

Unveiling the speech acts employed in an aggressive Nigerian Christian prayers sessions

Kenneth Ekezie Obiorah¹, Patience Nonye Edeoga²

University of Lagos, NIGERIA^{1,2}

¹Email: obiorahkenneth@yahoo.com

²Email: pedeoga@unilag.edu.ng

Article Information

Received: 22 Jun 2026

Revised: 27 Jul 2026

Accepted: 30 Jul 2026

Published: 02 Aug 2026

Abstract - Humans perform speech act when they speak or write. These acts enhance discourse and conversation. This study explores the types of speech acts performed during energetic prayer sessions in a Nigeria church and the linguistic strategies employed in performing these acts. Data were gathered from 12 months research visit to the of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministry Headquarter church in Lagos, Nigeria. Through a qualitative analysis of prayer language, the research identifies various speech acts used to inspire spiritual fervour during prayer sessions. The speech acts identified include: commanding, requesting, denying of efforts, questioning, promising and making positive assertions. Findings reveal that the illocutionary forces of the speech acts were felicitous because they amplify spiritual intensity, foster a sense of community, and promote vibrant prayer experiences. The result demonstrates that language plays a vital role in shaping spiritual practices and experiences within the mountain of fire and miracles ministry.

Keywords: speech acts, illocutionary force, linguistic strategy, energetic prayer

1. Introduction

Language is a powerful human device. With it, humans relate, influence and manipulate one another's thought. There is hardly anything that the humans can do without the instrument of language. To achieve a set target in any discourse setting, language users employ some linguistic strategies. This study delves into the dynamic realm of Pentecostal prayer language, exploring the linguistic strategies employed by the Mountain of Fire and Miracles (MFM) ministry to inspire energetic prayers. Linguistic strategies refer to the deliberate and systematic use of language to achieve a specific goal, convey a particular message, or create a desired effect. These strategies involve the manipulation of language elements, such as words, phrases, tone, and syntax, to influence the audience, shape perceptions, or construct meaning.

In religious activities where men are persuaded to perform or conform to the speaker, some linguistic strategies are employed to achieve that. There are many studies on language use in the MFM church (Amusan, 2023; Olajimbiti, 2015). These studies focused on context, pragmatic and cognitive activities of the prayer language with little or no attention paid to the linguistic strategies employed by the MFM prayer leaders during prayer sessions. The objective of the study is to identify and examine the linguistic strategies or elements employed by church leader to achieve their communicative goal during prayer sessions and subjecting them to the felicity conditions of Austin (1962). By investigating these linguistic strategies, this study aims to bring out a deeper understanding of the role of language in shaping spiritual practices and experiences within Pentecostal communities especially the MFM.



Aggressive Nigerian Christian prayer sessions, particularly within Pentecostal and charismatic contexts, employ a variety of speech acts that serve both spiritual and social functions. These prayers often use directive speech acts such as commanding, pleading, and confronting to assert authority over perceived spiritual enemies and adversities, reflecting a combative stance against evil forces (Iyabo, 2017). The language is frequently warlike and emotive, designed to arouse strong emotions like anger, fear, excitement, and relief among participants, thereby fostering an embodied experience of spiritual warfare (Olajimbiti, 2015; Richman, 2020).

Imprecatory prayers—curses or calls for divine retribution—are common and are believed to neutralize or reverse evil intentions directed at the faithful; these are justified biblically by selective scriptural references but remain controversial due to Christ's teachings on loving enemies (Ayanyinka, 2020). The rhetoric extends beyond the church setting into everyday discourse in Nigeria, influencing social interactions with heightened vigilance and distrust toward perceived enemies (Ekechi, 2025). Overall, these prayer sessions blend declarative, commissive, and representative acts to create a performative space where spiritual battles are enacted through language as a form of political and social praxis (Marshall, 2016; Iyabo, 2017).

Language is human. Both the spoken and the written forms of language are entirely human. The whole essence of language is discourse or communication. This act of discourse or communication is what Austin (1962) termed speech act. Concerning the speech act theory, Mabaquiao (2018), notes that though the speech act theory started as philosophy of language theory, it is used today across other disciplines such as Linguistics and communication. The theory of speech act is all about how the speaker makes his intention known to his hearer(s) through the use of the words of his utterance. The speech act looks beyond just uttering words in sentences to making sure the hearer does not only hear those words but understands the intended meaning. Elbah (2022) has it that 'what speech act theory (SAT) brought into picture is the study of a non-literal meaning of language use. It is the study of how language users do things using words. Apologize, assert, order, request, etc., are examples of speech acts carried out by words'.

The earliest enquiry into the area of speech act started with Austin (1962) in his book: *How to do things with words* published posthumously. The theory was introduced by Austin while Searle Austin's student furthered the study. Afterwards, several other researchers like Allan (1986), Grice (1975), Leech (1980, 1983) among others have made useful contribution that have helped in the advancement of the theory. The main proposition of Austin as Crystal (1997) notes is that 'many utterances do not communicate information, but are equivalent to actions'. Agbedo's (2008) study of speech act analysis reveals that in speaking and in writing, speakers or writers perform speech act. This act can be in the form of: stating a fact, confirming or denying something, making a prediction or request, asking a question, issuing an order, giving a piece of advice, making an offer, making a promise, thanking somebody or condoling a bereaved person.

The verbs used to perform these acts are categorized as constatives and performatives. In the words of Mabaquiao (2018), Austin used constatives to refer to linguistic expressions that are either true or false, and are often used to describe facts or states of affairs in the world. They are majorly "statements" or "propositions." Performatives on the other hand is used to refer to linguistic expressions that are used to perform certain actions while saying them. Hence, an action is performed once a performative is uttered. He buttresses this point with the following utterance: "I advise you to seek permission from your parents". He posits that the speaker by this utterance performs the act of advising. Austin used the expressions happy and unhappy to indicate success and failure of performatives. A performative is considered successful and happy if it does what it intends to do.

Then failure and unhappy if it does not carry out what it intended to do. Three prominent types of speech acts identified by Austin are: locutionary act, Illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. The locutionary act according to "is an utterance in the form of a statement". It is all about making or producing meaningful utterances. The illocutionary act as

presented by Osisanwo (2003) in Agbedò (2008) "...is a non-linguistic act performed through a linguistic or locutionary act." What this means is that illocutionary act talks about the force of action brought about by our utterance(s). Based on this, Agbedò further notes that every utterance has a different kind of illocutionary force while every speech act falls within the five categories of *verdictives*, *exercitives*, *commissives*, *behavitives*, *expositives* stipulated by Austin (1962). He also observes that every illocutionary act needs to meet the felicity conditions of Austin (1962) to be considered felicitous or else, it will be considered infelicitous. The felicity conditions are: sincerity condition, preparatory condition, executive condition and fulfillment condition. Lastly, perlocutionary act is all about the effect of the illocutionary acts on the hearer.

For Austin (1975), "perlocutionary act(s) always include some consequences", hence he (Austin) describes it as 'what we bring about or achieve by saying something'. Kissine (2008) simplified it by saying that perlocutionary act is the descriptions of the link between the utterance and some of its causal effects. Everything that has been had concerning the speech act theory point to the fact that we perform acts (speech acts) when we talk. These speech acts are categorized into three main acts which are inter-connected to each other.

Theoretical frameworks for analysing aggressive Nigerian Christian prayer sessions often draw on speech act theory, particularly Searle's model, which categorizes utterances into directive, declarative, commissive, and representative acts to understand how language functions in spiritual warfare prayers (Iyabo, 2017). Cognitive linguistics and pragmatics are also employed to explore how emotion-laden language in prayers arouses feelings such as anger, fear, excitement, and relief among participants, shaping their religious and social experiences (Olajimbiti, 2015).

Critical discourse analysis further helps reveal how Pentecostal prayer language permeates everyday communication, influencing social relations by constructing notions of enemies and fostering vigilance and distrust (Ekechi, 2025; Ogechi, 2024). Previous studies have highlighted the use of imprecatory prayers—curses or calls for divine retribution—as a controversial but biblically justified practice within Nigerian Pentecostalism that reflects a tension between traditional biblical injunctions and Christ's teachings on love and forgiveness (Ayanyinka, 2020).

Research problems include the limited empirical investigation into the pragmatic functions of these prayers, the socio-political implications of hate speech embedded in sermons, and the broader impact of aggressive prayer rhetoric on societal cohesion and intergroup relations in Nigeria (Ayansola, 2021; Gokaru et al., 2023).

There is also a need to better understand how these speech acts operate as political praxis that construct militant spiritual subjects and influence public space beyond the church setting (Marshall, 2016).

Many scholars have examined pentecostal discourse in Africa from different perspective. Some of such studies will be reviewed here under. Amusan (2023) examines the language of Christian prayers, focusing on the role of context and pragmatic cues in selected prayers from the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries (MFM). The study adopts a qualitative method, and analyzes five samples of Christian gospel prayers from MFM's "Power Must Change Hand" program. Content analysis was conducted using Searle's (1969) Speech Acts Theory and Grice's (1975) Theory of Presupposition. The study reveals that MFM prayers can be classified into six contexts: warfare, supplications, restoration, prophetic proclamation, deliverance, and prayer of revelation.

The study also identifies various pragmatic cues, including presupposition, metaphors, speech acts, and implicature. Speech acts, such as commanding, binding, and requesting were used to perform certain acts. Metaphors, like "Spirit is a Substance" and "Miracles are Farm Products," are employed to convey spiritual concepts. Findings reveal among other things that most of the prayer items are utilized to perform certain acts. And the most occurring acts are the directive and the declarative acts. While the directive act occurs more frequently in the form of commanding, pleading and requesting, the declarative act occurs less frequently. Again, it

revealed that commanding was used mainly in warfare prayer; prophesy proclamation, deliverance and restoration. However, pleading and requesting were mostly adopted in the prayers of revelation and supplication.

Agbede (2008) is a discourse in the Nigerian print media. He used the felicity conditions of Austin (1962) speech acts theory to analyse the speech acts made by Bayo Onanuga and Yakubu Mohammed during the Dele Olojede's reception to mark his Pulitzer Prize award. The findings reveal that the illocutionary acts deriving from their individual speech acts failed to meet Austin's *felicity conditions of sincerity, preparatory, executive, and fulfillment conditions*. As a result, their individual speech acts are adjudged *infelicitous*. Their speech acts also failed to meet Grice's *cooperative principles*.

Olajimbiti (2015) examines the language of prayer in Christian settings, specifically focusing on the cognitive processes and pragmatic behaviors in Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM) warfare prayers. He explores how the (MFM) Church uses language to stimulate and arouse the emotions of the laity to be aggressive, enthusiastic and gestural in warfare prayers. To achieve the above, the study analysed 30 videotape recordings of MFM warfare prayers in ten branches of the church (MFM) in Ibadan. The Relevance Theory was used to analyse the data gathered for this study. Findings reveal that warfare prayer utterances in MFM consist of emotionology that captures the religious psycho-social experiences of the people. As their clergy men use pragmatic acts like inciting, insinuating, and saturating to stimulate physical responses from the laity.

Kouega (2018) examines the language management in "International" Pentecostal churches in Cameroon. By "International" Pentecostal churches he meant churches in Yaounde Cameroon whose names suggest global or international scope. His aim is to identify the language policy adopted by these churches which helps them in their language management. Kouega collected data from 35 churches through the use of questionnaires, informal discussions, interviews, and participant observation. The study reveals that the linguistics strategy employed in these churches involves systematic translation between French and English the two official languages while the indigenous languages of the country are ignored. Except during tongue-speaking, these two languages are used perhaps in compliance to the country's official bilingualism policy.

The investigation of Adebayo and Zulu (2018) is on the relationship between language and religion. How language could be a medium for the transmission of religious communication and debates in a multi-cultural setting of South Africa. They used qualitative methodology to gather data from 20 churches in the Durban area of South Africa. Findings of the study reveal that religious language differs from everyday communication, and that there is no common ground between semiotic and pragmatic use of language and the contending power of spirit-filled languages. The study also notes that modern Christian churches face issues such as denotation and connotation of language, how to communicate their religious articles in a pragmatic behaviour and the struggle between interfaith because the channel of communication remains peculiar to church denominations.

Obioma (2018) examines the use of words by preachers in selected churches in Imo State. The aim is to find out if the preachers use the right registers in their preaching. To achieve this, she analysed audio recordings of 20 preachers from three zones in Imo State namely: Owerri, Orlu and Okigwe. The findings show that preachers use strange words, borrowed words, and coinages to communicate during sermons. This shows old religious word usages such as rebuke, caution and authority of God were not frequently used by the preachers in their sermons. Rather, words which depict materialism, economic and social situations were used more frequently. Hence, the new coinages have brought expansion to religious registers and thereby adding value to the quality of communication in churches.

Kouega (2022) examines language use and rituals in the Apostolic Church, a Protestant church with a Pentecostal orientation. His aim is to determine the church's language policy. He collected data from 25 churches through questionnaires, informal discussions, and participant

observation. He discovered that services are conducted in English and French, with systematic translation between the two languages. Pidgin English is also used in specific contexts like during *testimonies* and *calls for financial contributions*. Again, the indigenous languages are occasionally used in songs. The study reveals that the Apostolic Church's language policy, supports the use of English and French which are the joint official languages of the country. This is because it (the church) assumes that all congregants are educated in these two languages.

Ommani (2022) explores the relationship between language, identity, hospitality, and community with focus on the Luhya people and their language practices. The findings of the study show that language is a means of communication and a way to express hospitality to outsiders. And that self-identity and hospitality are essential human values conveyed through language and language choices in multilingual contexts convey underlying values.

Speech act theory continues to be a central framework in analysing meaning in language, especially in political, literary, and educational contexts (Assimakopoulos, 2026). Recent studies highlight how political speeches, such as those by Netanyahu and Joe Biden, employ strategic illocutionary acts to influence audiences and construct ideological positions (Itani, 2025; Wibowo & Sholihah, 2025). Research also shows that speech acts are not limited to political discourse but extend to media and entertainment, as seen in analyses of directive speech in films and expressive acts in song lyrics (Kun Hariani et al., 2021; Sabila Zahro & Kholil, 2026).

Furthermore, empirical studies in educational settings reveal how students use illocutionary acts in public speaking to convey intentions and achieve communicative goals (Rahayu & Eripuddin, 2023). Broader scholarly trends indicate a growing interdisciplinary interest in speech act theory, supported by bibliometric evidence showing increased global research output in this field (Afzaal et al., 2024). Additionally, pragmatic analyses of political leaders' speeches emphasize the role of social and cultural context in shaping speech act usage (Khater et al., 2024). Overall, these works collectively demonstrate the versatility and relevance of speech act theory across different domains of discourse (Assimakopoulos, 2026).

The study of Obiora and Adedara (2024) is on pentecostalism and language management. The focus of the study is on Mountain of Fire and Prayer ministries (MFM). With data gathered from services held at the (MFM) headquarters, they examined the management of linguistic diversity in the church, given its position as one of the largest Pentecostal denominations in Nigeria that draws its membership from all over the country. Findings reveal that English and Yoruba are the major means of communication in the church. However, the different indigenous Nigerian languages are used during worship sessions. Based on this, the researchers note that MFM promotes the use and preservation of Nigerian languages as advocated by the Nigerian constitution.

2. Method

This study adopts qualitative data gathering method, with data sourced through participant observation. According to Nwagbo (2014), qualitative method aims at gathering a deep appreciation of human behaviour and the reason which produce such acts, examines and tries to answer the questions about how and why a subject matter can be accounted for using a limited number of respondents in the research. It also aims at gaining understanding of people's attitudes, behaviours, value system, concern, motivations, objectives, culture or lifestyle.

The setting chosen for this study is the MFM headquarter Church. Only data from Sunday service (7- 11am) and Wednesday Manner Water Service (4:30-7:30pm) were used for this study. This is to enable the researchers the opportunity to study and analyse the data very well. Data were gathered from December 2023 to December 2024. Observation method was also used to ascertain the effect of the linguistics strategies on members. The data will be analyzed following the Speech Act Theory of Austin (1962).

The theory views language as a form of action, where words perform specific functions like making promises and giving command. When we speak, we intend to achieve a particular

goal, known as the illocutionary act. This act has an impact on the listener, called the perlocutionary act. By recognizing the different types of illocutionary speech acts, we can better understand how language shapes our interactions and accomplishes specific tasks in our daily discourse. Speech Act Theory (SAT) is considered a valuable framework for analyzing the linguistic strategies employed in Mountain of Fire and Miracles (MFM) prayers. The theory enables the identification of the specific linguistic strategies employed in MFM prayers, such as commands, declarations, promises, or questions.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The data for this study are presented and analysed in this section under the following headings: command, advice, encouragement, teasing, request denying of efforts, threat, statement of facts, questioning, promising, suggestion and affirmation of faith.

3.1.1 Commanding

Commanding is one of the illocutionary speech acts performed with spoken words or writing. The speech act of commanding during prayer is a veritable linguistic strategy utilized by the MFM for spiritual empowerment and authority, inspire fervor and enthusiasm and emphasize urgency and importance. This speech act is achieved with the use of high or raised tone; imperative verbs such as *shout, say, raise, renew*; emphatic words such as *categorically, dangerously, vocalic* and strong languages such as *aggression and powerful*. Another linguistic strategy employed by the MFM in performing the speech act of commanding is use of metaphors (metaphoric statements). Metaphors are potent linguistic devices used to convey complex ideas, evoke emotions, and create vivid mental images. By directly linking two seemingly disparate concepts, metaphors reveal hidden similarities and facilitate deeper understanding. In Pentecostal Christian Discourse, according to Okpeh (2017), metaphors are central to Pentecostal language, particularly in prayer calls within the MFM church. Instances of commanding during prayer calls in MFM are:

- (1) *Shout it 2 times!*
- (2) *Say it categorically!*
- (3) *This decree must follow!*
- (4) *21 giant Amen!*
- (5) *Raise your voice!*
- (6) *Renew your shout!*
- (7) *Add more aggression!*
- (8) *Let your Amen be dangerous and vocalic!*
- (9) *"With a voice that roars like thunder"*
- (10) *"Shout it like a wounded lion"*

A look at the statements from numbers 1-8 reveals the fact that the statements were made with raised tone, imperative verbs like *shout, say, decree, renew* all of which indicates a command. Then in sentence 9-10, one sees the command accompanied with the use of metaphors. The metaphors used in example 9-10 equate the worshipers' voices with the intense energy of thunder and a lion fighting for survival, thereby inspiring vigor and strength in the worshippers. Metaphors "open a window" for understanding by leveraging both cognitive and emotional processing. By harnessing the power of metaphor, MFM prayer leaders inspire, motivate, and deepen the spiritual experience of worshipers during prayer sessions.

Another dimension to commanding as a speech act utilised by MFM church during prayer is the situation where member are commanded to commence physical exercise that has spiritual benefit. In energetic prayer settings, physical exercises are intentionally incorporated to

amplify spiritual intensity, release emotional expression and foster a sense of communal engagement. Examples of such command are:

- (1) *Hit the ground with your legs!*
- (2) *Clap hands vigorously!*
- (3) *Shake your heads vigorously!*
- (4) *Inhale and exhale forcefully!*
- (5) *Rub your forehead!*
- (6) *Slapping your body parts 21 times!*

The command to hit the ground with your legs, clap your hands, shake your head, rub your forehead, slap your body parts are all commands that require physical exercise and vigorous body movement. All these commands were made to ensure alertness, involvement and active participation in the prayer session.

The final form of command as a speech act employed in energetic prayers in MFM is ceiling commands. Ceiling commands are employed by prayer leaders to climax prayer sessions. It inspires heightened spiritual response and fervor. These ceiling commands occur at the concluding part of the prayer sessions. They amplify the prayers' emotional and spiritual impact and seal prayers with authoritative finality and leave a lasting impression. Examples of ceiling commands used in MFM are:

- (1) *"A louder 7-fold Amen!"*
- (2) *"A seven-fold Amen!"*
- (3) *"A Jericho-destroying Amen!"*
- (4) *"A mighty, thunderous Amen!"*
- (5) *"A heaven-shaking, earth-quaking Amen!"*

The ceiling command expressions above are characterised with emphatic language, use of numerals (e.g., seven-fold), vivid imagery (e.g., thunderous), and imperative tone. These words help to craft impactful ceiling commands by using strong, active verbs and employing repetition and rhythm. The response that follows the expressions in 17-21 is always energetic and very loud, with members sweating and smiling with hope that **God** is listening to their prayers from 'far heavens'.

3.1.2 Teasing

Another kind of illocutionary speech act performed by MFM prayer leaders is teasing. Effective prayer leaders employ the act of teasing to motivate their followers to intensify their prayer energy. By using words that imply that the efforts of the praying worshipers have been evaluated, prayer leaders encourage individuals to invest more energy and dedication to their prayer. This occurs through teasing and encouragement. In one instance, a prayer leader stimulates energetic prayer by remarking, "you are warming up little by little." This statement: acknowledges the worshipers' progress, implies a gradual increase in spiritual strength and encourages continued effort and growth. The phrase "little by little" suggests that the leader has assessed or evaluated the congregation's energy and notes their steady improvement. This thoughtful feedback, fosters a sense of accomplishment, boosts confidence, motivates worshipers to pray with renewed vigor and enthusiasm and renewing the Mind through prayer. Such strategic language aligns with the speech act theory of performing an act with our words. By revealing their level of progress, worshipers are encouraged to move from passive to active prayer engagement. By so doing, they cultivate a deeper sense of purpose and develop a more fervent and effective prayer life.

3.1.3 Request making

Request making is another speech act utilized in MFM prayer. To do this, the prayer leaders make use of adjectives and adverbs. Adjectives are essential linguistic tools that qualify nouns, making language more expressive, detailed, and informative. They convey various properties, such as dimensions, speed, quantity, personality, value, quality, physical states and emotional states such as joyful, sorrowful among other things. Adverbs on their part modify verbs and provide

additional information about the manner, time, place, frequency or degree of action. In Mountain of Fire and Miracles (MFM) prayers, adjectives and adverbs are strategically employed to intensify emotional expression, convey spiritual urgency, and emphasize authority and confidence. Examples of expressions where adjectives are utilized in making requests are:

- (1) "With the **loudest** voice you can gather, say after me..."
- (2) "**More than** any volume you have raise up this night, shout the next prayer like this..."
- (3) "With **massive** spiritual energy shout it as follows..."
- (4) "Shout it **well-well**..."
- (5) "With **holy** anger and **merciless** violence, say after me...."
- (6) "Pray with **spirit** of enough is enough..."
- (7) "Pray with an **authoritative** voice..."
- (8) "Say it with **all** your energy..."

In expressions 22-29, adjectival words used are: *loudest*, *more than*, *massive*, *holy*, *merciless*, and *authoritative*. The adverbs are *enough* and *all* while *well-well* is an intensifier indicating how loudly one should shout. The prayer leader who made these utterances uses different strategies to appeal to the conscience of the worshippers in the congregation to pray with fervency so that they will be able to get their requests answer.

3.1.4 Denial/denying of efforts

In Mountain of Fire and Miracles (MFM) energetic prayers, denying of efforts is a speech act as well as a thought-provoking linguistic strategy that challenges worshipers to increase their participation, spiritual effort and intensity. The purpose of denying the efforts made by the worshippers in prayer is to stimulate them to surpass their current level of enthusiasm, break complacency and spiritual stagnation, and inspire a greater sense of devotion and commitment.

Examples of expressions used to deny the efforts of the worshippers are:

- (1) "Your voice is not loud enough!"
- (2) "Your Amen is not loud enough!"
- (3) "You can pray louder than that!"
- (4) "Your shout is not strong enough!"
- (5) "We need more energy in this prayer!"

All the negative constructions (e.g., "not enough," "not loud enough"), comparative language (e.g., "louder," "stronger"), emphatic language (e.g., "we need more") and imperative tone (e.g., "pray louder") present in the above examples were all employed to make the worshipper feel that they have not made enough efforts but rather need to increase their efforts so that they will be able to pray through and overcome the devil.

3.1.5 Threatening

Threatening as an illocutionary speech act was employed by MFM prayer leaders in energetic prayer settings. This was done to invoke fear, provoke thought and motivate worshipers to pray loudly and fervently. Instances of where threat was used to invoke fervency in prayer include the following statements:

- (1) "It's dangerous to keep quiet!"
- (2) "Silence is not an option!"
- (3) "If you don't pray loud, the enemy will take advantage!"
- (4) "Your silence can attract negative forces!"

A critical examination of the above statements show that prayer leaders while speaking invoke warning language (e.g., "dangerous," "not an option"), negative consequences (e.g., "enemy takeover"), emphatic tone (e.g., "don't let fear hold you back") and imperative language (e.g., "pray loud," "pray boldly") to force their threats down on members and hence make them to pray very well.

In Mountain of Fire and Miracles (MFM) prayer sessions, leaders employ the speech act of stating facts from biblical stories to motivate worshipers to pray loudly and fervently. By retelling narratives from the Scripture, leaders emphasize the importance of persistent prayer, the power of vocal prayer and the need to overcome spiritual complacency. Prominent in the stories told by prayer leaders are the story of Blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52). The prayer leader emphasizes Bartimaeus' unwavering faith during prayer. His refusal to be quiet despite oppositions and Jesus' healing response to Bartimaeus' cries. Another story is that of Lazarus (John 11:33-44). Before sharing these narratives, prayer leaders often remind worshipers that effective prayer requires intensity and passion, and that spiritual warfare demands vocal, fervent prayer. By leveraging these biblical stories, MFM prayer leaders inspire worshipers to emulate Bartimaeus' persistence, mirror Jesus' vocal prayer during Lazarus resurrection. Preachers emphasize key themes and principles, connecting facts from biblical accounts to their contemporary prayer list.

Questioning is one of the major speech acts used in discourse situations. To achieve this speech act in the MFM prayer settings, the prayer leaders employ the linguistic device of rhetorical questions. Rhetorical questions are thought-provoking inquiries that end in a question mark and serve to emphasize a point or evoke emotion. Prayer leaders employ this device to inspire energetic and passionate prayer. Instances of rhetorical questions in MFM prayer settings include:

- (1) *"Is that how loud you can say it?"*
- (2) *"Are you sure you want this breakthrough prayer?"*
- (3) *"How long do you want to be tormented before you pray?"*
- (4) *"Are you praying at all?"*
- (5) *"Do you want to remain in bondage or break free?"*

These rhetorical questions used as speech act by the preachers enable them to engage the minds and emotions of the worshippers and encourage self-reflection and introspection in them.

Another speech act used by prayer leaders in MFM is promising or making suggestions. In this context spiritual promissory notes and inspirational declarations are used to encourage worshipers to expect breakthroughs during prayer sessions. This type of speech act emphasizes the rewards of fervent prayer. Examples of suggestions and Spiritual promises made during prayer are:

- (1) *"If you are expecting breakthrough tonight, shout Hallelujah!"*
- (2) *"The shouting side is the winning side, shout it!"*
- (3) *"If you pray this prayer and lose your voice, you have made a strong bargain."*

This illocutionary speech act is achieved with the use of inspirational languages, emphasis on faith and expectation. With the help of these linguistic devices, the worshippers are encouraged to pray fervently and believe they have answers to their prayers.

Making assertions is a prominent speech act used in MFM energetic prayer. In vibrant prayer gatherings, energetic songs accompanied by positive assertions of faith and physical exercise play significant role in amplifying spiritual intensity and expressing devotion and passion. The energetic songs typically originate from church sermons and doctrines. They incorporate physical movements like shaking of head and body and also vigorous clapping. The emphasis is on spiritual themes such as God's power and faith. Instance of energetic worship songs filled with positive assertions is:

- (1) *All shakable must be shaken
All movable, keep on moving
I am serving a God of fire
All shakable must be shaken*

The song above is an instance of a song that is sang with body movement. Energetic worship songs like the above help to enhance focus and concentration as well as increased faith in the might of the All Powerful God. In this section, the identified speech acts shall be subjected to Austin (1962) felicity conditions of: sincerity, preparatory, executive and fulfillment conditions to ascertain if the speech act made by MFM prayer leaders can be adjudged felicitous or infelicitous as the case may be.

Sincerity condition tests the sincerity of a person in relation to his/her illocutionary speech act. Now considering the MFM prayer leaders illocutionary act of commanding, we will say they were sincere in asking the worshipers to shout several times and with a loud or voice that thunders because that was actually what they wanted from congregation. Therefore, we consider their speech act felicitous. The same thing applies to the acts of making request because they sincerely wanted them to shout louder and pray mercilessly. Again, the prayer leaders were sincere in stating the biblical facts about blind Bartimaeus and Jesus during Lazarus resurrection.

This condition seeks to ensure that the persons or people involved in any discourse situation are qualified to participate in it. What this means is that the participants must possess the necessary authority to perform the speech act. In view of this, we consider the illocutionary acts of the MFM prayer leaders felicitous. This is because the prayer leaders are majorly pastors and highly placed embers of the church. They have the authority to make such speech acts of commanding, advising, encouraging and teasing the worshipers to pray with fervency during prayer sessions. The worshipers as members who have come to church for prayers are qualified to participate in the prayer order.

The executive condition tests whether the speech act was properly executed as intended to achieve the intended effect without any deception. In line with the executive condition, the activities of the MFM prayer leaders will be considered felicitous. This is because the intention of the different speech acts is to motivate the worshippers in the congregation to pray very well and with their whole heart. This intention is what they pursue without any deception.

This condition is concerned with the effect of a speaker's speech act on the hearer. The speech acts of the prayer leaders are adjudged felicitous since those actions truly stir up the worshipper to pray with vigor.

4. Conclusion

This study has explored the speech acts employed by prayer leaders in the MFM during energetic prayer sessions. The speech acts as observed are used to create a dynamic and transformative prayer experience, inspiring spiritual growth, fervor, and devotion among worshipers. They invoke imagination, emotions, facilitate mental imagery, make communicate complex ideas simply and engage both mind and emotions. The use of some linguistic devices like metaphor, imperative verb, high or raised tone among other things enhances smooth communication. The perlocutionary effect of the illocutionary speech acts on the listeners (worshippers) is that it creates sense of spiritual energy that makes members to shout their prayers with vigor. It was observed that preachers make adequate use of the felicity conditions of sincerity, preparatory, executive and fulfillment conditions without any form of deception.

Reference

- Adebayo, R. O. and Zulu, S. P. (2018). Use of language and communication among the Pentecostal evangelical Charismatic Churches in Durban, South Africa. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy studies (JETERAPS)* 9, 14-25.
- Afzaal, M., Shanshan, X., & El-Dakhs, D. A. S. (2024). A comprehensive bibliometric analysis of speech acts in international journals (2013–2023). *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2380556>
- Agbede, C. U. (2008). A speech act analysis of political discourse in the Nigerian print media. *Ikenga International Journal of African Studies* 10, 159-191.



- Allan, K. (1986). *Linguistic Meaning Vols. I & II* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Plc.
- Amusan, Kayode. (2023). *An Analysis Of Pragmatic Cues In Selected Mfm Power Must Change Hand Prayers*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369759096_AN_ANALYSIS_OF_PRAGMATIC_CUES_IN_SELECTED_MFM_POWER_MUST_CHANGE_HAND_PRAYERS
- Assimakopoulos, S. (2026). *Speech Act Theory: Between Narrow and Broad Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Austin, J.L. (1962). *How to do things with Words* London: Clarendon Press.
- Ayansola, A. (2021). A Study of Pragmatic Acts and Hate Speech Strategies in Christian Sermons in Nigeria. *Ghana Journal of Linguistics*. <https://doi.org/10.4314/gjl.v10i2.9>.
- Ayanyinka, A. (2020). Imprecatory Prayer and Its Implications for the Nigerian Church: A Christological Perspective. , 22, 54-69. <https://doi.org/10.21806/aamm.2020.22.04>.
- Ekechi, J. (2025). "Back to Sender": Pentecostal Prayer Forms and Language Dynamics in Nigeria's Contemporary World. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 37, 513 - 530. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2025.2476741>.
- Elbah, Z. (2022). Speech act theory: The force of an utterance. *Ichkalat Journal* 11, 605 - 615
- Gokaru, S., Nor, M., Hamid, F., Benselah, Y., Abdullah, M., & Ali, A. (2023). Hate Speech in Nigerian Politics: An Islamic and Christian Perspectives. *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*. <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.132.20>.
- Grice, H.P. (1975). Logic & Conversation. In P. Cole & J. Morgan (eds.) *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts* New York: Academic Press. hands Prayers. Accessed on 8/8/ 2024 from
- Happiness U.O. (2018). Language use in sermon: Focus on words. *Ebonyi Journal of Language and Literary Studies*. 46- 57.
- Itani, G. (2025) Beyond Mere Words: Unveiling the Speech Acts behind Netanyahu's October 7 Speech. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 15, 445-460. doi: [10.4236/ojml.2025.152025](https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2025.152025).
- Iyabo, O. (2017). Binding the Devil: A Speech Act Reading of Selected Prayer Points in Daniel Olukoya's Prayer Rain. , 1.
- Khater, H. A., Altakhaineh, A. R. M., & Dahnous, F. (2024). Pragmatic analysis of King Abdullah's speech: exploring speech acts and societal context. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2433879>
- Kissine, M. (2008). Locutionary, Illocutionary, Perlocutionary. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 2, 1189-1202,
- Kouega, J. P. (2022). Language use and rituals in the Apostolic Church in Cameroon. *European Journal of Language and Culture Studies*, 24-32.
- Kouega, J.P. (2018). Language management in "international" pentecostal churches in Cameroon. *Open Access Library Journal*, 5, 1-16
- Kun Hariani, A. G., Muhid, A., & Dewi, P. (2021). Revealing the Form of Directive Speech in Ready or Not Movie. *Humanitatis : Journal of Language and Literature*, 8(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.30812/humanitatis.v8i1.1177>
- Leech, G. (1980). *Explorations in Semantics and Pragmatics* Amsterdam: John Benjamin
- Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Mabaquiao, N. M. (2018). Speech Act Theory: From Austin to Searle. *Augustinian: A Journal for Humanities, Social Sciences, Business, and Education* 19, 35-45.
- Marshall, R. (2016). Destroying arguments and captivating thoughts: Spiritual warfare prayer as global praxis. *Journal of Religious and Political Practice*, 2, 113 - 92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20566093.2016.1085243>.
- Ogechi, E. (2024). From Pulpit to Everyday Speech: The Social and Linguistic Impact of Pentecostalism in Nigerian. *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*. <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v7-i12-01>.
- Okpeh, P. O. (2007). Contextual considerations in the use of metaphors in Nigerian Pentecostal Christian discourse. *ELR Journal*, 37-60.
- Olajimbiti, E. (2015). "Fall and Die", "Scatter by Fire": Language of Emotion in Christian Liturgical Prayers. *Research on humanities and social sciences*, 5, 13-27.
- Ommani, J. L. (2022). Linguistic diversity and linguistic hospitality in the mission of God: A case of language use in the church within Luhyia community in Kenya.
- Osasinwo, W. (2003) *Introduction to Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics* Lagos: Femulos-Fetop Publishers.
- Rahayu, P., & Eripuddin, E. (2023). The Illocutionary Speech Acts in Students' Public Speaking. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 15(1), 834-844. doi:<https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v15i1.3158>

- Richman, N. (2020). Machine gun prayer: the politics of embodied desire in Pentecostal worship. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 35, 469 - 483. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2020.1828506>.
- Sabila Zahro', A., & Kholil, A. (2026). Illocutionary Speech Acts in the Lyrics of "Mathasibnish" Based on Searle's Theory. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 9(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.34050/els-jish.v9i1.49980>
- Wibowo, H., & Sholihah, U. (2025). Unpacking Speech Acts in Political Discourse Joe Biden's Speeches on the Hamas and Israel Conflict. *Teaching English As Foreign Language, Literature and Linguistics*, 5(2), 114-121. <https://doi.org/10.33752/teflics.v5i2.10313>