

A Pragmatic analysis of Guidance in English Religious Contexts

By

Ghufran Hussain Jasim

University of Babylon/ College of Education for Human Sciences/ Department of English/Iraq

Iman Mingher Obied

University of Babylon/ College of Education for Human Sciences/ Department of English/Iraq

Abstract

This study intends to investigate the moral guidance in English sermons from a pragmatic perspective. It tries to achieve the following aims:1) identifying the most prominent type of speech act employed in the selected sermons;2) identifying the most flouted conversational maxim in the selected sermons. It is hypothesized that:1) moral guidance is manifested through the use of representative speech act;2) quantity maxim is the most flouted maxim in the selected sermons. An eclectic model is developed which utilizes Searle's (1969) model of speech act theory and Grice's conversational maxims.

Keywords: Pragmatic analysis, moral guidance, speech act, conversational maxims.

1.Introduction

The idea of guidance is certainly not new, it dates back to the dawn of civilization. Back in the day, the head of the family takes on the responsibility in providing guidance to the young and those who urgently in need for it (Pal,2012:1). It is undeniable that human communities have always had a need for guidance (Kinra,2008:1). However the world we live in is in a constant change. Due to these changes in technology and almost every aspect in life such as cultures, beliefs, values and social relations, the young is left distracted and puzzled. Today, it is hardly possible in providing guidance to the young as a result of the limited knowledge of the leader of the community or the head of the family. Thus, the need for specialized guidance services are required (Pal,2012:1).

Guidance is a collection of services aimed at assisting an individual's growth in accordance with his /her personal and societal needs. Guidance must be considered as a continuous process because life goes on and individuals, particularly the youth, encounter new challenges in every aspect of their lives (Kinra,2008:7-10).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Moral guidance

The idea of guidance from a moral perspective, is peculiarly critical in the development of every individual. Producing a better character does not necessarily being done through ethical instruction that merely informs the brain. It is most effective when it is used to change how someone actually thinks and behaves. In this context, the guidance refers to the overall understanding of an individual's character; it refers to the awakening of moral consciousness that will direct him to follow the footsteps of those who were good and great before; it refers to a person's perception of himself as a social being in some future occupation, as well as an understanding of his responsibilities and obligations to his business associates, neighbors, and the law (Davis,1914:18).

Published/ publié in *Res Militaris* (resmilitaris.net), vol.13, n°1, Winter-Spring 2023

Moral development is influenced by cultural, philosophical, and religious factors. The dominant culture of a society, as expressed through mass media, has a significant impact on the way how children think and feel about right and wrong as they grow up. What is taught at home, in church, or school may be affirmed or negated through these promoted values, attitudes, and points of view. There are underlying, implicit philosophies within that same society that structure moral discourse among old and young. Furthermore, those who are members of churches make their contributions through their religious assumptions and viewpoints (DiGiacomo,2000:2).

2.2 Pragmatics: An Overview

According to Leech (1983:1), without understanding pragmatics which means how language is used in communication, the nature of language cannot be understood. He (ibid.:6) further states that pragmatics is the study of meaning which is related to the speech situations. Griffiths (2006:1) indicates that when we talk about pragmatics, we are talking about how our semantic knowledge interacts with our general knowledge of the world while taking into consideration the contexts in which it is used. Being more detail, Birner (2007:28) explains that pragmatic meaning is context dependent and non-truth-conditional.

The term pragmatics has been defined by Morris (1938:30) as “the study of the relation of signs to interpreters”. Yule (1996:3) asserts that pragmatics examines how a speaker (or writer) conveys meaning and how that meaning is received and understood by the listener (or reader). It is more concerned with how speakers communicate their meaning. To understand what people mean, we should deal with the context and how it affects what they say. For Griffiths (2006:6) pragmatics is *the study of utterance meaning*.

2.3 Speech Act Theory

Communication entails more than just expressing ideas. A 'naked' proposition is incapable of communicating anything. To communicate, we must express propositions with a specific illocutionary force, and in doing so, we perform specific types of action known as speech acts, such as stating, promising, warning, and so on (Cruse,2000:331).

2.4 Flouting conversational maxims

Cutting (2002:37) shows that speakers are flouting the maxims when they expect the hearers to infer the implied meaning. Thomas (1995:65) clarifies that a speaker intentionally flouts a maxim, not to deceive or misguide, but to elicit a different or additional meaning. This additional meaning is coined by Grice as 'conversational implicature'. Thomas (1995:69-71) states that the speaker flouts the four conversational maxims as in the following ways :

- a- Flouting the maxim of quantity takes place when the speaker deliberately provides more or less information than the situation demands.
- b- Flouting the maxim of quality occurs when the speaker states something that is obviously false or for which he or she lacks sufficient evidence.
- c- Flouting the maxim of relevance is abused by making irrelevant comments and responses to what the subject at hand is discussing.
- d- Flouting the maxim of manner occurs when being obscure, ambiguous or not brief.

3. Methodology and Data Analysis

3.1 The model of the study

An eclectic model is employed to analyze the current data. It consists of Searle's (1969) model of speech act theory and flouting Grice's maxims.

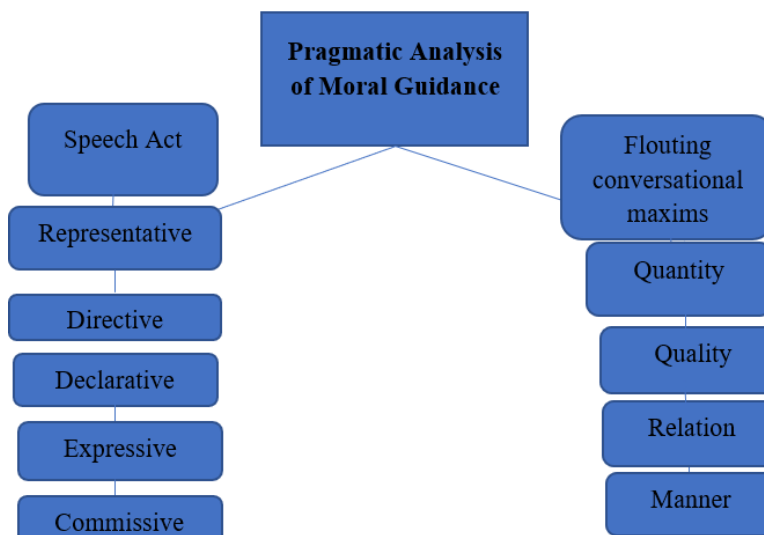


Figure (1): The Model of Analysis

3.2 Data Analysis

Sermon No.1

Extract No.1

(1)I want to start by telling the kids about an injustice that I suffered in childhood.(2) One afternoon when my brother and sister and I were all still young, we were finishing our lunch at home. (3)We had eaten our fruit, so our mother went to the cookie cupboard, which was too high for us to reach, and got out a package of Oreos. (4) She passed it to my older brother, and he took out two cookies. (5) She passed it to me, and I took out two cookies. (6))She passed it to my younger sister, and she took out one cookie...and then two cookies stuck together. Our mother slid the package back into the cupboard—and my brother and I went crazy. (7) Everybody knows that two cookies stuck together are two cookies, not one cookie! (8) In our minds, it was unimaginably unfair that our mother would have let our sister have three cookies while we got only two. (9) All of us children remember this incident because it seemed that one of us got something that she didn't deserve from someone who was supposed to be looking out for all of us (Web1).

Speech act

From the first utterance up to the eighth one, the speech act used is the representative speech act of reporting in which the preacher starts by telling the kids about some incident in his life that he considered as injustice where he and his brother were given two cookies while their little sister was given three cookies and this is unfair for them. In the last utterance, he employs representative speech act of asserting to say that children are children they never forget or understand the reason why adults may do anything. This story is a moral guide for both children and parents.

Conversational maxims

Regarding flouting the conversational maxims in this extract, the preacher flouts quantity and quality maxims. The quality maxim is flouted in the clause “telling the kids about an injustice that I suffered in childhood” through overstating what he described as being an injustice incident that he suffered. The quantity maxim is flouted when he offered many details about his childhood story while it is possible for him to be brief. It is also flouted by means of repeating the word “cookie” in the same statement three times to emphasize the way young children perceive and interpret the world differently.

Extract No. 2

(1) But when you grow up, you learn things. (2) I learned that not everyone is offered cookies every day, as I was. (3) Like the older brother in the Bible story, I was loved and taken care of. (4) I lived in a house where I had my own bedroom and a yard with a swingset and a dog with floppy bangs, and on weekends my family went skiing in the winter and boating in the summer. (5) When you are loved and taken care of, and have been given two cookies, it is ungrateful to complain because you want more. (6) I also learned as I grew older, that my little sister was often lonely. (7) For several years, she was the youngest child in the neighborhood. (8) If my brother and I didn't want to play with her, she didn't have anyone to play with. (9) When my sister was ten, our mother got a job, which meant that my sister came home to an empty house after school. (10) Like the father in the story, our mother understood that our sister needed to be loved in a way that was different from how my brother and I needed to be loved. (11) She knew that our baby sister had a kind of pain that we didn't have. (12) She forgave the little girl's greed, and she reminded my brother and me that we had everything that we needed (Web1).

Speech act

Starting with the speech act, all of the speech acts employed from the first to the last utterances are representative speech acts of stating to tell the audience how he grows up, and starts to perceive the world differently, and how he learns to appreciate his life and his parents. He explains why his sister was given more than them and how his mother behaves with them differently.

Conversational maxims

Speaking of flouting the conversational maxims, the preacher flouts only the quantity maxim. He flouts the quantity maxim by repeating the same phrase "I learned that" twice to emphasize how much someone could change when he grows up. Quantity maxim is also flouted in the way he presented much information than what is required.

Extract No. 3

(1) One afternoon, I came upon one of the young, black men on the public pay phone in the store. I heard him say, "I'm at the library." (2) That changed me. The library was four blocks away. (3) My first instinct, because I was afraid of him, was to think triumphantly, "What an idiot!" (4) But then what sank in was the fact that I had had a mother who drove me to the library when I was a child, and got me a library card, and who took me to the bookstore, too, and bought books for me, so that the distinction became obvious. (5) I understood, with those four words—I'm at the library—that my life and this man's life had been different (Web1).

Speech act

In terms of speech act, the preacher utilizes a representative speech act in the first and second utterances to emphasize how this incident has profoundly changed his perspective and made him realize that it is difficult to judge others' actions or live their lives because everyone has their own challenges.

Conversational maxims

With reference to flouting the conversational maxims, quantity maxim, manner maxim and quality maxim are flouted. Quantity and manner maxims appear in the same clause "because I was afraid of him", the preacher is not being informative about the reason of being afraid of that black man. This clause is also ambiguous which might confuse the audience that he is afraid the way he looks or just because he lies, so here manner maxim is flouted. Quality maxim is flouted in the phrase "What an idiot!" when he understates the black man with his

immediate judgment. Quantity maxim is also flouted in “with those four words—I’m at the library” by means of tautology i.e. he uses the phrase “I’m at the library” after “with those four words” in the same utterance to stress how much that incident changed him and helped him in acquiring moral lessons of life.

SermonNo.2

Extract 1

(1)For Jesus and Moses, morality, that is how we are to behave, is a question of holiness and perfection.(2) Good behavior is how we are meant to be which is ultimately, like God.(3)And we shall demonstrate this holiness in what we do. (4)What we do in part in respect of God, that is our strictly religious observance but more importantly in this context, what we do vis à vis our neighbor, that is in our social behavior.(5)These are, of course, two side of the same coin, and to achieve the holiness and perfection of which we are capable and for which we are destined, we shall need both. So much for the theory; what about the practice?(6) This is where it starts to get difficult (Web2).

Speech act

In terms of speech acts, the preacher uses representative speech act of stating in the first, second, fourth and sixth utterances to tell the audience that morality is what God holds sacred and to be moral means being perfect and holy like God. In the third and fifth utterances, he uses directive speech act of advice in which he informs the audience that we should achieve both holiness and perfection in our social behavior.

Conversational maxims

Speaking of flouting conversational maxims, the preacher flouts the maxims of manner and quantity in the first utterance, the idea of perfection and holiness is vague, it is not something easy to be achieved or acquired . Regarding the quantity maxim, the preacher does not present much information about perfection and holiness.

Extract 2

(1)To face persecution needs great trust and steadfast faith, and this comes from the rejection of worldly morality, as we take love beyond its normal, indeed sensible, bounds.(2) Matthew’s Jesus is saying that we need a disposition to stand against adversity; to stand in the last resort as he stood at his Passion. (3) His words encourage us to be “Holy Fools” (an idea picked up and expanded by Paul, as we heard in the Epistle) (4) This is the ultimately trusting integrity which will make us Holy and Perfect as children of God, and as such, capable of bearing fruit, the fruit by which we shall be recognized (Web2).

Speech act

In respect to speech acts, the preacher employs the representative speech act of stating in all of the fourth utterances to ensure that standing against social standards without fear requires tremendous trust and firm faith just as Jesus, we must have such disposition. This unconditional trust of God will be fruitful.

Conversational maxims

In relation to conversational maxims, the maxim of manner is flouted by which the idea of being holy fool is not clear.

Extract 3

(1)This failure to value of the individual is his most telling criticism of his contemporary society, and it’s equally valid as criticism of ours.(2)Our most obvious mistake is our tendency

to categorise individuals, most crassly in lumping all followers of a religion or all members of a race together (a mistake which blinds us to genuine differences which if we could recognise them we might begin to understand and address the problems they cause) (3) But perhaps more insidiously, we are also motivated too much by a communal selfishness, nationally and internationally (Web2).

Speech act

Concerning speech act, the representative speech act of stating is employed by the preacher in all three utterances in which he informs the audience that our extensive and obvious mistake is our tendency to categorize people, which leads to inequality.

Conversational maxims

There is a flouting of the maxim of quantity where he presents only one reason for failure and it is not satisfied as less information is provided.

3.3 Discussion and analysis

As shown in table 1, the statistical results reveal that the most frequent strategies used in sermon 1 is representative speech act with a percentage of 8.84%. The second most used speech act is directive speech act which constitutes 0.34% percentage.

The results show that the highest frequency of flouting conversational maxims is quantity maxim which constitutes 1.7% percentage then the quality maxim and manner maxim which constitute 0.68% and 0.34% respectively.

Table(1): *Pragmatic analysis of the data*

Pragmatic analysis	Sermon1		Sermon2	
	F	%	F	%
Representative	26	8.84	11	1.87
Directive	0	0	2	0.34
Commissive	0	0	0	0
Expressive	0	0	0	0
Declarative	0	0	0	0
Quantity	5	1.7	2	0.34
Quality	2	0.68	0	0
Manner	1	0.34	2	0.34
Relation	0	0	0	0
Total	34	100	17	100

4. Conclusion

Throughout analyzing the data, the study has come up with the following conclusions: First, for speech act, it is concluded that representative speech act is the most utilized speech throughout the selected sermons then the directive speech act. Accordingly, this reveals that moral guidance is manifested through the use of representative speech act for which the preachers express their beliefs, ideas and attitudes.

Second, for flouting conversational maxims, it is revealed that quantity maxim is being the highest flouted maxim with no intention to deceive or mislead the audience, but to explain meanings and widen their visions of the values and principles they refer to in or out of the stories, ideas, and Jesus or the Gospel words they tell.

Bibliography

Birner, B.2013.Introduction to Pragmatics. UK: Wiley-Black Well.

Cruse,Alan.2000. Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics. New York: Oxford University Press.

Cutting, J. 2002. Pragmatics and Discourse: A Resource book for students. London: Routledge.

Davis , J. 1914. Vocational and Moral Guidance .New York Ginn and company .

DiGiacomo , J. 2000. Teaching Right From Wrong :the moral education of today's youth . Washington :National catholic Educational Association.

Griffiths, P.2006. An Introduction to English Semantics and Pragmatics. UK: Edinburgh University Press.

Kinra , A . 2008. Guidance and Counselling. India : Person Education .

Leech, G. 1983. Principles of pragmatics. London: Longman Group Ltd.

Morris, C. 1938. Foundations of the theory of signs: International Encyclopedia of Unified Science I. In O. Neurath, R. Carnap and C. Morris (ed I, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 77-138.

Pal , K. 2012. Guidance and Counselling .India : Lovely Professional University.

Thomas, J. 1995. Meaning in interaction: An introduction to pragmatics. London: Longman.

Yogesh Hole et al 2019 J. Phys.: Conf. Ser. 1362 012121

Yule, G. (1996). The Study of Language. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Website Sources of the Sermons

<http://emcucc.org/newmorning/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Forgiveness.pdf>

https://www.hampsteadparishchurch.org.uk/data/sermons_2017.php