

A Discourse Analysis of Some Linguistic Features and Cohesive Devices in Surah 94: A Religious Discourse

Florence Etuwe Oghiator
University of Delta, Agbor, Nigeria

This study discusses Surah 94, using some aspects of the tenets of discourse analysis as its focus. The thrust of this study is to analyse the graphological features, the lexico-semantic representations, and the cohesive devices in the text. It employs the systemic grammar model for analysis. The graphological features examined include the punctuation marks, capitalizations, and indentation. The lexico-semantic representation is seen through the use of figures of speech. Moreover, the cohesive devices are the lexical devices (or references) and grammatical devices. The lexical devices are the repetition and antonym. Consequently, the grammatical devices include the co-ordinating and subordinating conjunctions, anaphoric and cataphoric ties. This study explicates the fact that linguistic-discourse features are prominent in religious language, most especially in Surah 94, and further deepens our understanding of the language of religion as both esoteric and performative in nature, and as a religious discourse.

Keywords: discourse analysis, Surah 94, religious discourse

Introduction

This study undertakes a linguistics discourse analysis, using some tenets of discourse in analysing Surah 94. The text used for analysis is *The Holy Quran Arabic Text English Translation and Commentary*. This study delves into the area of religious discourse to point to the fact that discourse analysis could be applied to different fields of endeavour. The text used for the analysis is written in eight short verses with irregular lines; most of the verses run over to the next verse. The text begins with the acknowledgement to Allah (in the name of Allah, the Beneficent the Merciful) before the verses. This is significant in most of the chapter in the Quran.

The paper focuses on the graphological features, the lexico-semantic representation, and the cohesive devices in the text. The graphological devices analysed include the punctuation marks, capitalisation, and indentation. The lexico-semantic representation in the text includes the use of figures of speech. Consequently, the cohesive devices analysed are:

1. the lexical devices; they are repetition and antonym,
2. the grammatical devices, which include the co-ordinating and subordinating conjunctions, anaphoric and cataphoric ties. All the foregoing is analysed using the systematic grammatical model as a basis for analysis.

Furthermore, some terms used in this study are discussed. They include discourse analysis, Surah 94 and religious discourse.

Discourse Analysis

A general term for approaches used to analyse written, oral or sign language, or any significant semiotic event, is known as discourse analysis. Semiotics is a branch of discipline that is concerned with the investigation of symbolic and communicative behaviour. In modern linguistics, discourse analysts not only study language use beyond the sentence boundary, but also prefer to analyse “naturally occurring” language use. A natural language either in its spoken or written form is a language that has a finite number of letters in it, although there may be infinitely many distinct sentences in the language, each of which can be represented as a finite sequence of those sounds (or letters) (Lyons, 1997, p. 7). Discourse analysis is defined as the analyses of connected speech and writing, and their relations in which they are used. It is the examination of language use by language form and language function and includes the study of both spoken interaction and written texts. To Teun Van Dijk, discourse analysis is the study of language to the explication of the structure and meaning of texts (1997, p. 2).

Discourse analysis identifies linguistic features that characterise different genres as well as social and cultural factors that help in the interpretation and understanding of different texts and types of talk. Uhunmwangho stated that “discourse analysis is the study of functional use of language, can perform for us the useful role of interpreting not only spoken but written texts” (2000, p. 92). To Wale Osisanwo “the study of organizational structure of discourse is known as discourse analysis” (2003, p. 5). Brown and Yule stated that “the analysis of discourse is necessarily the analysis of language in use, as such, it cannot be restricted to the service in human affair” (1983, p. 42). Consequently, Osisanwo in the opinion of Stubbs posits that discourse analysis refers mainly to the linguistic analysis as an attempt to study “the organisation of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts” (1995, p. 1).

In analysing discourse behaviour, two methods usually occur: One method is to analyse how people manage their discourse behaviour with respect to their cultural background, and their interactive goals at the time of talk. While the second method involves how to discover explicit rules for management of conversational problems, such as turn taking (Schiffrin, 1988, p. 96; Grimshaw, 1982, p. 28; Labov, 1972, p. 130; Omo-Ojogo, 2012, p. 40). The two methods can be used in an approach in discourse analysis, and this depends on the linguistic discourse involved in the analysis. These two methods can be applied to religious language discourse.

Surah 94. Surah 94 is written in eight short verses with irregular lines. Most of the verses run over to the next verse. The chapter started by giving acknowledgement to Allah (in the name of Allah, the Beneficent the Merciful) before the verses. This is significant in all the chapters in the Quran. The acknowledgement therefore is taken to be the title of the text. The lexical item Surah is an Arabic word, which means chapter. Surah 94 is one of the chapters in the Holy Quran. This chapter mainly points to three different subjects. The first is the expression of bounties; the second subject discusses the good news of the prophet, which informs him about his burden and difficulty that would be removed from him. The third states that attention should be paid to Allah alone, through hopeful encouragement in supplication and worship. The verses in Surah 94 are put in a loving and affectionate tone which depicts the grace of Allah in the Holy prophet.

Religious Discourse

Religious discourse is in other words the language of religion. The language of religion is strictly an ethical language (Ukagba & Asekhauno, 2009, p. 25). Ethics is a system of moral behaviour, derived from the

Greek noun “ethos”, which means a custom, an institute. Religious discourse includes the oral and written language, symbols, and other language forms involved in religion. To David Cameron (2016), religious discourse could be seen as political. He analysed this in reference to the use of religion by some politicians to appeal to their religion voters.

David Crystal and Derek Davy state that “there are three influences to bear in mind in the particular cultural and linguistic background to the language of religion. The influences are ‘the linguistic originals, speak ability, appropriateness and intelligibility’” (1969, p. 25). Furthermore, linguistic originals mean that the language should conform to the sacral character, as well as the sense of the text in original language. There are some significant doctrines that are difficult to alter without the accusation of inconsistency or heresy being leveled. On speak ability, they posit that the phonological features of religious language should be obvious and easy to pronounce, since its main use is in corporate public worship. Moreover, for appropriateness and intelligibly, the language used for large numbers of individuals in a religious discourse should not be too difficult, nor too simple, but there should be a balance between the ordinary and the obscure. But the current tendency is to orientate religious language discourse towards what is normally referred to as contemporary living usage.

Consequently, the vocabulary of religious discourse is extremely distinctive. Like legal discourse, religious discourse allows the use of archaism. For instance, thou, thy “giveth” and “goeth”. Religious discourse displays a number of theological terms which provide the verbal basis for the formulation of people’s beliefs (Crystal & Davy, 1969, p. 2). The terms are characterised with the appropriate use of linguistic structures and discourse features.

Linguistic Discourse Analysis of Surah 94

This section presents the graphological features, lexico-semantic representation, and the cohesive devices in Surah 94. We shall now focus on the analysis of Surah 94. The text is presented below.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

1. Have we not expanded for thee thy breast,
2. And removed from thee thy burden
3. Which weighed down thy back.
4. And exalted for thee thy mention?
5. Surely with difficulty is ease,
6. With difficulty is surely ease.
7. So when thou art free (from anxiety), work hard,
8. And make thy Lord thy exclusive objective.

Graphological Features

The graphological features identified are punctuation marks, capitalisation, and indentation. The punctuation marks are properly observed and are few in number. They are seen in all the verses. These are commas, fullstops, parentheses, and a question mark. There are no semi-colons and colons in this text. The punctuation marks are 10 in number, six commas, two fullstops, one parentheses, and one question mark. The commas in the verses make the reader to observe a little pause and facilitate the reading of the text. The few occurrences of the punctuation marks also quicken the (chanting) reading of the text. The use of punctuation marks indicates the use of graphological features in the language of (Islam) the Quran.

Capitalisation in the text begins all the verses. The first letter in all the verses begins with an upper case which is a grammatical norm, although there is an aberration in the use of capital letters in the verses. These are seen in Verses 1, 2, 3, and 5. The capital letters are preceded by commas. This is an aberration in English grammar and in discourse analysis. The aberration is the use of a comma immediately before a capital letter. The use of initial capital in “we”, Verse 1, is a linguistic deviation too. There is also an aberration in “Lord”, Verse 8 because of the initial capital in the nominal, “Lord”. The lexical item, “Lord”, is not used at the beginning of the sentence. “Lord” is fore-grounded because it draws attention to itself. Capitalization is also a graphological feature in discourse analysis. Using initial capital for “Lord” elucidates the supreme nature of God (Allah), which is recognised and reverend. Indentation is used in all the verses in the text.

Cohesive Devices

The cohesive devices in the text are the lexical and grammatical devices. The lexical ties (devices) are repetition and antonym. The repetitions are seen in Verse 1, “for thee thy”, Verse 2, “from the thy”, Verse 4, “for thee thy”. They are used to create emphasis in the text. In fact, the lexical item “thy” is repeated six times in Verses 1, 2, 3, 4, and 8. They are also used to create emphasis. The antonyms in the text are present in Verses 5 and 6 respectively, “surely with difficulty is ease”, “with difficulty is surely ease”. They are cohesive devices used in discourse. These phrases are also repetition. Antonym is a word that expresses opposite in meaning of another word. Antonym simply put is the opposite meaning of another word.

The grammatical devices in the text are carefully selected. They include, coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, anaphoric and cataphoric ties. The coordinating conjunctions, “and”, is seen in Verses 2 and 4: “...And removed thy burden” (Verse 2), “And exalted for thee thy mention?” (Verse 4), also in Verse 8, “And make thy Lord thy exclusive object”. The subordinating conjunctions are: “which”, in Verse 3, “which weighed down thy back” and “when” in Verse 7, “so when thou art free (from anxiety), work hard”. The anaphora in the text is: the pronouns “we”, in Verse 1, “thee” in Verses 1, 2, and 4, “thou”, in Verse 7. Anaphora refers to back-word relation of references and they are pronouns in a text. The cataphora is the determiner, “thy”, in Verses 2, 3, 4, and 8. The text uses few discourse cohesive devices for its emphasis. Cataphoric references refer to forward relation, and refer to pronouns and determiners in a text.

Lexico-Semantic Representation

The semantic representation in the text is achieved through the use of the figures of speech. Verses 1, 2, and 3 are metaphorical statements: “Have we not expanded for thee thy breast”, “And removed from thee thy back”, “Which weighed down thy back”. Verses 5 and 6 are also metaphorical. They are: “Surely with difficulty is ease”, “With difficulty is surely ease”. The expansion of the breast (Verse 1) is for the greatness of the heart of the prophet (Muhammad), because the burden which almost broke his back (Verse 2) had been removed. It is also the expansion of thought and the holy spirit of the prophet and the expansion of knowledge of the prophet through inspiration and revelation.

This chapter of the Quran comforts the prophet that his difficulties would not continue (Verses 5 and 6) but would soon be followed by ease. There is also the use of synecdoche in the text to achieve its meaning. The synecdoche is seen in Verse 8, “And make thy Lord thy exclusive object”. Here, the prophet has been told to make the “Lord” his whole, undivided. His focus should concentrate on the Lord (Allah). (A synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part is made a whole or a whole is made a part.) All the aforementioned are used to establish meaning in the text

Conclusion

This paper analysed Surah 94 in the Holy Quran, the holy book of Islamic religion. The analysis showed that discourse features and linguistic structures abound in the text used for this study. They include the graphological and lexico-semantic structures and the cohesive features, which are the lexical and the grammatical devices. The text also explained the instructions and message given to prophet Muhammad by Allah. Most of the messages in the verses are figures of speech. In Verse 1, the expansion of the breast in metaphorical referred to the expansion of thought and the holy spirit of the prophet, the expansion of knowledge of the prophet through inspiration and revelation. Moreover, Verses 2 and 3 explained that Allah takes away the heavy load off His prophets back. The load is the difficulty in the art of prophecy. Furthermore, Verse 4 promised the prophets of Allah good reputation. In Verses 5 and 6, Allah told His prophets not to be grieved that the difficulties would be converted to comfort (ease). The 7th verse of this Surah was also applicable to those who believed in Allah that in times of difficulties, He would proffer a solution and relief for them. Finally, the last verse, Verse 8, condemned laziness and encouraged the prophets to work hard and turn wholly to the Lord. All these explicate the semantic implications in the text to further deepen our understanding of language of religion as both esoteric and performative in nature.

References

- Blommaert, J. (2005). *Discourse. A critical introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Bolinger, D. L. (1968). *Aspects of language*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich.
- Bowker, J. (2007). *Beliefs that change the world: The history and ideas of the great religion*. London: Quercus Pub. Plc.
- Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse analysis*. Cambridge: UP.
- Butler, C. S. (1985). *Systemic linguistic. Theory and application*. London: Batsford Acad and Edu.
- Chapman, C. (1973). *Linguistics and literature: An introduction to literary stylistics*. Lndn: Edward Arnld.
- Chomsky, N. (2007). *Language*. New York: The New Press.
- Crystal, D., & Davy, D. (1969). *Investigating English style*. New York: Lngman.
- Crystal, D. (2008). *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics*. Malden: Blackwell.
- Fadsold, R. (1990). *Sociolinguistics of language*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Fairclough, N. B. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Girmshaw, A. (1982). *Discourse practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Gee, J. A. (2005). *An introduction to discourse analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Jorgenson, M. W., & Phillips, L. (2002). *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. London: Sage.
- Labov, W. (1972). *The study of language in its social context*. London: Routledge.
- Lorimer, L. T., & Lechler, D. E. (1957). *The new lexicon dictionary of the English language*. New York: Lexicon Pub.
- Michael, M. (1991). *Discourse analysis for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Obodeh, F. E. (2018). *The language of religion: A discourse analysis of three typologies* (Ph.D. thesis, Ambrose Alli University, 2018).
- Olateju, M. A. (1998). *Discourse analysis: Analysing discourse in the ELS classroom*. Ibadan: Intec Printers.
- Schiffrin, D. (1988). *Conversational analysis*. London: Longman.
- Uhunmwangho, A. V. (2000). *English for the tertiary level. An introductory test*. Lagos: Lagos Imprint Services.
- Van Dijk, T. (1994). *Discourse as structure and processes. Discourse studies. A multidisciplinary introduction Vol. 1*. London: Sage Pub.
- Van Dijk, T. (Ed.). (1997). *Discourse studies, Vol. 2*. London: Sage.