

## **LANGUAGE USE AND COMMUNICATION IN THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES: A STUDY OF HOUSE ON THE ROCK CHURCH.**

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### **Abstract**

The major objective of language is communication. This study explores the language use in Christian religious service(s) of the church, House on the Rock (henceforth HOTR) which is one of the vibrant Pentecostal churches. It specifically examines the various religious performances obtainable or practiced in the church. This will be achieved by looking at the language use in prayers, preaching, neologisms, songs (music) and so on. The study utilizes the Harold Lasswell communication model because it suits the study by laying emphasis on their preacher (source), the channel/medium (language) and the adherents or congregation (receiver or destination). The study concludes that every denomination categorized under Pentecostals have certain doctrines or religious performances peculiar to them.

**Keywords:** language use, communication, religion, Pentecostal churches, House on the Rock

### **Introduction**

Language use is a social activity and language users make choices from their language system to perform different functions. Language and communication go hand in hand, one cannot really function without the other. Language as defined by Block and Tragar (1942) is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates. It is a medium through which ideas, feelings, thoughts goes from one source to another, thus, communication. That is to say that there will be no communication if there is no medium or channel through which it is achieved. So, basically, language is the key for effective communication. The use of language in religious contexts is characterized by fluidity depending on the group, ideological learning and context. Language provides outlet for expression of religion.

In this study, we are looking at how language is used for communication in a religious setting it is pertinent to know also that language operates in certain contexts, It could be religious, educational, peace building, and socio-cultural and so on. The study will go further to look at how language is used in a religious context, Christian religion to be précised and relating it to Pentecostalism.

There are different kinds of religion; the traditional, religion, Buddhism, Judaism, Islamic religion, Christian religion and so on.

Language therefore, becomes the most important means by which God's faithful can communicate, fellowship or commune with Him and each other. From the libation of the traditional worshippers to the Lord's prayer, all the books of the Bible and the Quran, Language or words are the medium.

Nevertheless, this work is purely based on a Christian background as it relates to Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism as a religious phenomenon traces its origin to the event of the day of the Pentecost

in Acts of the Apostles chapter 2:1-4. It is an experiential Christianity resulting in the baptism of the believer in the Holy Spirit as shown in the evidence of speaking in tongues which is referred to “glossalies”, a Greek word meaning “tongues” (Offiong 2003). They are known for advancing doctrines in prosperity and promotion of spiritual mechanisms of control that offer solutions to all life problems (Zink 2012). Their teachings are creatively patterned to attract greater patronage and participation of worshippers.

### **Literature Review**

Language is regarded by experts as the key to the heart of people. By means of language, people who live together are able to interact and express their thoughts and feelings. You cannot talk about language without referring to communication as well. they work hand in hand.

A lot has been said and studied about language and communication, but for the purpose of this study, some out of the numerous things that have been said about them will be discussed. Crystal (2003) view language as a particular variety or level of speech. At its most specific level, it may refer to the concrete act of speaking, writing or singing in a given situations. Ndimele (1999) says language is often described as a semiotic system, because it entails the use of certain agreed upon symbols to convey meaning from one person to another with a speech community.

Language is essentially a communication system in the sense that it associates meaning ie the message with a set of signs, sounds or symbols. (Ndimele, 1999) Olaoye (2007) citing Sapir(1921: pg 8) who says language is purely human and non-instinctive way of communicating ideas, emotions, ideas by means of voluntarily produced symbols.

Eka and Udofot (1996) view language as the most brilliant of human inventions. It is also the most useful. by means of language, people who live together are able to interact and express their thoughts and feelings. Cumson(1980: 4) describes language as a system of conventional signals used for communication by a whole community. The pattern of conventions covers a system of significant sound units, the inflection and arrangement of words and the association of meaning with words. Halli (1968: 158) in his essay on language says that language is the institutions whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by habitually used oral and auditory arbitrary symbols. Chomsky & Haller (1968) give a definition of language as follows: we may think of a language as a set of sentences each with an ideal phonetic form and associated intrinsic and semantic interpretation. Essien (2003) posit that language is a system of rules and in principles in which sounds, structure and meaning are integrated for communication.

Moreover, a careful analysis of these definitions shows that language is; arbitrary, conventional, vocalized, a system and rule governed culturally defined etc. One can also deduce from the above definition that language is sacred as it identifies a people. It unites people, in that by means of it, they cooperate. Mankind is in dire need of language to express themselves, interact, to forage alliances and to reach an understanding.

Finally, based on these definitions and views of language, one can deduce that its use being peculiar to human beings is non-instinctive and therefore learned and its function of being the major tool with which a speech community exchanges ideas and express emotions.

## Theoretical Framework

Since communication is the transmission and reception of information (message) between a source and a receiver using a specialized and signaling system known as language, this work will adopt a particular model of communication out of models of communication. The communication model refers to a sequence of components which when operated, facilitate communication from source to destination. Therefore, the Harold Lasswells's communication model, which is a refined model of the gratification/consumer model of communication, is adopted.

This theory suits this work as it represents the pastor and his congregation where emphasis is placed on “WHO” the communicator and “WHOM”, the receiver, audience, the congregation or adherents. There is also a feedback e the effect of a message transmitted “WHO” says something? and to “WHOM”? “WHAT EFFECTS”.

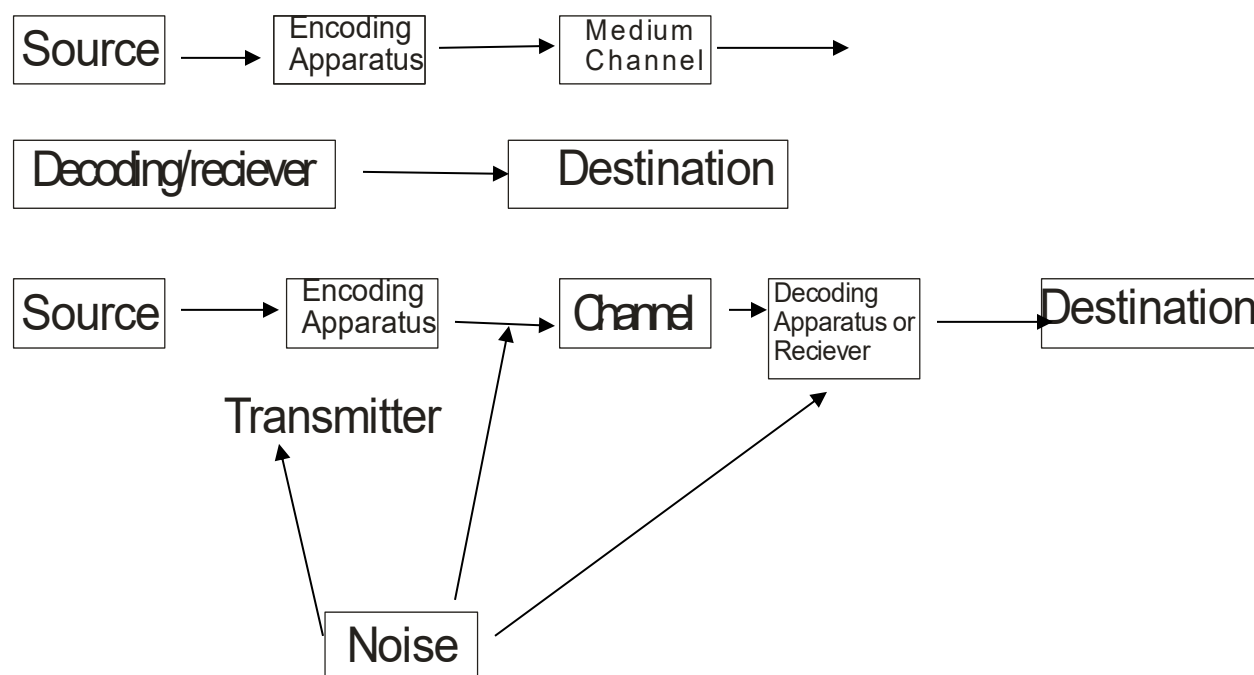
WHO.....says?

Channel.....to

What.....effect?

whom.....with?

These question statements are represented in the following sketch:



## Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism is renewed religious movement within Christianity, that places special emphasis on a direct personal relationship with God through water baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit ie speaking in tongues, the use of the anointing oil, communion etc. the term “Pentecostal” is derived from Pentecost, a Greek term describing the Jewish Feast of Weeks. For Christians, the event commemorates the descents of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Jesus Christ as described in the book of Acts of the Apostles 2 and Pentecostals tend to see their movement as reflecting the same kind of spiritual power, worship styles and teaching that were in the early church.

Pentecostalism is an umbrella term that includes a wide range of different theological and organizational perspective as a result, there is no single central organization or churches that direct the movement. Most Pentecostals consider themselves to be part of broader Christian groups like Protestants i.e. most Pentecostals are referred to as the Protestants.

Generally referred to as “new generation” churches in Nigeria, Pentecostal movement includes evangelical and Pentecostal churches, fellowships and ministries. They achieve remarkable growth from around the 1980s and have become the fastest growing and most visible form of Christianity in Nigeria (CASSA, 2005). This is connected to the fact that their sermons, mode of dressing, etc are a departure from what used to be obtainable in Orthodox churches. Instead of the formal, predictable and old fashioned worship style of the latter, Pentecostals deviate in inspirational songs rendered during “praise and worship” session where people “dance their hearts out”. There is also more awareness about the benefits of being a child of God. Thus, people are gravitating more towards the Pentecostal churches where the language in particular is a standout.

### **The church: House on the Rock, a Pentecostal?**

House on the Rock (Home for all), is a vibrant, prominent multi-ethnic Christian church headquartered in Lagos, Nigeria. The ministry was founded by Pastor Paul AdeoluAdefarasin in 1994, well known for its annual musical concerts. “The experience”. This musical concert features both local and international gospel musicians.

The church believes in the power of God’s word to change lives and she values the practical application of God’s word to make a difference in who we are and what we do.

The church falls under the Pentecostal church. This is because she is characterized with some of, if not most of the things or features that define Pentecostalism. The church believes in the baptism of Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues (glos....), the church uses English to preach, pray and to sing most of their songs. The dominant language of interaction and preaching in the church is English language. The manifestation of the language use and communication in the church is reflected mostly in preaching, praying and sometimes, singing of the choruses.

In House on the Rock (HOTR) for short, the language of the songs can reflect the different or cuts across different ethnic groups. The altar/pulpit language is pure English. This is something that goes beyond language.

Furthermore, the church members are predominantly the educated, the elite and has a few who are not educated and that is why, in as much as the pulpit language is English, i.e. not an indigenous language, the songs most times capture other languages that when sung in an indigenous language(s) or way(s), has a way of making the people feel excited, they tend to express their emotions, they get elated because they are being ministered to as the songs have impact in their lives. As a matter of fact, in their praise & worship session, there are contemporary songs, African, praise & worship, hymns.

Additionally, their attire is characterized by a high degree of modernization and fashionability. This outward expression also carries significant meaning for individuals outside the church, often labeling them as “worldly” people. However, this social phenomenon is specific to the church. The

church holds the belief that one should come as they are, guided by the Word of God and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, capable of changing lives and convicting sinners. In this context, the church emphasizes that one's clothing should not be a barrier to receiving the word of God. By consistently attending to hear the word of God, regardless of attire, individuals are able to experience conversion and bring their lives into order.

### **Methodology**

The discussion of this work is based on the number of sermons received or heard over the period of ten years. This work is based on the language use and communication in Pentecostals with particular reference to a church, known as House on the Rock (Home for All). The data is drawn from the participant's observation and through a study of some of the messages or sermons of the church that have been recorded for commercial purposes. Linguistic knowledge is used to analyse the various specific religious performances doctrines that are peculiar to the church (HOTR).

### **Discussion/Analysis**

The church HOTR cut across membership of different classes ranging from professionals, captains of industries, academics, students and artisans, etc. The church utilizes language as an indispensable means for construction of realities in order to attract new members who they also want to retain at all cost. This type of language is reflected in the type of sermons, songs, teachings and even in the way they interact and communicate among the members.

This study explores the relationship that exists between language and religion from the Pentecostal context with specific focus on House on the Rock. It specifically examines the dominant styles in the church discourses.

### **Language Use and Communication in HOTR**

The dominant language in use and communication in most Pentecostal Churches is English Language. It is the official language in Nigeria and serves as the main language that is used in Pentecostal Churches. The manifestation of the language use and communication in the church (HOTR) is reflected in their preaching (sermons), messages, songs, prayers, there is also language of persuasion, subtlety, etc. The church uses English to preach, sing, pray and to communicate with one another in the church. It is the dominant language of the church.

**Language Use in Preaching:** The language use in preaching in HOTR is often forceful. The preacher articulates in a loud voice and may sometimes quicken and suddenly slow his preaching for effectiveness. He plays a lot on the effect of shouting suddenly and pausing for dramatic effect. He also injects emotion into his voice, uses emotionally imbued words to penetrate the adherents.

Secondly, the sermons are laddened with the message of health & healing, prosperity, hope and faith is always seen as what is needed to get the solutions to the diverse problems of the people. That is to say that the sermons are fitted with faith provoking words which are aimed at building the faith of the people. That is why most times in the church, you will hear the preacher say something like the following:

1) “You can receive it, if only you believe!” (2) “If you believe it shout ‘Amen’”. “Let your Amen be louder than that of your neighbour”. The message of hope (3) “before the sunset, let the Lord show you a sign!”

Furthermore, there are some literary devices that are embedded in the language of preaching:

- i. The use of rhetorics
- ii. The use of exclamatory remarks
- iii. The use of personal pronouns
- iv. The use of repetition
- v. The use of tag questions and by use of infective polar questions
- vi. The use of general request
- vii. The use of hyperbole

**The use of rhetorics:** Here, the preacher does not expect any answer from the adherents when some statements are made or declared. For example: (4) “Are we supposed to fold our hands and allow the devil win the battle? (5) “Why are you here?” (6) “Preacher: am I boring you” or Are you bored?” (7) Are you with me?”

**The Use of Exclamatory Remarks:** This is one of the devices that is normally used in the church. Most times, the preacher uses interjections to capture the attention of the adherents. (8) Pastor: Shout Hallelujah! Congregation: Hallelujah!! (10) Pastor: Amen? Congregation: Amen! (12) Pastor: The Lord is Good! Congregation: All the time! (14) Pastor: Hello! Congregation: Hello!!

**The Use of Personal Pronouns:** Here, the church or the congregation is addressed personally with the use of personal pronouns. The pronouns are also used to include the preacher. For example: (13) “Let us be on our feet” (14) “Can we lift our hands to worship God” (15) We welcome you to this special service, etc.

**The Use of Repetition:** Repetition is an emphasis and emphasis signifies importance. It is a very important device that is used reiterates words, phrases or sentences for the sake of emphasis. It can also be used to lighten effect and re-enforce a speaker’s message in oral delivery (Ekpe, 1997). (16) The preacher: Amen! Congregation: Amen!! (17) The preacher: Hallelujah! The congregation: Hallelujah!

**The Use of Hyperbolic Statements:**

Sometimes, the preacher uses a conscious exaggeration to lighten the effect of his message. (18) “Our God is so big that the devil is like an ant in His presence”

(19) “God of wonders beyond the galaxies”,

The preacher preaches interactively. This way, he tries to involve the audience by asking them questions i.e. using tag questions; (20) God is a faithful God. Isn’t he? (21) He knows the end from the beginning. Doesn’t he? (22) God cannot allow you to fail. Can he? The preacher can also ask that the Bible be read responsively or ask that everybody read the bible passage together as its being displayed on the multimedia screen.

**Language of music/songs/choruses** Music/song is a form of language performance. Language use is a social activity. Songs are viewed as instances of language use, which like any other linguistics forms, express socio-cultural experiences and beliefs of the singer. In HOTR, the songs sung are characterized with different themes like adoration to God, gratitude to God, commitment to Christian service. Sometimes, the church does a lot of contemporary music or songs. It is even of recent that the church started to include some indigenous songs. And these songs especially when sung or rendered in an indigenous manner, you see people who are from different cultural background get elated and it makes the people get emotional, sometimes, they cry, prostrate and demonstrate the songs because those indigenous songs have a way of carrying them along. Furthermore, In HOTR, the contemporary songs are clearly a reflection of the kinds of teaching that goes on there. Since, the songs are laden with different themes such as adoration, praise, faith etc. the songs can reflect on them. For example, talking about songs of song is obtainable in the church.

23) “You are God”

From beginning to the end

There’s no place for argument

You are God all by yourself”..

24) *Song of faith:* You don’t have to worry and have to be afraid

Joy comes in the morning

Troubles they don’t last always....

And if your heart is broken

Just lift your hands and say

I know that I can make it

I know that I can stand  
No matter what may come my way  
My life is in your hand”; by song of deliverance.

25) The blood of Jesus sets me free, from sin and sorrow  
The blood of Jesus sets me free”.



**Language of prayer:** Language use in the church is in prayers. Prayers are often said loudly, characterized by high pitched voices and shouting and such prayers are emotionally expressed. In HOTR, diverse kinds of prayers are being prayed, Prayer of healings, fruitfulness, prosperity, faith, deliverance and so on. Often times, the kind of prayer determine the disposition of the congregation. If it is that of deliverance, it will be accompanied with vigorous jumping, shaking of hands and head, use of commands and so on. You hear command like: (26) “In the name of Jesus every chain or yoke is broken!” “I command the spirit of.....come out in Jesus name!” (27) “Let every yoke be broken!” If the language use in prayer is that of faith, you will hear (28) “If you believe it, let your “Amen” show it! Amen!!! (29) Receive you miracles in Jesus name – Amen! Etc.

### **Neologism**

The term is defined as a linguistic phenomenon which has to do with the formation of a new word to develop a language. The Pentecostals have some words that are peculiar to them. For example : (28) “Bless you” (29) “It is well”, (30) “born again”, (31) “seed of faith” (32) “first fruit”, (33) “slap your hands” (34) “wave your hands” (35) “am I boring you?” (36) “Testimony time...over comer’s time” (36) “Kingdom service” etc. In the second utterance, “it is well” instead of “fine, thank you” or very well, thank you”. The people respond to the question? How are you? “How is your family?” “How is work?” with “*it is well*” even if they are going through rough or hard times, as it is not viewed as proper to expose your problems especially when God can deal with them. “Born-again is used to mean to re-dedicate one’s life to a new way in Christ Jesus. “**Slap** your hands together for Jesus is used to mean the act of clapping your hands to Jesus. It is an inevitable by-product of bilingualism.

**Hybridization/Code-Mixing** Code-mixing is the mixing of two languages at the word level. While language hybridization is the resultant process of frequent code-mixing. So when two or more languages are frequently mixed, a newly hybrid variety of language happens. These two concepts are very important and obtainable in a bilingual setting. In Pentecostal churches therefore, HOTR inclusive, majority of the people are bilinguals, they have a very superficial understanding of English Language.

In HOTR, code-mixing/hybridization is mostly and clearly evident in their songs. Some of the songs sung in the church have features of code-mixing of English and any other language as the case may be. This is done especially when such expressions in the songs cannot be adequately conveyed in English Language. That is why you will hear such songs like: (37) *you've done so much for me, I cannot tell it all...nara ekele m o, If I have ten thousand tongues, It still won't be enough...nara ekele m o...* (38) *If I tell of your glory...chi ga-eji chi ga abo...If I speak of your glory.....chi ga eji.....chi ga abo.....* They are code-mixed of both English and Igbo language. We can hear songs code-mixed in pidgin, English and Igbo like: (39) *Na you be God....Almighty God... You no be man oh! Nara ekele, nara otito...Ome mma...naani gi ka m g'efe.* Yoruba/English language code-mixed songs: (40) *I just wanna say....Baba oh, eshe... Olorunagbaye o...you are mighty!*

Furthermore, in HOTR, the leaders or pastors try to be “Yoppy” They speak and dress like the youth to actually attract their attention. Again, the church also acquire “*Americanized*” accent (41) like “Gard” instead of “God” and there is also a culture shift in the way they dress, which is one of the dynamics that differentiate the church from other Pentecostals like the orthodox and the protestants. Their mode of dressing is purely a departure from what used to be obtainable in orthodox churches instead of the formal, predictable and old fashioned worship style of the orthodox churches.

### **Paralinguistic Features**

These paralinguistic features, those features as body language, gestures, facial expression and pitch of voice which are used for effective communication. They are termed as non-verbal means of communication. In a Pentecostal church such as HOTR, they employ some of these paralinguistic features during every service. They are evident in the preaching where the preacher uses varied voice for emphasis in his teachings. This pitch of voice rising and falling dramatically. Most times too,

during prayers, you see vigorous shaking of hands and heads, lifting of hands and bowing of heads when singing. You hear statement like: “Lift your hands and wave them to Jesus”. Dancing is a social dynamic and important aspect of reality in Pentecostal churches even in HOTR. The church underscores the important of dance as a way of expressing gratitude to God. All of these are some religious practices or performances that are evident in Pentecostal church like the church under study and they are expressed through language.

**Conclusion:** This study expresses the language use and communication in the Pentecostal churches with reference to House on the Rock Church. It identifies the various language uses in the church and how it is being communicated. Just like discourse in other domains of language use and communication, the Pentecostal discourses have its own peculiar features which are deeply rooted in basic doctrines and practices and the socio-economic and cultural experiences of the adherents. This study has looked at some of the specific religious context, citing some specific religious performances that are peculiar to HOTR, one of the vibrant Pentecostal churches ever, identifying some of the various doctrines and how language is used to convey them for effective communication.

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