

**LITURGICAL LANGUAGE IN 'CHRIST IS ALL' CATHOLIC PRAYER BOOK****Elizabeth Wayua Mutunga**

School of Social Sciences  
Department of Languages and Humanities  
Mount Kenya University, Kenya  
Email: mutungaelizabeth@gmail.com

**Dr. Anashia Nancy Ong'onda**

School of Humanities and Social sciences  
Department of Languages and Linguistics  
Machakos University  
Machakos, Kenya

**Abstract**

This paper examines liturgical language in 'Christ is all' catholic prayer book. Language is a means through which we express religion experiences. However, religious language is complex and dynamic in terms of function, style, historical context, text and mode. Moreover, different people have different ways of saying prayers. This paper was set to investigate liturgical language in Catholic prayers. The study applied Halliday's model of functional grammar and employed a descriptive research design. Documentation and archival methods were used to collect data. Purposive sampling method was used to collect 33 catholic prayers from 330 prayers in 'Christ is all' prayer book. Textual analysis was employed where the prayers were coded and interpreted. The study established that the linguistic structure of catholic prayers employed unique linguistic features that have various communicative functions. The study concludes that language in prayers expresses a particular religion identity. It is hoped that the findings of this study adds to data of existing studies of Theolinguistics.

**Key words: Liturgical language, Catholic prayers, Functional grammar****1. Introduction**

Language and religion share a long and close history and their influence is being felt in every modern society. This interdisciplinary issue of language and religion is what gave rise to a new branch of linguistics known, as the Theolinguistics. Theolinguistics is a discipline investigating biblical and theological language and the language of all involved in practice of religious belief (Crystal, 1981). According to Samarin (1987) religious language is a language that is consistently used with religion or within a religious domain of language use. Hence, religious language is a kind of language reserved for religious activities and used for very little else, except perhaps as school subjects or literary and scholarly language (Fasold, 1987).

The Roman Catholic Church uses religious language in its prayers and more specifically liturgical language; language used in religious services. The Roman Catholic missal was translated from Latin into the vernacular in earliest time. This has elicited a lot of interest in the study of the Catholic standard prayers to see the linguistic effect on them since then. It is unusual for any religious language not to bear some formal marks of its special character. Even the so-called plain speech of Quakers is recognizable by certain stylistic features (Bauman, 1990; Irvine, 1982; Maltz 1985). It is for this reason this study will be conducted. Crystal (1969) points out that a liturgical language needs to strike a balance between ostentatious intellectualism and racy colloquialism. It must be both dignified and intelligible. Liturgical language has to be formally characterized as God's and not confusable with any other style. Crystal identifies three kinds of distinctiveness that comprise the whole effect, that is: Archaisms, Specialized vocabularies, and Formulaic diction. Liturgical language also varies from one context to another.

Prayers belong to Euchologionian liturgical texts (Crystal, 1969). In the Catholic Church, there are different types of prayers; ranging from, the pleading prayer, prayer of praise and the prayer of gratitude, confessional prayer and priestly prayers. Stylistically these prayers differ, for instance priestly prayers are marked by antitheses and use phrase structures with an accurate meter (Fasold, 1987). The study therefore was an attempt to unearth how Catholic prayers are structurally organized in a specific way to reveal the religious experience of Catholic believers.

## **2. Halliday's (1994) model of functional grammar**

Functional grammar (FG) is based on systemic linguistics that emphasizes the way spoken and written language operates in different social situations. FG shows how texts work beyond the level of the sentence, how different texts are structured, and how language varies to suit the purpose of the users. FG takes on a descriptive approach and focuses on groups of words that function to make meanings.

Halliday (1994) notes that FG is functional in three distinct senses: in its interpretation of texts, of the system, and of the elements of linguistic structures. Thus, language is shaped into a system which can satisfy human needs. The focus is on the way language is put together so that meaning is communicated for particular purposes. In other words, FG focuses on language as a meaning-making resource rather than as a set of rules (Schleppegrell, 2004). That is, the focus is on language as a system of meaning. Thus, the aspect of semantics is also emphasized in FG. These semantic structures are referred to as Meta-functions. Meta-functions are the view that language works in terms of the functional relationships of its constituent parts, and systems of choice which we make whenever we use language. For Halliday language is a "network of systems or interrelated set of options for making meaning (Halliday, 1994). FG relates grammatical categories to the communicative functions which they serve. These functions are seen to operate at different levels of organization in the language, and may be identified in terms of the constituent parts which go to form larger units. This implies a segmental principle of organization in which larger units may be seen as being formed from smaller units and smaller units being combined to form the larger units. These organization units are called hierarchical relationship and they range from a clause to morpheme. Therefore in, FG, a clause is the highest grammatical unit.

In FG the unit of analysis therefore is a clause which can be analyzed as a message. That is; the organization of information within individual clauses and through this, with the organization of the larger text. The clause is therefore grouped in two (theme and rheme). Schleppegrell (2004) states that theme is a construct of functional grammar that reveals how a clause in English is organized as a message. A clause can also be analyzed as exchange or mood. The system of mood belongs to the interpersonal meta-function of the language and is the grammatical resource for realizing an interactive move in dialogue. Mood governs the basic structural features of the sentence—whether the sentence chooses between declarative, interrogative or imperative forms.

The last way in which a Clause can be analyzed is as representation. The focus is on transitivity. Transitivity belongs to the mode of ideational metafunction, that is, the experiential one. It is a resource for construing our experience in terms of configuration of a process, participants and circumstances. Thompson (1996) states that people use language to interact with people, to talk about the world, the external world, things and events. We could also use it to express our internal world, thoughts, beliefs or feelings. The focus of transitivity is on the content of a message. Halliday model of FG was therefore deemed relevant in the analysis of structure and functions of Catholic prayers.

### 3. Research Methodology

The design for the current study was descriptive research design which is a systematic subjective approach used to describe life experiences and give them meaning. The study targeted 330 prayers in ‘Christ is all’ prayer book. Out of 330 prayers 33 were sampled using the purposive sampling method. This is based on a study by Alreck and Settle (1995) which states that it is necessary to sample at least 10% of the study population. The study used qualitative methods of analysis specifically textual analysis. The purpose of textual analysis is to describe the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in texts. The method for data analysis were documentation and archival. The study was guided by the following research question:

(i) What are the linguistic features of liturgical language of Catholic prayers in ‘Christ is all’ prayer book?

## 4.0 Results and Discussions

### 4.1: Linguistic features of liturgical language of Catholic prayers

The section discusses the linguistic features of liturgical language of catholic prayers. The linguistic features are analyzed in terms of the following sub-sections, unique use of vocabulary, syntactic features and an imperative sentence together with the subject.

#### 4.1.1: Unique use of Vocabulary

The study established that in Catholic liturgical prayers there was use of vocative prayers with O that expressed emotions such as *Bless us O Lord, O blessed lord* and *O clement, O loving, O*

*sweet Virgin Mary! Amen , O Lamb of God, O my God, O Savior of the world and O my dear Mother* as shown in the sampled prayers below:

### **Prayer 1: Hail Holy Queen**

Hail, Holy Queen Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness and hope...

*O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary! Amen.*

The above prayer shows the personal attributes of the Virgin Mary and ends with the feature O that expresses emotions. The Virgin Mary is particularly associated with the Catholic Church. The catholic Christians believe that Mary is the Mother of God. Hence, the mention of the Virgin Mary easily identifies the Catholics believe. The Prayer 2 to 4 below further demonstrates the feature O:

### **Prayer 2: Prayer after Confession**

**O MY God**, I offer Thee my confession ; accept it for jesus sake: pardon all that Thou hast seen amiss in it, and supply all that is wanting in me... **O savior of the World**, who by Thy Cross and precious Blood hast redeemed us, save us and help us we humbly beseech Thee, **O Lord**... How shall I thank Thee, **O Lord Jesus**, for Thy great goodness to me? Join with me, **O my dear Mother** Mary, and you, my angel Guardian, and my holy Patron, in giving thanks to the Lord for His goodness and mercy to me.

### **Prayer 3: Grace at Meals**

*Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which Thou hast given for our food ; through Jesus Christ. Amen.*

### **Prayer 4: Prayer before Mass**

**O blessed lord**, who has promised to meet me in Thy church, help me to worship thee heartily, joining in all the service. Keep me from vain and wandering thoughts, that I may concentrate my mind on Thy message of pardon, duty, and love; for Jesus' sake. Amen

## **4.1.2 Syntactic features of liturgical catholic prayers**

The syntactic features of Catholic prayers were reflected in the use of archaic pronouns, use of modifiers, Pronouns and direct address.

### **4.1.2.1 Archaic personal pronouns**

An archaic personal pronoun is a set of second-person singular pronouns such as *thou, thee, thy, thine, thyself*. In Anglo-Saxon times, these were strictly second person singular. Catholic prayers are characterized with these pronouns as shown in excerpts below:

The data below is from the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, Apostles Creed and Hail Holy prayer respectively:

#### **Prayer 4: The Lords Prayer**

Hallowed be **thy** name  
**Thy** Kingdom come  
**Thy** will be done on earth as it is in heaven

The next data is from the prayer of Hail Mary:

#### **Prayer 5: Hail Mary**

Hail Mary, full of grace.  
The lord is with **thee**.  
Blessed art **thou** amongst women

#### **Prayer 6: Apostles Creed**

He ascended into heaven,  
**Sitteth** at the right hand of God, the father almighty;  
From **thence**, He shall come to judge the living and the dead

#### **Prayer 7: Hail Holy Prayer**

To **thee** do we cry...  
To **thee** do we send up our sighs...  
Turn then, most gracious advocate, **thine** eyes of mercy towards us

The above data shows that archaic pronouns are a distinctive feature in the liturgical language of the catholic prayers. The Catholic prayers are still using the archaic forms of 'thee', thou, thense among others. The use of archaic pronouns is meant to achieve intimacy with God as compared to modern English forms and for emphatic purposes. Moreover, the Catholic Church believes that the use of archaic pronouns shows more respect to God.

#### **4.1.2.2: Use of modifiers**

Another important syntactic feature of liturgical language in catholic prayers is the use of modifiers. A modifier is a word that changes, clarifies, qualifies, or limits a particular word in a sentence in order to add emphasis, explanation, or detail. Catholic prayers were characterized by premodifiers and postmodifiers in form of adjectives and adverbs as shown in the prayers below:

- **Prayer 8: A Prayer to surrender**
- *Eternal father*, I surrender myself entirely to thee and to thy Divine will on this day. Take, O Lord and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will.
- **Prayer 9: Prayer for Forgiveness of sins**
- To you O God *fountain of mercy* I come a sinner ,may you wash away my impurity son of justice give sight to the blind eternal healer, cure the wounded *king of kings* ...you *Almighty Father* because of my weakness against you ,all knowing son, because of my ignorance against you ,merciful holy spirit.

#### **Prayer 10: Guardian Angel Prayer**

Angel of God, *my Guardian dear*, to whom God's love commits me here, ever this day (or night) be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen

Prayer 8 to 10 above show the use of modifiers in prayers. These modifiers create a link between the known human world and unknown theological world. They also emphasize that God's power is not tyrannical. The researchers observed that Catholic prayers have pre and post modification of the nouns especially of the different beings being addressed. A prayer usually targets a particular interlocutor who is defined differently by certain religions. The Catholic prayers recognize the idea of the Holy Trinity-God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as well as Mary the mother of Jesus. These nouns have both pre and post modification as extracted from the prayer of the Holy Spirit below:

#### **Prayer 11: Prayer of Holy Spirit**

Holly spirit, *Divine consoler* (*Postmodifier*)

Holly spirit, *Powerful consoler* (*Postmodifier*)

...*O most sacred heart* of Jesus (*premodifier*) *Most sweet* Jesus (*Premodifier*)

**O most gracious** Virgin Mary

The data above show that most of the nouns are pre modified to give attributes which show the attitude of the faithful towards the being addressed.

#### **4.1.2.3: Pronouns**

Pronouns are a distinctive feature in the language of religion. In the Catholic prayers the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular is common in individual or personal prayers while in prayers of public or the group nature of worship like in the litanies and the novenas the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural is used. This feature was used in individual prayers shown below:

- **Prayer 12: Adoration prayer (by St. Faustin)**

- *I* adore you; Lord and creator, hidden in the most Blessed Sacrament adore you for all the work of your hands. *My*\_Lord and creator, your goodness encourages *me* to converse with you.....
- **Prayer 13: Prayer to Abba Father**
- *My* Father in heaven, how sweet it is to know you are *my* Father and *I* am your child. Especially where the skies of *my* soul are cloudy and *my* cross weighs more heavily, *I* feel the need to repeat to you. *I* believe in your love for *me*.
- **Prayer 14: On Going to Bed**
- O *my* God, receive *my* soul, in the name of our lord Jesus Christ crucified lay down to rest. Bless *me* preserve *me*.....

The other group of prayers is where the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural is used to signify unity in prayer .The novenas and the litanies are said by a group and thus the use of 1<sup>st</sup> person plural.

- **Prayer 15: Litany of the Most Holy Spirit**
- Blessed be the Holy Trinity and undivided unity, *we* will give glory to him, because he has shown his mercy to *us*.
- V: O Lord *our* God, how wonderful is your name in all the other!
- R: ...Blessed trinity hear *us*, adorable unity graciously hear *us*.
- 
- **Prayer 16: Little Chaplet of the Holy Spirit**
- On the big beads: Father, send *us* the promised paraclete, through Jesus Christ *our* lord Amen.
- Let 's pray: O God, who didst instruct the hearts of thy faithful and kindle them the fire of thy love, grant *us* by the same spirit .....

### **Prayer 17: Novena of Mother Mary of Subukia, Kenya**

#### **Day 1: Holy the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

Blessed Mother of subukia, we turn to you with confidence .*We* call on you as our Mother and we seek your protection in *our* hour of need. Present our intentions to your son, whose **command knee** should bow, **doing whatever** he tells us. Amen

Day 6: **Our** Mother Mary ,mother of divine hope **our** Mother of Subukia .Mother of divine hope ,intercede **for us** so as to keep walking as we await the fulfillment of our hope .Guide us so as to know what to wait for.

From the above samples the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular and plural are used in the Catholic prayers for the purposes of building an intimate relationship with God.

#### 4.1.2.4: Direct address

The direct address is a common syntactic form in the Catholic prayers. The direct address always involves recognizing the relative status of the addressee (Brown and Gilman1961).The Catholic prayers begin by addressing the being involved before proceeding to say the prayer as shown below:

*Dearest Jesus*, I thank you for giving me this day.

*Hail, Holy Queen* mother of mercy.

*O most Holy Mary, virgin* mother of our lord Jesus Christ.

*Immaculate Conception*, Mary, my mother...live in me, act in me...

*O merciful Archangel*, st Jehudiel, dispenser of Gods eternal and abundant mercy

These prayers have a standard opening and closing formulae structure. The Catholic prayers begin with the opening formulae of the sign of the cross “In the name of the Father, son and the Holy spirit. These words are usually accompanied by the sign of the cross making it is a performative speech act.

#### Sample 1: Sign of the Cross.

**In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.**

Different closing formulae phrases are used to signify the end of a prayer. This is because different performative acts require different ending as shown:

#### Prayer 18: Act of Contrition

O my God, **I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee**, and **I detest all my sins because of Thy** just punishments, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who art all-good and deserving of all my love. ***I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin.***

The bolded sentences shows speech acts of asking for forgiveness, detesting and resolving in the confession prayer.

**Prayer 19: Penitential act**

**Priest:** Lord, we have sinned against you: **Lord, have mercy.**

**Congregation:** Lord, have mercy.

Lord, show us your mercy and love. And grant us your salvation.

*May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

The bolded sentences in the penitential acts mainly to plea for mercy from God from the “I confess prayer” discussed earlier:

**Prayer 20: I confess**

**I confess to almighty God...**

*and I ask blessed Mary, ever virgin,*

*all the angels and saints,*

*and you, my brothers and sisters,*

*to pray for me to the Lord our God.*

**May almighty God have mercy on us,**

***forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.***

**Prayer 21: Grace after Meals**

We give Thee thanks for all Thy benefits, O Almighty God, who livest and reignest world without end. Amen.

The prayers above show that different performative acts in the prayers such thanking, apologizing to praising God calls for different ways of ending the prayers.

**4.1.2.5 The use imperative sentences + Subject**

Catholic prayers are also characterized by the use of imperative sentences and the subject. *Imperative sentences* are sentences that appear miss *subjects* and use a verb to begin the *sentence*. Imperative sentences have no subjects. However, the *subject* is always assumed to be the person listening, or the audience. Therefore, the subject is assumed to be the second person who is the listener. In prayers, however, the imperative appears together with the subject as shown in the sampled data below. The bolded parts show the imperative and the subject.

**Prayer 22: From Anima Christi**

**Hide me** within your wounds

And **keep me** close to you

**defend me** from the evil enemy

And **call me** at the hour of my death

### Prayer 23: Beautiful Morning Prayer

- Lord Jesus at the dawn of this new day once again I surrender myself unto you. I pray that you take my life and use it for your glory, my life must be to thee alone...**may** my motto for this day ...**may** my one and only goal be to satisfy the desires o your heart...**may** I become like you my savior, a friend of sinners ...**may** my love for you lead me to love them...**may**...this wonderful truth guide my behavior. Also, Lord Jesus may this day be the day of your return.

More examples are the Lord's Prayer below:

*Give us* this day our daily bread;  
*lead us* not into temptation  
*deliver us* from evil

The imperative mood in the above prayers is used express the desire that Christians want God to fulfill for them; for instance *Give us* this day our daily bread; *deliver us* from evil and *may* I become like you my savior. In this case the subject is apparent since the prayer is directed to God.

### 5. Conclusion

The current study was designed to examine the liturgical language in catholic prayers in 'Christ is all' prayer book. The study found that the catholic liturgical prayers have a unique structure that is meant to connect the Christians to God. The liturgical language in catholic prayers is expressed in various linguistic features. The study established that the catholic prayers are expressed by various syntactic forms such as imperative sentences and direct sentences. The study also established that different prayers have various closing endings basing on different performative acts such as thanking, apologizing and praising. The specific linguistic features in catholic prayers were used as a strategy of developing intimacy with God. Besides, linguistic features in catholic prayers are used for various communicative functions such as to express the catholic identity through the sign of cross and for historical purposes through the apostle creed.

### References

- Alreak, P.L. and Settle R.B. (1995). *The survey research handbook*. London: IRWIN.
- Bauman R. (1990). *Let your words be few: Symbolism of speaking and silence among Seventeenth-Century Quakers*. Prospect Heights IL:Waveland Press.
- Crystal, D. (1981). *Generating theological language*. In van Noppen, 265-81.

Fasold, R (1987): *The sociolinguistics of society*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Halliday, M. (1994). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc.

Irvine, J.T. (1982). *The Creation of Identity in Spirit Mediumship and Possession* .In *Semantic Anthropolog*. London : Academic.

Maltz, D. N. (1985). *Joyful noise and reverent silence: on silence*, ed D.Tannen, M Saville-Troike, Norwood N.J:Ablex.

Schleppegrell, M. J. (2004). *The Language of Schooling: A Functional Linguistics Perspective*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers.

Thompson, G. (1996). *Introducing Functional Grammar*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, Inc.