

## Language Use and Pain-relieving Strategies in Christian Funeral Sermons and Services in Nigeria

*Temitope Michael Ajayi\**

### **Abstract**

*The Christian religion sees death as a means of transportation to another world and life beyond the reach of the living. The eternal separation between the dead and the living, as caused by death, often brings about feelings of pain, sorrow and regret in the hearts of the bereaved. However, as pain-relieving strategies, preachers and pastors at Christian funerals make recourse to certain Christian ideologies embedded in shared Christian doctrinal belief about death in their sermons to calm and console the bereaved. This phenomenon has not been given due attention in scholarship. This study, therefore, although draws inputs from the sociolinguistic tenets of Adegbija's pragma-sociolinguistic theory, is a descriptive analysis of Christian funeral sermons and services in selected Pentecostal, Orthodox, and Evangelical churches in Ibadan, Nigeria. The findings of the study reveal Christian ideological principles are strategically employed by Christian preachers/pastors in their language use at funerals in Nigeria as pain-relieving strategies to proffer a soothing balm to heal the pain in the hearts of the bereaved.*

**Key words:** *language use, pain-relieving strategies, funeral sermons and services, Nigeria*

### **Introduction**

It is no gainsaying that death is an inevitable end for every living being-man, animal and plant on earth. It is generally perceived as a phenomenon that brings an end to the life and existence of everything that has life. This perception must have informed Ajayi's (2016: 1) submission about death as follows 'Death is undoubtedly a universal phenomenon whose fang and sting are meant to be experienced by every living being, irrespective of their status (man or animal), race, culture, religion or ideological beliefs'. Baker (2011) quotes Plato, one of the greatest philosophers of all time, as saying that death is the liberation of the soul from the prison of the body but after an interval of disembodied existence, the soul again is imprisoned and born into the world. In most cultures and religions of the world, death is seen as a phenomenon that imposes an eternal separation between the dead and their loved ones. In death, the body

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\* Lecturer, Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, E-mail: michealtemitope@yahoo.com

becomes inactive (Decker, 2007), decays and turns to dust, while the soul is resurrected to face judgment (Baker, 2011). As a way of expressing their pain over the departure of their loved one(s), mourners, including friends, family members and associates of the departed soul(s) usually cry, weep and make statements of regrets (Byock, 2002). They wish the dead fellow had not died.

Christian preachers and pastors in Nigeria, particularly in the southwestern part of the country, certainly understand the depth of the pain death brings to the souls of the bereaved at the death of loved ones, hence their devising and deployment of certain ‘pain-relieving’ strategies in their funeral sermons. These pain-relieving strategies are a therapeutic device employed by Christian preachers or pastors to console the bereaved during burial ceremonies and funerals. These pain-relieving strategies are sometimes portrayed in the language use and choice of words of Christian preachers and pastors at funerals. This is a phenomenon that has apparently escaped the attention of scholars in the country. This study, therefore, examines language use by pastors and Christian preachers in funeral sermons in selected Christian churches in Ibadan metropolis.

### **Death: Its Definition and the Christian Perspective**

Keating (2002) argues that death can be defined from the medical and theological perspectives. According to him, we speak of death from a medical point-of-view when there is the total and permanent cessation of all vital bodily functions. This occurs when a person’s heart stops beating and the electrical impulses of the brain have permanently ceased, indicating that the last evidence of aliveness has irreversibly left the body (p. 1). However, from a theological perspective, death occurs when a person’s body is separated from their soul (the immaterial part of humans). At this point, “the dust (the body) will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Eccles 12:7, KJV). Keating (2002) further submits that the Bible differentiates between the spiritual and physical deaths. According to him, spiritual death refers to a state of being in which the human soul is separated from God and has not been enlivened by his Spirit. In other words, any human being who is not in tune with God is said to be spiritually dead. Such a person is not assured eternal rest in the bosom of the Lord at death. The physical death, on the other hand, is a form of death that every human being, irrespective of whether or not they are enlivened with the Spirit, must experience. However, according to Christian

ideological belief, Christians, who have been spiritually enlivened during their life on this earth, will go on living in fellowship with God in the “eternal life” (John 10:28; 17:3; 1 John 5:20).

Sharing the opinion of Keating, Decker (2007) also defines death, from a theological perspective, as the separation of the soul and the body, though neither of them ceases to exist. From Decker’s definition, it suffices to say the physical death is not the end of a person’s soul. Decker further argues that Christians believe that a person who is physically dead is not spiritually dead but is sleeping. Baker (2011) submits that Christian doctrines about death evolved from two major sources- the Second-Temple Judaism which reinforces the fact that resurrection of the body is possible; and the Greek philosophy which places emphasis on the idea of immortality of the soul. In his argument, he makes reference to the position of Wolfson (1957:8) on the belief of the early fathers of the church on the immortality of the soul. This claim, according to Wolfson, is predicated on the belief that Jesus resurrected from the dead. According to this Christian belief, just as Christ survived bodily death and was reinvested with his risen body, Christians in words and in deeds are going to survive death. This ideological belief explains why, at funerals, the dead body of a Christian is not referred to as corpse but a person (Decker, 2007). An example of this scenario is found in the Bible. When Mary Magdalene and the other women visited Jesus’ tomb where they had an encounter with an angel, the angel did not refer to the dead body of Jesus as a corpse but described him as a living being (Mark 16:6). This is one reassuring way Christians remind themselves of resurrection after death. As submitted by Decker (2007: 7), the principle of resurrection is the bedrock of the Christian hope. This is a hope that cannot be denied or frustrated by any destiny of human body.

In spite of this assurance of life after death, as projected by the Christian ideological belief, one wonders why there is so much crying, weeping and wailing whenever a person’s death is recorded among the Christian fold. One conclusion that comes to mind from this is that no matter how much Christians believe in life after death where there is a promise of reunion between the dead and the mourners; the physical separation of the dead from the living proves to be a most excruciating experience.

### **Review of Related Works**

Nwoye (1992) investigates obituary announcements as communicative events in Nigerian English. According to him, a critical appraisal of obituary announcements in Nigerian newspapers reveals they go far beyond the ordinary announcement of death. Beyond just passing information about death occurrence, they pragmatically communicate information about the socio-economic status of both the deceased and their survivors to the public. Nwoye further observes that obituaries in Nigerian newspapers, just as those in European countries like Germany, avoid direct mention of death, hence their habitual use of metaphoric expressions in reference to it. He concludes the English employed in Nigerian obituaries manifests some peculiarities which reflect its co-existence with Nigerian indigenous languages in the country. Aremu (2011) is a socio-pragmatic analysis of obituaries in Nigerian English. He collected data from combined sources of oral interviews with selected Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba respondents and the electronic and newspaper media. His findings reveal obituaries in Nigerian English are characterised by euphemism, metaphors, idioms, hedges, code-mixing/switching, and lexical borrowings. He concludes language use in obituaries in Nigerian English is a representation of the hybrids of English in Nigeria. Olowu (2013) is a critical analysis of Christian perception about the concepts of death and judgement within the theoretical framework of (Critical) Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

Applying critical and multimodal discourse analytical tools to analyse the texts of some selected editions of *Christian Women Mirror* that discuss the subjects of death and judgement, he concludes that Christians hold that life continues after death. Death, to the Christian, is just the beginning of another existence either in heaven or hell. Christians also believe that judgement comes after death. In judgement, while the righteous will go to heaven to enjoy bliss forever, sinners will go to hell where there is suffering and gnashing of teeth. Ukeh (2013), employing a qualitative method of data collection and analysis, examines festivities during mourning among the Tiv people of Benue State in Nigeria. He concludes the Tiv mourning custom is such that compels the bereaved to provide for sympathisers instead of being provided for. According to his findings, the Tiv are affected by bereavement on several dimensions. This custom appears to be a product of redefinition of values by the elite who use the avenue of mourning to display affluence. Unfortunately, this lifestyle has been copied by the poor within the society, a development that has brought untold hardship on the poor

but improved the status of the rich. Egbunu (2014) examines the phenomenon of death among the Igala people of Nigeria. In particular, the work investigates the perception of the Igala people about death and the thereafter. Egbunu employs the social, historical and descriptive methods of analysis and the entire life of the human person is portrayed as cyclic. He submits 'death is not only seen negatively as a necessary end but also positively as a passage or gateway unto a much higher, enhanced and refined existence. The human person is thus motivated through such a reflection to become radically decisive on virtuous living. This is by and large, presented as the basic yardstick to a more meaningful, focused, impactful and goal-oriented life.'

Ajayi (2016) is a pragmatic approach to the study of Yoruba Christian burial songs in Nigeria. Employing a modified version of Mey's (2001) concept of pragmeme in his study, Ajayi sees Yoruba Christian burial songs sung at Christian funerals as pain-relieving strategies employed by mourners and singers to console and calm the family members and associates of the dead. The present study is different from all the works cited above in that, although it looks at the phenomenon of death, it examines and describes language use by preachers and pastors in their funeral sermons from a sociolinguistic perspective. It argues funeral sermons are characterised by certain pain-relieving strategies consciously employed by pastors and preachers at Christian funeral services to console and calm the bereaved.

### **Analytical Framework**

This study adopts the sociolinguistic tenets of Adegbija's (1985) pragma-sociolinguistic theory for the description of language use by Christian preachers and pastors to console the bereaved in their funeral sermons and services. The theory draws inputs from two fields of language studies- pragmatics and sociolinguistics. It is a theory that harps on the thorough knowledge of the 'historical, personal, environmental, sociocultural and linguistic aspects of context relating to the context in which a particular discourse took place (Adegbija, 1985: 11). This concept is similar to Leech's (1983) term socio-pragmatics which he described as the sociological interface in pragmatics. In fact, in Leech's submission, it is a phenomenon that explores how social conditions and situations influence language use and interpretation. For the purpose of this study, we adopt the sociolinguistic tenets of the theory.

Sociolinguistics is the study of language in its social context. It is a field of study that examines 'language as it communicatively functions in society and as it is affected or influenced by social and cultural factors' (Emezue, 2013). In this study, we see the *shared Christian belief* on death as a significant socio-religious factor that affects or influences the deployment of language by pastors and preachers in their sermons at funeral services.

### **Methodology**

This study employs participant and non-participant ethnographic methods of data collection. The data for the study were funeral sermons and services in ten randomly selected churches in different parts of Ibadan, Nigeria. These churches were of the Pentecostal, Orthodox and Evangelical denominations found in the Christian body in Nigeria. The specific areas of Ibadan where the churches visited were located were Agbowo, Aremo, Mokola, Orita Mefa, Ekotedo, Oke-Bola, Oke-Ado, Agbeni, and Olode. The data collected on each funeral were transcribed and glossed accordingly (for those in Yoruba). The data were subjected to a descriptive analysis with particular reference to how the shared Christian ideological belief about death influences language use by Christian preachers and pastors to relieve the pain of death in the bereaved in their funeral sermons. For ethical reasons, we capture the names of the deceased in our data using their initials.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

In this section, our analysis looks at how shared Christian belief about death informs the lexical choice of Christian preachers in their funeral sermons and services, as well the songs sung at funeral services.

### **Reference to the Deceased as Body and not Corpse**

In the various church funerals attended, the corpse of the deceased is often referred to as *body* by the Christian preachers. They do this in accordance with the Christian theological belief that Christians in the real sense do not die but sleep in the Lord. According to the Christian doctrine, the Lord Jesus Christ, their Saviour, overcame death and has dominion over death and has given them the assurance that death cannot overcome them. It therefore means that, even when they are not physically active as a result of the physical death, they are spiritually active at the feet of Jesus in company of angels. Christian preachers consciously and deliberately reinforce this *Christian ideological belief* in their funeral sermons as a

soothing balm to heal the pain that dominates the hearts of the bereaved at the death of loved ones. This submission of ours is predicated on our observation as captured in the excerpts below:

### **Excerpt 1**

**Priest:** With faith in Jesus Christ, we reverently bring the **body** of our brother M to be buried in its human imperfection. Let us pray with confidence to God who gives life to all things that he will raise up this mortal **body** to the perfection and the company of saints. May God give him a merciful judgement and forgive all his sins. May Christ the good shepherd lead him home to be at peace with God our Father. And may he be happy with all the saints, in the presence of the eternal king. Brethren in Christ, he is right here with us lifeless. We can see him if we open the casket we can talk to him but he can't respond but his lifeless **body** here speaks a lot to us.

**Priest:** I bless the **body** of MEA with the Holy water that recalls his baptism of which St. Paul writes: all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death, we were buried together with him so that as Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the father, we too might live a new life. For if we have been united with him by likeness to his death, so shall we be united with him by likeness to his resurrection.

### **Excerpt 2**

Àlùfà: Ni ìgbàgbó nínú Jésù kristì, a wá gba **ara** bàba olóògbe ROD fún ìsínku.

*With faith in Jesus Christ, we receive the **body** of our father, late papa ROD for burial*

**Excerpt 3**

**Priest:** I bless the **body** of mama FMA with the holy water that recalls her baptism...we pray for our sister, mama FMA whose **body** we honour with Christian burial. Give her happiness with your saints and raise up her **body** in glory at the last day to be in your presence forever...

**Excerpt 4**

With faith we receive the **body** of our mother mama OAO for burial. For as much as it has pleased the Lord Almighty God of His great mercy to take to himself the soul of Mama OAO here departed. We commit her **body** to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection of eternal life through our lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile **body** that it may be like unto his glorious **body** according to the mighty works, whereby He is able to subdue all things to Himself...

In Excerpts 1, 2, 3, and 4 presented above, the preachers consciously choose their words while making reference to the deceased. They constantly refer to the deceased as *body* and not corpse. Operating within the ambit of the shared Christian belief about death, the preachers in these excerpts carefully select their lexical choice as a deliberate linguistic strategy to send a pain-relieving message to the bereaved that their loved one(s) has/have not died in the real sense but is/are asleep. They understand the lexical weight of the word *corpse* which connotes hopelessness, no longer living or no longer in existence and carefully avoid the word in their funeral sermons. Instead, they opt for a more soothing term, *body*, to refer to the deceased. In Excerpt 2 in particular, although the funeral is conducted in Yoruba and one could still see the conscious reference to the corpse of the deceased as *body* by the preacher, in the following statement: *a wá gba ara bàba olóògbe ROD...we receive the body of our father ROD...'. The preacher does not refer to the deceased as òkú<sup>2</sup> 'the dead' but *ara* 'body'.*

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<sup>2</sup> In the Yoruba socio-cultural system, the dead is referred to as *oku*. However, in the Christian parlance, this is considered inappropriate, hence the preference for *ara*. The preacher in the

### Reference to the Good Deeds of the Deceased

Making reference to the good deeds of the deceased is another pain-relieving strategy employed by pastors and preachers at Christian funerals to relieve the hearts of the bereaved of the pain of death. In this instance, the preachers hope, by *talking* about the many ‘beautiful’ things the fellow had done in the world, they would convince the bereaved their loved one(s) who die would certainly make heaven, hence there is no need to be sorrowful. This is evident in the bold parts of the excerpts presented below:

#### Excerpt 5

**Pastor: Mama is a model in simplicity and humility, she relates well with every one, a silent influencer, a peace lover and a generous giver. She is a woman who has strong will, in spite of her simplicity she was bound to be firm.** And another beautiful thing was mummy was well prepared for eternity and was not scared of death as she often says on her sick bed “RM, èrùikú ò bà mí” (her first daughter’s name) I am not afraid of death. And was found during that period, singing the hymn titled “it is well with my soul”...mama has touched so many lives mama has made a great impact that we cannot but point attention to for those that are related to her to know and those that are also not related we have so much to learn from her life. She has gone! **We wish mama will still remain as that model but it has pleased the Lord to call her.** So we are not here now to come and mourn but to celebrate her. Mama has been described variously by people some have said woman of faith and indeed she was! She was a giver, she was a friend of everyone, she was an administrator, there spoke about her simplicity of life, we found in her an achiever and a mentor. We found in her a helper who is out to lift people up and she did...The scripture is filled with so many examples that we continue

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excerpt, even though Yoruba, was constrained by his Christian ideological belief, hence his reference to the dead as *ara* (body) and not *oku* (the dead).

to refer to today that we can also liken mama to that we are celebrating. Let me give an example of one woman in the Bible named Dorcas who was dwelling at Joppa. From the book of *Acts chapter 9 verses 36*, “*There was a believer in Joppa named Tabitha which in Greek means Dorcas she was always doing kind things for others and helping the poor.*” The record is bearing it; this is the hard copying we are reading now concerning her even though she had pass on many, many years ago. But the impact she made had been documented we are still reading it today. In the testimonies we heard, we found these traces of these virtues in mama too.

#### Excerpt 6

We gathered here to pray for Mama, it’s been a long time since I know her even before I became a Bishop her. This made me to run here to pray for her. No one knows who next? We will all leave one day, but we don’t know when. **Mama is a good person; she is always waking with her husband that I got scared that Mama will die immediately her husband died. They were both strict disciplinarians. Mama is a blessed woman**, she made it to 90 years, especially in this country we are, it is the grace of God who helped her to attain to this height. We thank God for her life; that is why we have gathered here to pray for her.

#### Excerpt 7

**We thank God for the life of Papa; we thank God for the number of years he has used, because he used it in kindness and good deeds.** The bible tells us do good in our lifetime just like papa E did even more. We will observe in the life of papa that he seeks the good of others. The bible emphasizes that everything we own will perish in this world, no matter how much property we have our own. We can’t take any of our property to heaven; all our material

possessions will perish on earth. Papa used his wealth to enrich and bless others which makes us to understand that he has lived a good life.

In Excerpt 5, the preacher deliberately reminds the bereaved of the simplicity and humility that characterised the lifestyle of the deceased while alive. In the sermon, the deceased is being *described* as a fellow that lived a peaceful life with everyone around her, one that had positive impact on people, and one that was simple but firm. All these portray the deceased as a disciplined fellow who knew what to do at the right time (and at the right place). In fact, she was a very prudent woman. She was so influential that the church would wish she would not die but as God would have it; she was called home by Him. The preacher consciously chooses to do this to encourage the bereaved to forget their sorrow engendered by the perceived loss of a loved one. To further reduce the pain of death to mere nothingness, the preacher reminds the bereaved of the encounter he had with the deceased while alive where she constantly told her daughter, RM, she was not afraid of death. The preacher wants to present the deceased as one that had kept to all the precepts of God, and hence should not be afraid of death, as death to her is only a journey onto eternal rest. With all these pain-relieving words and utterances of victory over death, why should the bereaved still be sorrowful over the departure of the deceased?

The picture is not different in Excerpts 6 and 7 where the preachers praise the deceased to high heavens. In Excerpt 6, for instance, the preacher projects the deceased as a good woman, a disciplinarian and one that was always available to support her husband (when he was alive). She was a virtuous woman who lived 90 fulfilled years. The preacher expects the bereaved, on hearing these good deeds of the woman, would take solace in the fact that the departed led a virtuous life and was a blessing to her family and society; hence she has only gone home to rest. In Excerpt 7, the preacher describes the man as one that lived his life in kindness and goodness. One would notice the preachers talk only about the good things the deceased have done and not their bad deeds. This is a deliberate strategic device employed by them to relieve the pain of death in the hearts of the bereaved. This device is also apparent in the excerpts below:

**Excerpt 8**

From the testimonies that people at the funeral wake-keep yesterday, a lot of things were said about our mother, she was a peace lover, a helper, a charitable woman, she was a giver, an administrator; she loved the things of God so much and was very humble.

**Excerpt 9**

We are here together this morning, to bid farewell to our father, to bid farewell to a great teacher, to bid farewell to a loved one. Let's look at the life of our father here who we surely agree is resting in the blossom of the lord because he lived a good life. He lived a life of simplicity if you see him just looking at him you won't know his status. Our father has gone to leave with Christ he has fulfilled his purpose on earth".

**Excerpt 10**

We are here to celebrate our father. He is being celebrated today because he died in Christ, and people gave a lot of good testimonies about him at the services of songs held at his residence yesterday that he accepted Christ and showed Christ to many. And as such I want us to rejoice for we know that he has gone to be with Christ. We all know that when a wicked person dies people make comments such as "to hell with him" but the case of our father here is different. Our father is being celebrated today because he is good man, he has attained a ripe old age and we bless God for that. Our father, was a disciplinarian, he loved all and participated actively in the things of God.

**Excerpt 11**

A pèjò síbí làààrò yíí, láti kí akọni obìnrin wòlílí ìyá àti olùkọ wa pé ó dìgbòóşe. Ìyá wá gbé ìgbé-ayé rere, èmi gégé bí ẹnìkan kọ ẹkọ pípò làrà wọn, nígbà ayé wọn, wọn fi krístì han ọpọ ẹniyàn tí wọn si gba ọpọlọpọ à là kúrò nínú idè

sàtánì . wón ti ja ijà náà . ìdí èyí ni a ɣe péjọ láti ɣe ayeyẹ pàdàsílé ológo,ayeyẹ òní kii ɣe nítorí pé wón kú gégé bíi onígàgbó. Sùgbón nítorí wón jẹ onígàgbó tí ọlórún ló láti tó àwọn àgùn-tàn rẹ sọna nítorí ìdì èyí a kò sọfọ wón torí a mò pé lóòótọ, wón n sùn làyà olúwa.

*We have gathered here this morning to bid farewell to a great woman of God, to a prophetess, to pay our last respect to our mother , our teacher and our spiritual director. Our mother, loved a good life. I personally learnt so many things from her, she has worked the good work, she has shown christ to many she has deliever so many from the bondage of Satan, she has fought the good fight. So this morning, we are here to celebrate a glorious exist, a life well spent. We are celebrating her because she died a christian and not just any kind of christian but the kind that was used by God to guide his sheeps. So there is no need to mourn her because we know that she is resting in the bossonm of the lord.”*

Taking a critical look at all Excerpts, 4-11, one concludes the Christian preachers console the family of the bereaved by *appraising* the deceased on how his/her life was spent. Most times, if the deceased was an active member of the church who contributed greatly to the needs of the church and members of the church, the preachers remind the family of this with the hope of assuring them the deceased had lived a selfless life and in peace with God, such that could earn him or her a peaceful resting place in the bosom of the Lord.

### **Reference to shared religious (Biblical) belief about Death and Resurrection**

This phenomenon is evident in the following excerpts:

#### **Excerpt 12**

The Bible established the fact that no matter how long we stay in this world we will all return to the ground. There is no amount of

wealth we amass; we still leave it in this world, because they are all in vain. When we breathe the last breathe, we can no longer come to this world, and we can't query God just as the book of Job has told us.

### Excerpt 13

**Pastor:** Ó yẹka dúpẹ, àbí kò yẹka dúpẹ? Today is not a day of mourning, it is a day of thanksgiving unto the Lord. Celebration of life and appreciating God for the wonderful life our mummy lived. So we are not here to come and mourn now but to celebrate her. So, ọjọ òní ọjọ ọpẹni fún wa (today is a day of thanksgiving for us) a sì n dúpẹ lówọ wọn, a sì n dúpẹ lówọ Olúwa. I know that our mummy means a lot to every one of us present here, a lot of testimonies have been given about her at the service of songs. **I want us especially the children of mama to know that our mummy just like Christ died and resurrected, will also resurrect in Christ.** Saint Paul tells us in the letter to the first Thessalonians chapter 4 verses 13-14 *“but I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep (dead) that ye sorrow not, as even other who have no hope (the non-Christians). For if we (Christians) believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleeps in Jesus will God bring with him.”* St. Paul tells us that as Christians we should not be sorrowful over the death of a loved one or a fellow Christian because those who we think are dead are actually not dead but are asleep in Christ and that God will resurrect them just as He resurrected Christ. **Our mummy is not dead she is asleep and will be raised by God just as he raised Christ. So let us not mourn her but rather rejoice for she has gone to be with the Lord.**

**Excerpt 14**

Brethren in Christ, he is right here with us lifeless. We can see him if we open the casket, we can talk to him but he can't respond, but his lifeless body here speaks a lot to us. That is why; I want us to reflect on a simple question what is death? What is death all about? As humans we take life a lot for granted. Man is lonely at death. When we are talking about death, we also have to talk about time. Time is short but for some of us time is always there, but the real thing is that time is short. **What we do with that time is what matters and it is what we do with time that determines our destination when we are dead. That is why; we can define death as life. What did Jesus say to us, he said " I am the resurrection and the life" he who believes in me though dead will live" and so death is life.** We believe there is life after death, death is a *transformator*, that is why for us Catholics, we believe there is death and we believe there is life after death. Our father has gone to leave with Christ he has fulfilled his purpose on earth. Let's look at the life of our father here who we surely agree is resting in the bosom of the lord because he lived a good life. He lived a life of simplicity if you see him just looking at him you won't know his status. St. Paul tells us in the second reading that we should not be sad for those who have died in Christ that God who raised Jesus would also raise them with him.

In Excerpts 12, 13 and 14 presented above, the Christian preachers *console* the family(ies) and associates of the bereaved by making reference to the shared Christian religious belief about death and resurrection. According Becker (2011) and Ajayi (2016), the shared and common belief of Christians about death is that there is resurrection after death. This shared ideological belief is drawn from different passages of the Bible, one of which is I Thessalonians 4: 13-14, earlier cited. According to this shared Christian belief about death and resurrection, any Christian that dies in Christ will

resurrect into eternal life. This explains why the preacher in Excerpt 13 emphasises the need for the bereaved to be thankful to God instead of mourning. They (the bereaved) should give thanks to God for the beautiful, fulfilled and rewarding life the deceased lived while in the world. This is captured in his words as follows: *‘I want us especially the children of mama to know that our mummy just like Christ died and resurrected, will also resurrect in Christ’*. He continued further: *‘Our mummy is not dead she is asleep and will be raised by God just as he raised Christ. So let us not mourn her but rather rejoice for she has gone to be with the Lord’*. In Excerpt 14, the preacher reiterates the Christian view that living a worthy life is one of the criteria needed to resurrect with Christ after death. In particular, he projects the deceased as one that had fulfilled this criterion, hence his certainty of reigning with Christ: *‘What we do with that time is what matters and it is what we do with time that determines our destination when we are dead. That is why; we can define death as life. What did Jesus say to us, he said “I am the resurrection and the life” he who believes in me though dead will live” and so death is life.’* The preacher carefully resorts to the use of this pain-killing strategy to reduce or exterminate the pain of death in the hearts of the bereaved.

### **Offering of Words of Prayers**

Saying words of prayers is another strategic way of relieving the pain of death in the bereaved by Christian funeral preachers. Christian funeral preachers console the family of the bereaved through prayers. These prayers are said to ease the pain the bereaved feel about the death of their loved one. They also say the prayers in ways that would remind the bereaved of their Christian faith. Often times, if the deceased is a young person, the preachers pray against premature death, but if the deceased is an elderly person, they pray that the soul of the deceased rest in the bosom of the Lord. They also pray for the soul of the deceased to be accepted in the bosom of Jesus. They equally pray for the living, particularly for long life. The latter is particularly done to take the mind of the bereaved off the present situation (mourning the dead). In some Christian churches, particularly Pentecostal settings, it is believed that no amount of prayers said for the dead could make him/her such make heaven, while in Orthodox settings, it is believed that prayers of intercession can be said on behalf of the soul of the deceased for him/her to spend eternal life in heaven. This is evident in Excerpts 15, 16, and 17 below:

**Excerpt 15**

**Priest:** O God, Almighty father, our faith professes that your son died and rose again; mercifully grant that, through this mystery, your servant MEA who has fallen asleep in Christ, may rejoice to rise again through him, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the holy spirit, One God forever and ever, Amen.

**Priest:** Lord God, whose son left us, in the sacrament of his Body, food for the journey, mercifully grant that, strengthened by it, our brother Michael may come to the eternal table of Christ who lives and reigns forever and ever.

**Priest:** With faith in Jesus Christ, we reverently bring the body of our brother Michael to be buried in its human imperfection. Let us pray with confidence to God who gives life to all things that he will raise up this mortal body to the perfection and the company of saints. May God give him a merciful judgement and forgive all his sins. May Christ the good shepherd lead him home to be at peace with God our Father. And may he be happy with all the saints, in the presence of the eternal king.

**Congregation:** Amen.

**Excerpt 16**

**Pastor:** Let us bow our heads for prayer  
Our lord and our God, you are worthy of praise, you are worthy of honour and adoration. We thank you for the privilege and opportunity you have always been giving us to put in rights in our lives, So that we can be worthy at the end. Here we are again celebrating a woman, you have found worthy and our testimonies also bearing witness that she is worthy so we are not here to pray for her we are only celebrating her. Her works have followed her like we have

examined this morning, the rest of us that are on the queue, we are praying for ourselves lord, it is not by power nor by might but by my spirit says the lord, that you will help us that none of us will miss this heaven in the name of Jesus

***Prayer for the nuclear and extended family (all rise as the prayer is being said by the pastor)***

**Pastor:** Psalms 1 verses 3 ***“they are like trees planted along the river bank bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither and they prosper in all they do”*** we are praying that after the departure of mama you will be like the trees planted along the river bank, bringing out your fruit in your own season, and whatever you lay your hands on you shall prosper in the mighty name of the lord Jesus.

**Congregation:** Amen

**Deployment of Songs of Relief**

In most Christian funerals, at least a Christian song, most times a hymn, is sung after each session of the programme. Ajayi (2016) submits Christian burial songs are pain-relieving songs, as they are meant to reduce the agony and pain that fill the hearts of the bereaved when mourning the death of loved ones. There are procession and recession songs. The procession song is sung at the beginning of the funeral service and in Orthodox churches, it is while the song is one that the body of the deceased is brought into the church. After the opening prayer, another song is sung, and after the sermon when people are coming to give their offering, there is another song. The recession song/hymn comes at the close of service. These songs are strategic means of elevating the spirit of the bereaved and ultimately make them forget the sorrow of death. In the songs, the beautiful picture of heaven is painted and reinforced with specific mention of death as one that makes it possible for Christians to live in the same abode as angels, reference to the dead as pilgrim(s) who have come home to rest, the description of heaven as home for Christians, and the projection of death as victory (over the troubles of life), among others. All these are embedded in the shared Christian ideological belief that heaven is home, a place of comfort, devoid of pain, sorrow and weeping. Some of the instances of the use of songs of relief in our data are presented below:

**Excerpt 17**

1. Hark! Hark, my soul! Angelic songs are swelling  
O'er earth's green fields and ocean's wave-beat  
shore:  
**How sweet the truth those blessed strains are  
Of that new life when sin shall be no more!**  
*(Refrain)* Angels of Jesus, angels of light, singing to  
welcome the pilgrims of the night!
2. **Onward we go, for still we hear them singing,  
"Come, weary souls, for Jesus bids you come"**  
And, through the dark, its echoes sweetly ringing,  
**The music of the gospel leads us home.**

**Excerpt 18**

1. O Lord my God, when I in awesome wander  
Consider all the works thy hand hath made,  
I see the stars; I hear the mighty thunder,  
thy power throughout the universe displayed;  
Chorus  
Then sing my soul, my saviour God to thee  
How great thou art! How great thou art!  
Then sing my soul, my savour calls to thee  
How great thou art, how great thou art!
2. When through the woods and forest glades I wander  
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees  
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur  
And hear the brook, and feel the gently breeze;

**Excerpt 19**

1. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!  
the strife is o'er, the battle done,  
the triumph of the LORD is won,  
oh! Let the song of praise be sung alleluia!
2. The powers of death have done their worst  
And Jesus hath his foes dispersed;  
Let's shouts of praise and joy outburst. Alleluia

**Excerpt 20**

1. “*mo mò p’ ólùdandé mí mbe;* I know that my redeemer lives  
*Itùnu ñlá l’ eyi fún mí* what comfort this sweet sentence gives  
*Ó mbe , enit’ó kú lékan;* He lives, he lives who once was  
*Ó mbe, Orí iyè mi láí* He lives my everlasting head
2. *Ó mbe, lati ma bùkún mi* He lives triumphant from the grave  
*Ó sì mbèbè fún mi lòké* He lives eternal to save  
*Ó mbe, láti jí mí n’ boji* He lives all glorious in the sky  
*Láti gbà mí là títí láí* He lives exalted there on high

**Conclusion**

This study, drawing input from the sociolinguistic tenets of Adegbija’s (1985) pragma-sociolinguistic theory, has attempted a descriptive analysis of language use and pain-relieving strategies in Christian funeral sermons and services in randomly selected Pentecostal, Orthodox, and Evangelical churches in Ibadan metropolis, Nigeria. Following Adegbija’s conception of sociolinguistics in his pragma-sociolinguistic theory, we identify the shared Christian ideological belief about death as a socio-religious phenomenon that affects and influences language use in Christian funerals and services. The findings of the study reveal Christian ideological or doctrinal principles embedded in shared Christian ideological belief are consciously and strategically employed by Christian preachers and pastors at funerals in Nigeria as pain-relieving strategies to provide soothing balm to heal the pain in the hearts of the bereaved. Some of the pain-relieving strategies employed by Christian preachers and pastors in their language use at funeral services include reference to the deceased as *body* and not *corpse*, reference to the good deeds of the deceased, reference to shared religious (Biblical) belief about death and resurrection, deployment of songs of relief, and offering of words of prayers.

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