



A Linguistic-Discourse Analysis of the Language of Psalm 23

Dr. OGHIA TOR, Florence Etuwe.

Department of Languages, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria

Phone: 08033855058

Email: florence.oghiator@unidel.edu.ng

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/>

Dr. OMENOGOR, Happy Dumbi

Department of Languages, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria

Phone: 08119718359

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/>

Corresponding Author : Dr. OGHIA TOR, Florence Etuwe (florence.oghiator@unidel.edu.ng)

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the linguistic-discourse Analysis of Psalm 23, from the holy Bible, the book of the Christian religion. Linguistic-discourse analysis is one of the approaches used in disbanding the entanglements and ambiguities in language study. The linguistics and discourse features discussed include the graphological features, phonological features, syntactic structure, lexico-semantic representation, and cohesive relations. The graphological features are the punctuation marks, indentation, paragraphing and capitalization of letters in the text. The phonological features in the text are alliteration and assonance. Moreover, the syntactic structure includes short phrases, clauses, sentences, and pattern repetition, and the use of archaic pronouns which form part of the clauses and sentences. The lexico-semantic representation explains the linguistic explanation of the structure and meaning of the text. Consequently, the cohesive relations discussed in the text are anaphora, cataphora, substitution, conjunction, synonym, repetition and collocational converse. The theoretical framework adopted in this study is the Neo-Firthian Hallidayan Systemic Functional Grammar. The word 'systemic' means that language is viewed as a set of options for making meaning (Halliday, 1990; Obodeh, 2018). Brown and Yule (1983) Theory on Discourse analysis is also used as a backup to Halliday systemic grammar. The theory contains four approaches which include reference, presupposition, implicative and influence. Brown and Yule stated that the theory would help in the analysis of written textual, spoken and interaction for the research and also for the reader of the analysis, and this paper is an analysis of a written discourse. The library is also one of the research methods for this study. This is where books, journals and other useful research information are kept. The analysis in the study portrays the fact that a religious text could be analysed using the tenets of linguistics discourse. Since language is a tool of all activities in life, this paper therefore has tried to solve some language problems by analyzing the linguistics and discourse features of the language of the text, Psalm 23, for better understanding of the text by readers, clergy, congregations, and scholar of language and literature in particular and the academia in general.

Keywords Linguistic-discourse Analysis, Psalm 23, Neo-Firthian, Hallidayan Systemic Functional Grammar,, Linguistics and Discourse Features

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AUTHORS' BIO



OGHIA TOR, Florence Etuwe, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer in the English Unit of Department of Languages, the University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State. She holds a PhD in English Language (Discourse Analysis and Linguistics); (MA) in English Language; and a (BA(Ed.) English. She also has Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) in English/ Ukwuani. Florence attended the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, and College of Education, Agbor. Her areas of interest include: Discourse Analysis; Pragmatics; Contrastive Linguistics; and Linguistics Studies. Florence Etuwe loves reading, and travelling. She is happily married with children.



OMENOGOR, Happy Dumbi, PhD, is a Nigerian of Delta State origin. He is a Senior Lecturer in English, Department of Languages, Faculty Arts, University of Delta, Agbor. He attended Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma in Edo State where he took a BA and MA degrees in English Language. He later took a Post Graduate Diploma in Education from University of Port Harcourt. He also had a PhD in English Language. He was the pioneer Head of Department, Languages Department, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria.

Introduction

This study is on the linguistic- discourse analysis of the language of the text, Psalm 23. Psalm, 23 is a chapter in the Bible, the Christian religion holy book. Psalm 23 is a text written by David. David was a shepherd as a boy when he tendered sheep. In this Psalm, David prayed to God to protect him the way he protected the animals. The Psalm has religious and linguistic- discourse implications. Crystal and Davy(1969); Obodeh, (2018, p.31); Uhumwangho, (2000, p.3); Uhumwangho and Oghiator, (2022, p.32) identified different religious languages. They are the language of liturgy, the language of sermon, the language of theological discourse, and the language of biblical translation. The selection of lexico-semantic in all of the foregoing may be different, but they have some kind of similarities, since they contain biblical quotations. This paper is particularly concerned with the linguistics and discourse application to the reading of Psalm 23.

Discourse Analysis is defined as the analysis of connected speech and writing and the contexts in which they are used (Obodeh, 2018; Oghiator, 2022). Uhumwangho (2000) in Obodeh (2018, p.39) stipulates that discourse analysis is the study of the functional use of language and the concepts and contributions of the study of language to the explication of the structure and meaning of text respectively. Uhumwangho and Oghiator (2022); Yule and Brown (1987, p.42) in Obodeh, (2018,p.39); Oghiator, (2022, p.32); Uhumwangho and Oghiator, (2022, p.32) state that Discourse analysis is necessarily the analysis of language use which cannot be restricted to the service in human affairs. The linguistics codes in discourse have to be thoroughly analyzed and given explanations for better understanding by language users. Therefore, this paper delved into the linguistic - discourse analysis of Psalm 23. The analysis was carefully done using the levels of linguistics and the discourse tenets available in the text. These include the graphological, phonological, syntactic, lexico-semantic and cohesive features. All these were carefully analysed in the text.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is the grammatical model that is used to examine the linguistic features in a language. Neo-Firthian Hallidayan Systemic Grammar is the linguistic model used in this study. The term 'systemic' is the view of language as a set of options for making meaning (Halliday, 1994, p.2; Obodeh, 2018, p.4). Systemic grammar postulates four theoretical categories: These are unit, structure and system; they are used to explain the grammatical patterns of any human language (Halliday, 1994, p.2; Osisanwo, 2014, p.4; Obodeh, 2018, p.4). This paper therefore, employs the Neo-Firthian

systemic grammar in analyzing Psalm 23, the text for the study. The grammar model recognizes four grammar categories: unit; class; system. Most importantly, the unit carries the grammatical pattern. This model further recognizes five units on the grammatical rank-scale of English; these are the sentence, the clause, the group, the word and the morpheme. Therefore, the model is suitable for the study of Psalm, using the linguistic components of Psalm 23. This falls within the units. Brown and Yule theory is also an additional theory used for this research.

Research Questions

The research questions are used in the paper as a guide to the research. They include:

- (a) Is discourse analysis relevant in the analysis of the language of the text, Psalm 23?
Are the research methods for this research suitable?
- (b) Is linguistics analysis a good approach to discourse analysis?
- (c) Are the levels of linguistics used for the analysis adequate for the research?

Research Methods

The thrust of linguistic discourse analysis is text or speech but in recent times, pictorials, signs and symbols are also used in discourse analysis as they are part of language use. Therefore, the text, Psalm 23, is used for the linguistic analysis of this research. The library is also one of the instruments of information of this research. That is where books, journals, periodicals and other information for research are kept. Consequently, theoretical framework is used in this study. The theoretical framework employed are Neo-Firthian Hallidayan Systemic Grammar model, and Brown and Yule theory. They are frameworks adequate for this research. Furthermore, some research questions are used as a guide to the study.

3.1 The Linguistic Analysis of Psalm 23

1. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
3. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
5. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.
(The Holy Bible King James Version).

3.1.2 Graphological Features

The foregoing Psalm was written by David. As a boy, David was a shepherd, tending sheep. He prayed to God to protect him the way he protects the animals. The text is written in 6 verses of irregular lines. This suggests the poetic nature of Psalms. The punctuation marks are carefully placed. There are commas, semicolons, colons and full stops in every verse in the text, which mandatorily make the reader to pause many times. There are two commas in the text, five semi-colons, three colons and six full stops. This makes a total of sixteen (16) punctuation marks in the text. The regular occurrence of the punctuation marks slows down the reading of the text, because one does not need to pray in a hurried manner. There are also the use of paragraphing and capitalisation of some letters in the verses of the text. The first letter in the beginning of each verse is written in an uppercase. The first lines in the six verses are indented in the left margin, which also draws the reader's attention. The use of uppercase in the lexical item, 'LORD', at the beginning of verse one and at the end of verse six, (which is the last verse in the text) draws the reader's attention also. The lexical item, LORD, is foregrounded and also used as a reverence to God. The use of lower case in the initial letters of 'he' at the beginning of line 2 in verses 2 and 3 is a kind of foregrounding because one expects that initial upper case should be used when referring to God. It is also foregrounded because it draws attention of the reader. The capitalisation of some letters in the verses in the text also depicts the graphological features of religious discourse. All the foregoing portrays the graphological features in religious discourse.

3.1.3 Phonological Features

There is a preponderance of both voiced and voiceless alveolar fricatives, /s/ and /z/. They are 22 in number. The occurrence of these sounds gives a rhythmic effect to the text. This portrays one of the factors of religious discourse aforementioned, as stipulated by Uhunmwangho (3) that "the sentence structure of religious language must be fairly memorable and melodious". The texture of the text is soft because of the voiced plosives /b/ /d/ /g/; this also gives easy rendition for rhythmic effect.

Alliteration is one of the phonological features in this text. Alliteration is the repetition of succession of words with initial consonant sounds in some words in the same

lines or verses, irrespective of their position. It could be initial, media or final position. Alliteration features in all the verses in the text as seen below;

1. The LORD is my shepherd /ʃ/; I Shall /ʃ/ not want.
2. He /h/ maketh me /m/ to lie down in green pastures: he /h/ leadeth me /m/ beside the still waters.
3. He /h/ restoreth my /m/ soul: /s/ he /h/ leadeth Me /m/ in the paths of righteousness for his /h/, name's sake.
4. Yea, though /ð/ I walk /w/ through the /ð/ valley of the /ð/ shadow of death, I will /w/ fear /f/, no evil: for /f/, thou /ð/ art with /w/ me /m/; thy /ð/ rod and thy /ð/, staff the /ð/ comfort me /m/.
5. Thou /ð/ prepare /p/ a table before me /m/ in the /ð/ presence /p/, of mine /m/ enemies; thou /ð/ anointest my /m/ head with oil; my /m/, cup runneth over.
6. Surely /ʃ/ goodness and mercy /m/ shall /ʃ/ follow /f/, me /m/, all the /ð/ days /d/, of my /m/ life /l/; and I will /w/, dwell /d/, in the /ð/ house of the /ð/ LORD /l/ forever /f/.

The alliteration in the following verses provides melody and rhythm in the text and explicates the use of alliteration in the Bible. Moreover, assonance is also one of the phonological features in the text. Psalm 23, used for this study. Assonance is the usage of similar or identical vowel sounds in a line or verse. The assonance in the foregoing text are seen in the vowel sound /i/, in 'He' 'me' verse 2, lines 1 and 2; the vowel sound /ə/ in 'restoreth', 'leadeth' in verse 3, lines 1; vowel sound /əu/ in verse 4, 'though' 'shadow' (line 1); the vowel sound /ʌ/ in 'cup', 'runneth'; vowel sound /e/, in 'head' 'runneth' (verse 5 lines 3 and 4); vowel sound /ai/ in 'my' 'life', verse 6 lines 2 and 3 respectively. The assonated sounds in the text establishes melody in the verses.

3.1.4 Syntactic Structure

In the syntactic arrangement of the text, short phrases and sentences are used. Moreover, there is the use of pattern repetition in verses 2 and 3; "He maketh me, 'he leadeth me', which breaks down into; NP+VP+ me. The effect is to give aesthetic and rhythmic value to the text.

The use of archaic pronominal forms and verbal groups in the text such as, 'thou' anointest', 'yea', 'thy', 'preparest' 'maketh', 'leadeth', restoreth, runneth' and 'art' are associated with religious province. This also conforms with cohesion in the text and authenticates cohesion in religious discourse. The usage of archaic words also shows the point of time in the history and development of the English language when the Bible was written. Certain lexical items such as 'LORD', and Shepherd', suggest religious language (Christianity), which is not found in

other varieties of language use. The lexical items are carefully selected. Majority are monosyllabic, such as; 'soul', 'down, green,' 'thou', 'rod', 'cup', and 'head'. Consequently, the majority of these lexical items have 's' inflection. Examples are; 'Pastures', 'goodness', 'waters', 'paths', 'righteousness', 'enemies' and 'days. All the foregoing', 'enhance and create melody to the text. The use of 'and' in lines 4; verses 4 and 6 respectively, and 'though', in line 1, verse 4, explicates the use of conjunction as cohesive reference (relations) in language discourse.

The constituent parts of the text are closely related, from verse one to the last verse, giving coherence in the text. Moreover, the pronominal, such as; 'thou' and 'thy', the prepositions, such as, 'of', 'in' and 'for', the groups such as; 'The LORD', 'My shepherd', in green pastures', 'he leadeth', 'My soul', 'lie, down,' thy staff', 'thy rod', 'they comfort', 'runneth over' and 'still waters'.

The clauses are also well selected. They include; 'The LORD is my shepherd', 'I shall not want', 'He maketh me', "lie down in green pastures" "he leadeth me beside still waters", "He restoreth my soul", 'He leadeth me in paths of righteousness', " I will fear no evil", 'they comfort me', 'Thou prepares a table before me, 'thou anointest my head with oil', 'my cup runneth over', 'I will dwell in the house of the LORD'. The clauses are analysed in systemic model as follows;

- a. //The LORD/is/ my shepherd//
S P C
- b. //I/ Shall not want//
S P C
- c. //He/ Maketh/ Me//
P C
- d. //lie down/ in green pastures//
S P C A C
- e. //he/ leadeth/ me/ besides still waters
S P C
- f. //He/ restoreth/ my soul//
S P C C
- g. //He/leadeth/ Me/ in Path of righteousness
S P C
- h. //I/ will fear/ no evil//
S P C
- i. //they/ comfort / me//
S P C C
- j. //Thou/ prepares/ a table/ before me/
S P C C
- k. Thou/ anointest/ my head/ with oil
S P A
- l. // my cup/runneth /over//
S P C C
- m. //I/will dwell/in the house/ of the LORD//

These are linked together to make the text a unified whole.

3.1.5 Lexico-Semantic Representation

Lexico – semantic analysis depicts the linguistic explanation of the structure and meaning of a text as which is portrayed in the use of language in the text. This could be achieved through the use of figures of speech, or combination of ordinary language and figurative language. The meaning of the text is achieved through the use of some figures of speech. The first line of the text is a metaphor, 'the LORD is my shepherd' . David compares God to a shepherd, because the lord will protect him the way a shepherd protects his flocks. This elucidates a semantic input to the meaning of the text and also confirms the use of metaphor in religious language. There is also personification in lines 1 and 2 in verse 4; 'yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death'. Giving death, an attribute of living (shadow). The foregoing also demonstrates the semantic representation in religious discourse.

Furthermore, the semantic representation in the text actually portrays the biblical translation of the language of religion. As David prayed that the lord is his shepherd, he lacks nothing, and even when his enemies are after him, God will protect him because the goodness and mercy of God is upon him. The foregoing also demonstrates the lexico-semantic attribute of religious discourse.

3.1.6 Cohesive Relations

Cohesive devices are those devices which make a text to function as a single unit. They are the linguistic devices used in relating segments and bits of a text to one another (Osisanwo ,2014; Obodeh, 2018) . The cohesive relations (devices) in the text are; anaphora, cataphora, substitution, conjunction, synonym, repetition and collocational converse. The anaphoric references in the text, include; 'He', 'I', 'me' 'thou', 'they' ; the cataphoric references, are ; 'thy', ' my' 'the', 'green' and 'still', and the substitution in the text include; 'he', 'his,; 'they' and 'thou' in verses 2,3, 4 and 5 respectively. The conjunctions are the co - coordinating conjunction and subordinating conjunction. The co-coordinating conjunction, 'and' are in verses 4 and 6, lines 4 and 3 respectively. The foregoing cohesive devices are grammatical cohesive ties which connect the groups, clauses and sentences in the text. The lexical cohesive ties include; repetition, 'he' in verses one and two, 'his' in verse three, 'they' , in verse four and 'thou', in verse four and five; synonym , thy rod and thy staff in verse four, and collocational converse, 'thou preparest a table before me ... thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over " . The analysis portrays that multifarious linguistic features are seen in biblical

language of religion, most especially in Psalm 23. This text has the function of what Crystal and Davy referred to as contemporary living usage. The cohesive devices help to express the continuity that exists between one part of the discourse and another.

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