly large and has focused on describing its history, genre analysis, variety signifiers and vocabulary items but research is still sparse on cohesion in sermons. This study therefore examined grammatical and lexical cohesion in a purposively selected church sermon with a view to identifying the cohesive features and how they impinge on meaning. It utilized extracts from a recorded church sermon for analysis and employed aspects of the taxonomy of cohesive relationship provided by Halliday and Hasan (1994) to establish the relationship within the text. The findings show a variety of cohesive devices used in the sermon such as substitution, reiteration, reference, anaphore and cataphore etc. These features engender emphasis, clarity of information and allow for a logical and sequential ordering of messages so that the text hangs together as a structural and unified whole. Additionally, the language of the selected sermon is lucid and reinforces its thematic articulation. The study concludes that by analyzing the cohesive elements of the sermon, we gain a profound knowledge of its linguistic effectiveness in conveying messages of spiritual significance. This research will enrich the linguistic repertoire of religious discourse in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Grammatical/lexical cohesion, church sermon, religious discourse.

### Introduction

The analysis of cohesion in texts has been a major issue in the study of discourse and linguists have studied it from diverse perspectives. Cohesion refers to the relation of meaning that exists within text and it is part of the system of language which enhances meaning. It is perceived to be the quality of impeccable arrangement in text that gives it an internal unity, making it to connect as a structural whole. Halliday and Hasan (1976) noted that cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some elements in the discourse is dependent on that of another. Taiwo (2012) remarked that meaning relations occur where the interpretation of some elements in the discourse is dependent on that of another and this is achieved through the use of grammatical and lexical elements in order to foster textual connectivity.

The proper use of cohesive devices marks the difference between well-written text and the one that falls short of it. Pioneering research in cohesion was carried out by Halliday and Hasan (1976) and thereafter many scholars have attempted to develop, expand and simplify the theory (Brown & Yule, 1989; Bloor & Bloor, 1995; and Yule, 1996). In cohesion, features like repetition of items as well as complex relations of collaboration and structural semantics, sense connection across sentence boundaries are examined. It is possible for a piece of writing to be cohesive without being coherent. Coherence is the hanging together of a text, whereas cohesion is the set of linguistic resources that every language has as part of the textual metafunction for linking one part of a text to another. Every part of a text is therefore both text and context and the ideas in writing should hang together. The present study investigated the pattern of grammatical and lexical cohesion in a selected church sermon and how they impinge on meaning of the text.

Gibbs (1951) identified six types of sermons, these are: personal testimony, the expository sermon, the textual sermon, the topical sermon, the historical incident sermon and the biographical sermon. The sermon used for analysis in this study falls into the classification of expository sermon which was delivered on the last Sunday of the month in a Pentecostal church in Lagos, Nigeria. The sermon titled; 'The Right Response to the Goodness of God' has fifteen sentences and they are numbered for easy identification and analysis.

### **Objectives of the study**

The primary objective of this study was to identify and analyze the cohesive elements in the church sermon and discuss the quality of well-formedness in text that gives it an internal unity to achieve a smooth flow of information. This is vital in order to have a deeper understanding of its content and how meaning is enabled. By analyzing the cohesive features of the sermon, we gain a profound knowledge of its linguistic effectiveness in conveying messages of spiritual significance. Several studies have been conducted on cohesion in text and discourse from different perspectives but this research is significant primarily because it delves into the intricacies of the sermon's content and structure thereby extending the perspective on how cohesive devices are deployed in sermonic discourse. This study is driven by these salient research questions:

- i) What is cohesion?
- ii) What cohesive features are present in the sermon?
- iii) How do these contribute to the overall meaning and impact of the sermon?

The paper is structured to first provide a background to the study and then review extant studies on cohesion. This is followed by a detailed theoretical anchorage, data presentation and analysis. The discussion interpreted these findings in the light of existing theories and implications for religious discourse. Finally, the conclusion summarized the primary findings and reflect on the importance of cohesion in the sermonic discourse.

### **Extant Studies**

Numerous studies have been carried out on cohesion from different perspectives particularly as it relates to church sermons. Appropriate use of cohesive devices contributes significantly to the thematic depth and emotional resonance of a text, facilitating a more profound connection with the audience. Hoey (1991) defined cohesion as "the way certain words or grammatical features of a sentence can connect that sentence to its predecessors (and successors) in a text." Cohesive devices are the single phrases or words that typically make a text connect as a structural and unified whole. Several scholarly works have demonstrated the importance of cohesive devices in signaling relations between parts of texts (McCarthy, 1991; Daramola, 1996; Martin, 2001; Eggins, 2004), and how they operate like threads woven to stitch texts together (Carter, 2001). They give texts texture and render them as harmonious unit and not a patch work of unrelated sentences or utterances (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Halliday & Hasan, 1989).

Ude (2021), investigated the texture of selected Christian sermons by notable church leaders with a view to identifying the cohesive elements these leaders used to bring about texture and coherence in the sermons. Some utterances were subjected to descriptive analysis relying on insights from the Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The findings revealed intricately woven and coherent texts which are only made possible as a result of the church leaders' unique deployment of such cohesive elements such as: reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction in the texts. Adepoju (2020), examined the different methods that writers/speakers employ in making English narratives coherent. It pointed out reasons why many texts are considered disjointed/disorganized thereby making such texts lose the desired radiance.

Drawing from Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion in English, the paper analysed 'The Prodigal Son' (King James Version) - one of the most recited narratives of the Christian scripture. Given the analysis of cohesion in the studied data, the paper provided evidence to show that the narrator employed adequate cohesive items to establish the narrative discourse as one united text through the interconnectivity of the various cohesive features. It concluded that the unity of a text is enhanced by adherence to appropriate usage of grammatical and lexical ties in English narratives.

Asiamah, Frank and Israel (2022), studied the language of sermon particularly the spoken discourse with the aim of examining the cohesiveness or otherwise of the sermon and how the cohesive devices (if any) contributed to the logicity and understanding of the non-written text. A sermon from the WhatsApp page of Rev. Fr. Joseph Nyarko, a Catholic priest of Sunyani Diocese, was purposively selected for this study. The sample was closely analyzed using the theoretical framework provided by Halliday and Hasan (1976). The findings revealed that there was cohesiveness in the sermon and relevant cohesive devices were used to organize the sermon into meaningful discourse. The work concluded that every utterance or text, whether written or non-written, consciously or unconsciously, has unique structure and form which could be analyzed.

Esimaje (2012), identified the words most associated with Christian sermons in English, in Nigeria. A corpus of present-day sermons in Nigeria was constructed and compared to a reference corpus of sermons from other parts of the world, in order to find out those lexical items which are characteristic of sermons, whether in terms of types, frequency or usage. The study revealed the role of textual context to be the definition of thematic focus because, although the sermon words in the two contexts manifest high similarity, their degrees of significance in the contexts differ substantially. Additionally, the findings revealed diversity, both in lexical choice and the discourse structure of sermons.

The existing studies and the current research are markedly different in two respects; the corpus data utilized for this study and the application of Halliday's and Hassan's cohesion theory for its analysis with a focus on both the grammatical and lexical varieties of the model.

Cohesion refers to the relation of meaning that exists within text and it is part of the system of language which has the potentials for meaning enhancement. It is conceived to be the quality of well-formedness in text that gives it an internal unity, making it to hang together as a unified whole. Crystal (2008) averred that "cohesion is a major concept referring to the surface structural features of an utterance, or text, that link different parts of sentences or large units of discourse together". Halliday and Hasan (1976) noted that cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some elements in the discourse is dependent on that of another. Carter and McCarthy (1988) described lexical cohesion as the coherence of a text formed by the use of repetition, synonyms, antonyms, superordinate / hyponyms, related words and text-structuring words. Taiwo (2012) opined that appropriate use of grammatical and lexical elements in discourse can foster textual connectivity.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) argued that cohesion is expressed partly through the grammar and partly through the vocabulary, hence grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. It is necessary to consider that cohesion is a semantic relation but, like all the components of semantic system, it is realized through the lexico-grammatical system. This includes both grammar and vocabulary. Of the cohesive types; reference, substitution and ellipsis are grammatical; lexical cohesion is lexical; and finally conjunction is on the borderline of the two, mainly grammatical, but with a lexical component in it. (Halliday & Hasan 1976).

The proper use of cohesive devices marks the difference between well-written text and the one that falls short of it. In cohesion, features like repetition of items as well as complex relations of collocation and structural semantics, sense connection across sentence boundaries are examined. It is possible for a piece of writing to be cohesive without being coherent. Coherence is the hanging together of a text, whereas cohesion is the set of linguistic resources that every language has as part of the textual metafunction for linking one part of a text to another. Every part of a text is therefore both text and context and the ideas in writing should hang together. The present study investigated the pattern of cohesive features in a selected church sermon identifying the dominant types and how they impinge on meaning of the text.

The text used for analysis in this section falls into the classification of expository sermon and it was delivered on the last Sunday of the month in a Pentecostal church in Lagos, Nigeria. It was recorded in a church service as spoken discourse and transcribed into written text. It has fifteen sentences which are numbered for easy identification and analysis. The language is lucid and reinforces its thematic articulation.

### **The Right Response to the Goodness of God**

On a day like this, someone can present a very straight sermon but instead of preaching a straight sermon, I have decided to do one thing:

Sentence 1). We are all going to be involved and we are all going to sing to the goodness and to the mighty power of God as we experienced it during the last year.

Sentence. 2). So, it's going to be testimony time during this divine hour and that is why I have titled the sermon, 'The Right Response to the Goodness of God.

Sentence. 3). That we are alive today has a reason.

Sentence. 4). I don't know the reason why I'm alive as per the specific reason.

Sentence. 5). But I want to believe that God is giving us this special opportunity for one reason which is very clear.

Sentence. 6). You know that one thing that has been the problem of human beings, especially Christians year-in-year-out is that we have not measured up in the way we respond to the goodness of God.

Sentence. 7). Some of us feel that "I am a Christian", "I am a pastor", "I am an elder", "a choir leader", "a Sunday School teacher", "a Seventh-day Adventist", "I am a pastor's wife", I am this and that and we think that those things will give us tickets to heaven.

Sentence. 8). We hardly remember that the only thing that will take us to heaven is our personal response to the goodness of God.

Sentence. 9). And I believe the reason why we are having all kinds of problems that we have in this world today, be it in the family, an institution like commerce and the rest of it; the business world, politics, is because human beings (as a matter of fact according to what somebody said this morning, the reason why we have a lot people in poverty today is because with all the abundance God gave us, with all the abundant creation God provided) we have not known how to respond to the goodness of God.

Sentence. 10). And that is why some have died, that is why some are sick today, but you and I are very fortunate because the grace of God has preserved us and today we are alive.

Sentence. 11). If that is true, we must know how to praise and to express our gratitude to Him.

Sentence. 12). We must know how to respond to His goodness and one of the very first things you do in order to respond positively to the grace of God is to learn how to thank Him; and that is why we are all coming; to some of us, to represent us and in order to make it fast before I pray and we begin, I want to spot some people that I would like to come up here at their own time when the Holy Spirit inspires you of something you can share in the way last year treated you or what it meant to you.

Sentence. 13). You will come here and sit behind us.

Sentence. 14). I am doing that in order not to waste time so that you are ready here and you just come up and speak with us and as soon as you share, you go back to your place.

Sentence. 15). But from now on, when the Holy Spirit inspires, you will come and sit behind the officers.

### Table of Analysis

The cohesive features in the text have resulted in the following table of analysis.

SENTE NCE NO	NO OF TIES	COHESIVE ITEMS	TYPE	PRESUPPOSED ITEM
1	2	this  straight sermon (x 2)  one thing  Him	demonstrative reference  lexical reiteration  cataphoric reference  personal reference	today (Sabbath day)  for emphasis  ref. to (sing to the goodness and to the mighty power of God)  God
2	1	testimony	anaphoric reference	ref. to sent. 1 (sing to the goodness of God)
3	1	reason	cataphoric reference	ref. to sentence 4
4	2	reason  why  as per	anaphoric reference  endophoric reference  expository conjunction	Ref to sentence 3 and “the speech” in sentence 1  synonym for ‘reason’ and ‘the specific reason’  for the two synonyms above
5	2	but  this special opportunity	additive conjunction  clausal substitution	Links dissimilar concepts  to be alive
6	3	one thing  human being	nominal substitution  endophoric reference	ref. to ‘we have .....of God’ (same sentence)  for the purpose of collocation

		year x 2	lexical reiteration	for emphasis
7	3	I am x 3  This and that  Those thing	lexical reiteration  demonstrative reference  nominal substitution	for exemplification  synonym mainly used to refer to 'church titles'  'church titles'
8	1	only thing	Cataphoric reference	ref. to 'our personal .....God' same sentence
9	2	And  we	additive conjunction  personal reference	Links similar concepts  Christians // church congregants
10	3	we  and  Him	personal reference  additive conjunction  personal reference	Christians // church congregants  Links similar concepts  'God' is implied
13	2	You  us	personal reference  personal reference	church congregant  church congregants
15	2	But  you	additive conjunction  personal reference	Links dissimilar concepts  church congregants

## Discussion

In the text analysed, there are many lexical and grammatical devices used to achieve cohesion. There are occurrences of lexical devices such as repetition, synonymy and collocation while the grammatical devices are; reference, conjunction, substitution and ellipsis. The conjunctions used in the text serve as cohesive relation which connect preceding idea to the next methodically in order to enhance comprehension. For the coordinating conjunctions, it is observed that the conjoined parts have the same grammatical value, for example; word+word and clause+clause. The commonly used coordinating conjunctions in the text are 'and', 'but'. 'And' is used to join elements in order to stress what they have in common while 'but' is used to emphasize the difference between the elements and suggests that the second element is something that might not ordinarily be expected. However, the subordinating conjunction is employed to make one clause subordinate to another and is realised with the use of subordinator which appears at the beginning or middle of a clause. The frequently used subordinators are; 'because', 'if', 'that', 'when' and 'so'. 'Because' indicates cause or the reason behind what was expressed in the preceding clause. 'If' indicates the condition in which an action is performed while 'so' suggests a purpose; in which the second element is needed because of the first. The most commonly used grammatical



device is reference. Anaphora is used in the sermon to refer to a stretch of discourse preceding it. It integrates and aligns it with the on-going message. Cataphora faces forward, that is, it hints on a concept that will be encountered later in the text. Anaphoric and cataphoric references are freely used in the text in this study. Exophoric reference is used when the source for its interpretation lies outside the co-text and can only be found through an examination of the context. There are ample examples of exophora in the text.

## Conclusion

Grammatical and lexical cohesion allow for logical, clear and sequential ordering of messages so that the text hangs together as a structural and unified whole. They are used to organise the text showing the direction and purpose of information and keep the audience's mind on track regarding the intent and purpose of the preacher. By connecting preceding idea to the next, cohesive devices help the listener or church congregants arrive at higher level of interpretation. The cohesive devices used in the text usually hint at upcoming or subsequent information in the discourse and narrow down the focus of a listener by limiting the options for interpretation. They also create a flow and progression of thought which enhance easy comprehension of message. The cohesive elements are "configuration of links" which enhance logical transition between clauses in order to achieve cohesion. The systematic use of these features facilitates easy comprehension of the church sermon.

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