Oral Testimonies among Christians on a University Campus in Ghana

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Abstract

Genres in religion are gradually being studied in applied linguistics, in general, and discourse analysis, in particular, by scholars in both Anglo-European contexts and non-Anglo-European contexts. This study reports findings of a wider investigation into a key genre among Christians in a non-Anglo-European context. This study aimed to examine the organizational and linguistic features in oral testimonies presented among Christian students in an English-medium university in Ghana, drawing on Swales' rhetorical move analysis. Findings of the investigation showed three key findings. First, oral testimonies in the selected Christian churches showed a five-move structure. Second, there were obligatory and optional moves that assisted the presenters of testimonies to achieve their overall communicative purpose. Third, the study indicated the dominant use of key lexical items such as personal pronouns and slogans. These findings have implications for the scholarship on genre studies, religion and language as well as future research.

Key words: Christians, genre, narrative, oral testimonies, Swales.

Introduction

The early 19th century saw a great boost to Christianity in Ghana with the advent of European missionaries who established the Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Evangelical Presbyterian churches. These churches dominated in Ghana until the beginning of the twentieth century, which saw the start of the 'prophetic' and 'spiritual' churches popularly called African independent churches (Koduah, 2004) and the Pentecostal movement from both the United States of America and Great Britain. This latter movement swept across Ghana and by the close of that century, Pentecostalism together with its offshoot, the Charismatic wave, accounted for the entire Ghanaian Christian population.

It must be pointed out that Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches are churches characterized by the 'spectacular' such as casting out demons, 'loud' prayers, and clapping. While both kinds of churches are characterized by an interactive preaching style and an interest in meeting material and physical needs of their members (Sekyi-Baidoo, 2007), it is the case that the Pentecostal churches tend to have their preaching in local Ghanaian languages while the Charismatic churches carry out their activities mainly in English. Moreover, Pentecostal churches operate through a form of hierarchy with the highest position occupied by the chairman, who is an Apostle, together with others such as pastors and evangelists, overseers, and presiding elders. In contrast, Charismatic churches operate in the form of individual ownership and thus have founders. Two examples, each of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Ghana respectively, are Church of Pentecost (CP) and Assemblies of God (AG) as well as Action Faith Ministry (AFM) and the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC).

The earliest among the three categories of churches in Ghana, Orthodox Churches are churches whose members believe in and follow a specific mode of worship: They follow a laid-down liturgical procedure beginning from the procession of the choir and singing of introit, call to worship, singing of hymns or canticle, prayer of adoration, confession in that order till recession of the choir and clergy to mark the end of a church service. Their beliefs or tenets are summed up in the Apostle and Nicene Creed and the Westminister Catechism. The Orthodox churches in Ghana include the Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Africa Methodist Episcopalian Zion Church, Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. In contrast to the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, orthodox churches are governed by a recognized board which has a hierarchical structure of leadership: from the Moderator to the catechists and the church is divided into presbyteries, districts and locals (as in Presbyterian Church of Ghana); and from the Presiding Bishop to the Lay Preacher and the church is divided into diocese, circuit and societies (as in The Methodist Church of Ghana).

Despite the socio-historical, political, and liturgical differences in the three kinds of churches in Ghana, there is an important verbal behavior that occurs in all three kinds of Christian churches: oral testimony. Christians often refer to the Bible verse in Revelation 12:11 to corroborate the relevance and practice of giving testimonies: "And they overcame Satan by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; and they love not their lives to the death". It bears mentioning that Church testimony is a public profession of Christian faith or religious experience. It aims at telling the awesomeness and intervention of God in the problems of a person's day-to-day existence through a person sharing his/her experience of God's love and power. Such testimonies are shared either in the general church service on Sundays or in other ordinary and special meetings organized by the church. The atmosphere in a religious gathering constrains and regulates the use of language in presenting testimonies.

The aim of study

Generally, testimonies may be either written or spoken. Christian testimonies thus are found in written or oral medium. In recent times, testimonies have become a common verbal behavior on various radio and television stations in Ghana, especially on Saturdays and Sundays. This genre surprisingly is under-researched, as far as I am aware. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the macro and micro linguistic aspects of oral testimonies presented among Christians in Ghana. In particular, the following questions are posed in the study:

1. What generic structure characterizes oral testimonies given among Christian groups University of Cape Coast (UCC)?

2. What lexico-grammatical resources are exploited in oral testimonies among Christians at UCC?

This study is limited to oral testimonies given during church services as these constitute a more naturally occurring behavior rather than the written ones.

Conceptual Lens

The conceptual background of the study revolves around two key concepts such as 'genre' and 'narrative', as well as some selected studies on the language of religion.

Genre

The present study considers oral testimony as a religious genre. Although the term 'genre' dates as far back as the Graeco-Roman period, it is only in recent times that it has been popularized, especially in Applied Linguistics, due to the work of scholars such as Miller (1984), Swales (1990), Bhatia (1993), Martin (1993), and Bazerman (1994).

The extant work on genre studies enables us to see genre as a communicative event with a communicative purpose identified and mutually understood by members of a discourse community in which they regularly occur (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993). In other words, to the extent that a genre regularly occurs, it can be seen as either an institutionalized template or a socio-rhetorical device that allows members of a discourse community to perform certain recognizable and acceptable activities. Thus, a genre is highly structured and conventionalized, allowing constraints in terms of the intentions that members of a discourse community would like to give vent to as well as the form in which it occurs and the lexico-grammatical resources that are exploited to give it a discoursal value.

Although genres are associated with typical socio-rhetorical situations and in turn shape future responses to similar situations, they have always been 'sites of contention between stability and change' (Berkenkotter & Huckin 1995: 6). This means whereas spoken Christian testimonies may have a definable form, as in any genre, in the hands of various members of specific Christian communities, they will not always recur in the same way. Thus, it is possible for different congregations to manipulate the generic resources to express their experiences. According to the well-known genre analyst, Bhatia (2004: 24), 'such liberties, innovations, creativities, exploitations…are invariably realized within rather than outside the generic boundaries' in terms of recurrence of rhetorical situations, consistency of communicative purpose and the existence of lexico-grammatical resources.

In the present study, I draw on the notion of genre because of its potential in assisting us to see the organizational and linguistic aspects of oral discourse among a distinct social group or a community of users (here, referred to as Christians).

Narrative

The large volume of literature of narratives and related topics such as narrative enquiry or narratology in the last two and half decades makes it impossible to attempt any characterization of the literature. Nonetheless, it is necessary to allude to the conceptualization, purpose and features of the narrative, given our intuition that oral testimony is structurally and essentially a narrative.

According to Labov (1972), a narrative is one method of recapitulating past experiences by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred. A narrative is seen as a replay event, an expression of identity, a cultural trace – or a trace of something that is not there. These definitions prove that without a story, there is no narrative as "the presence or absence of a story is what distinguishes narrative from non-narrative" (Rimmon-Kenan, 1988). A story, therefore, implies a change in situation as expressed by the unfolding of a specific sequence of events. The chronological succession of events is a crucial ingredient and provides a basic building block of narratives such as oral testimonies.

Concerning the purpose of narratives, we note that narratives, to some people, preserve history; to others, it serves didactic purposes. Still, to others it reflects identity construction. Markham (1997) says personal narratives serve as representations of the role people play and as the "masks" that they present as images of themselves. As a result, these stories play an integral role in the persons we are and the persons we present to others. Markham further avers that as the self is made up of memories, and the personal narratives are made up of memories, it follows that personal narratives reflect self. Personal narratives allow the presenter to talk about self in a way that does not violate the community norm against self-praise.

At this point, we may allude to some definable features of the narrative. (Meanwhile, Grabe (2002) argues that discourse can be fundamentally divided into expository and narrative texts.) The family of narrative discourse, of which spoken testimony is a member, has a set of features that bear resemblances to one another. These include the more obvious fact that a narrative is typically episodic in nature; they involve sequences of events, some events being out of the ordinary and requiring explanation, as is likely to be case with events recounted in a testimony among a congregation. Indeed, as Grabe (2002) points out, events could be recounts, forecounts, historical events, (auto) biographies tales, and fictions. Other features of a narrative, drawing on Labov and Waletzsky (1967), include a) agentivity, b) sensitivity to the canonical event-structuring preferred, and c) a narrator's perspective (a voice). Besides, there are a number of formal linguistic features associated with most narratives.

In the present study, the notion of narrative allows us to see oral testimonies among Christians as an instantiation that reveals a change in the self of the speaker while allowing the speaker to recount his or her story or experiences, in contrast to the expository (Martin, 2002), which underscores concepts or ideas.

Language and genres among Christians

Several studies have been conducted in more recent times in religious discourse (e.g. Heather, 2000; Wharry, 2003; and Jule, 2005). In particular, Jule's (2005) edited work brings to light the interface between religion, gender, and language in day-to-day human interaction in various parts of the world, excluding Africa. The focus was not on religious genres, though. Heather (2000), on the other hand, takes a critical perspective in analyzing various religious genres such as prayer diary, worship session, Bible study session, and Hymn Singalong in Salvation Army, an international Christian movement in a non-

African setting. Wharry's (2003) work is very close to the present study as it examines some discourse markers such as 'Amen' and 'Hallelujah' in African-American sermons. Given the historical ties between African-American churches and African churches, in particular Charismatic and Pentecostal churches, it would be interesting to see the extent to which such discourse markers are used in oral testimonies, though a different genre from sermons.

The most pertinent studies to mention in this research on the interface between religion (here Christianity) and language include notably Dzameshie (1997), Taiwo (2006), and Sekyi-Baidoo (2007). But by far, Taiwo seems to be the most cited in terms of studies on genres used among Christians in Africa. In "Response Elicitation in English – medium Christian Discourse in South Western Nigerian' Taiwo (2006) sees interrogation (polar, wh-forms, and rhetorical ones) as means of discourse control and sustenance in sermons among Charismatic Christian preachers. Taiwo's study differs from the present study in terms of genre as the latter is concerned with testimony. But it will be useful to find out whether interrogations are used in the present data set. Although also set in Nigeria, Chiluwa (2000) examines a more recent technologically-based text, text message, and, in socio-rhetorical approach, finds that Christians use it for various communicative functions.

Like Taiwo, Dzameshie (1997) focuses on sermons, as he explores linguistic choices as an identification strategy of persuasion in sermons in Ghanaian Christian churches in Accra and Takoradi (two of the major cities in Ghana). Focusing on the first person plural pronoun, Dzameshie indicates that preachers show modesty in speech by making linguistic choices which suggest that preachers are unpretentious about their abilities, achievement or merits. He also identified in-group terms of address such as "folks", "brothers", "sisters" and friends" as well as inclusive and exclusive pronouns as strategies to promote solidarity in discourse. Afful (1998, 2006) cursorily mentions religious slogans and the marked use of kinship terms in various interactive encounters among Christians in Cape Coast in Ghana, though his attention is not on any specific genre.

It is interesting to note that whereas all the above studies, including those conducted in Africa, have discussed various genres in varying extent; none has investigated spoken testimonies among Christians. The present study aims at filling a void in the scholarship on religious discourse; besides, it draws on data from an area that has hitherto been excluded from research on the interface between language and religion. From the conceptual background, we now turn our attention to the research design of the present study.

Research Approach

Research design

This study proceeded as an empirical investigation using the qualitative multiple case study approach – that is, it was inquiry-structured as *in situ*, exploratory, non-manipulative, openly coded and participatory research (Philipsen, 1982). The choice of a multiple-case study allowed an in-depth study of a verbal behavior in a localized setting in order to understand a particular human behavior. So observation remained a key tool but field collection of published bulletins and other documents from the three Christian groups and casual conversations before and after the church services were part of the attempt to meet the requirements for methodological triangulation.

Research Site: University of Cape Coast

The setting of the present study is the University of Cape Coast (UCC), a public English-medium university in Ghana. There are two areas at UCC, the southern (also known as Old Site) and northern campuses (popularly known as New Site). At the Old Site are blocks such as the Administration Block, Faculty of Education, three residential halls for students, and bungalows for UCC staff. Two of the three selected Christian groups (see Section 4.3) meet on UCC campus while one meets just opposite the central gate of the University. Though a secular institution, UCC clearly recognizes the essence of God in its affairs. Thus, operating under the directives of the Academic Board, the Chaplaincy Board supervises the activities of all religious groups.

Data Source and Data Collection

The data consisting of twelve oral testimonies were collected from Pentecost Students and Associates (PENSA) and International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) to represent the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches respectively and the National Union of Presbyterian Students-Ghana (NUPS-G) to represent the Orthodox churches at their church services from 1st February 2009 to.20th March 2009. Due to the

multilingual nature of UCC, English language is used during church services. We collected the data, us-ing participant observation method and audio recording the testimonies with a cassette, tape recorder, and an Ipod. Each of the services lasted averagely two to three hours but each testimony lasted between five and eight minutes. In these services, members willingly shared their testimonies. The presenters of the testimonies did not know that they were being observed and that their testimonies were being record-ed so they were not tensed or did not try to influence or manipulate the language use, although permis-sion was sought from the leaders of the Christian groups in order to meet the ethical requirements of in-formed consent.

Method of Analysis

The researchers employed mainly the descriptive or qualitative approach (here Swales' move analysis approach) and the quantitative methods occasionally, to analyze the data. The move analysis enabled us to identify the various 'moves' (that is, sub-rhetorical communicative units that help members of a dis-course community (here, Christian group) to achieve their overall communicative goal: testifying to the miraculous intervention of God in the presenter's' life. Specifically, in order to make the recorded data amenable for both qualitative and quantitative analysis, the researchers listened to all the recorded testi-monies at least three times. We then coded the oral testimonies, using alphabets and letters such as (A1, A2, A3, A4; B1, B2, B3, B4; and C1, C2, C3, C4) to represent the different Christian groups, PENSA, NUPS-G, and ICGC respectively and the persons who gave the testimonies. Following the coding, we listened more carefully to identify the moves and other related issues, as mentioned earlier.

Generic Structure and language of oral testimonies

This section analyzes and discusses the data collected, using Swales' (1990) rhetorical move analysis. We discuss the generic structure and the linguistic manifestation of the moves; the moves are discussed in the order in which they appeared in the speaker's account.

Opening Salutation

The data collected showed that oral testimonies had an opening. The first move identified in the present study took the form of salutation or greeting. This opening salutation takes four forms, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Opening salutation in the texts*

Christian groups	A 1	A 2	A 3	A4	B 1	B 2	B 3	B 4	C 1	C 2	C 3	C 4	
Praise the Lord	+	-	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	5
Slogan	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	-	-		-	4
Amen	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	1
Zero opening	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Total	2	1	1	-	1	1	2	1	1	1	-	1	12

With the opening salutation, as can be seen from the above table, "Praise the Lord" had the highest fre-quency (6), followed by the use of slogans (5) with "Amen" (which means 'let it be') appearing only once. Each of the testimonies made use of either one or two of the opening salutation named. Thus, this move tended to be obligatory, rather than optional

In particular, some speakers begin by saying "Praise the Lord" and the congregation responds "Hallelu-jah", a kind of adjacency pair which is usually noted in conversation analysis. This form cuts across all speakers from the three Christian groups, as evidenced in the testimonies, A1, A3, A4, B3, C1 and C4. Other speakers use the slogan of the various groups such as the following:

>   *Manifesting*- and the audiences respond *The Glory of God*
>   *NUPS-G* and the response is *For Christ*
>   *ICGC* and the response is *Our God Reigns*

These were peculiar to each of the three Christian groups from whom the data were collected. This evokes Sekyi-Baidoo (2007) who found that there are three kinds of greetings (seen as slogans in the present research) in ICGC in Ghana although the present study focuses on spoken testimonies. According to the presenters of the testimonies who were later interviewed informally, slogans make them feel a sense of belonging to a group and also enhance the solidarity among them, a point also made by Afful (2006) in his treatment of religious slogans used as address terms among university students. Our interviewees affirmed that 'Hallelujah', 'Amen', and 'Praise the lord' seemed too general, although they tended to identify them as belonging to the Christian community.

Testimonies A1, B2, B4 and C3 use slogans and the speaker in C2 is the only one who uses "Amen" and the congregation responds "Amen". Two speakers (A2 and B1) employed "zero" opening salutation as they started the narration by presenting the 'problem' of their narration. These speakers might have ignored the salutation in order to pay more attention to what they might have perceived to be the more important aspects. They either could have been in haste or not have been used to this way of initiating such discourse as new members.

The occurrence of only one instance of 'Amen' at the beginning of a testimony in our data set is not particularly surprising as the word means 'let it be', normally ending a statement. The speaker who began his testimony by using this slogan, similar to those who adopted the zero opening salutation, may have been in a hurry. It is more plausible to explain its use as an attention-getter, given that it is used at the initial segment of the narrative. It is worth noting that the use of slogans, 'Hallelujah', and 'Amen' are not genre-specific among Christian churches as they are used in other genres such as sermons (Wharry, 2003; Afful, 2006) and greetings (Sekyi-Baidoo, 2007)

The Problem

The second move of oral testimonies in our data set was reference to 'a problem' encountered by the speaker. This was the most obligatory move in oral testimonies, as all testimonies we collected had this move. This was expected and commonsensical as there will hardly be a testimony if there were no 'problematic situation'. This move of the oral testimony among Christians at UCC varies in content according to the individual speaker's experience. The content of problems highlighted in the data was expressed through the following themes: a) Involvement in road accident, b) The fear of failing an examination, c) Sickness and death and d) immorality or depravity. The significance of the above themes arouses and sustains the interest of the audience.

Five out of the twelve testimonies have 'The fear of failing an examination' as their theme.

> A1: …*I fumble, fumble, fumble, fumble, I couldn't answer it.*
>   *When I got up I said this is the first time I will fail in my life.*

> B1: *Em, anytime I take a book and want to read I don't get the con, concentration.*
> *I said "oh God I've wasted my time on, on this topic so I just stop it.*

> C3: *But last semester I said I made a crazy mistake during one of my paper and err I lost*
>   *twenty marks.*

Understandably, the majority of the 'problem' fell under the above theme, given the nature of the research site, an academic institution where quizzes and examinations are essential activities. Students often express some apprehension about examinations and quizzes even if they have adequately prepared for them.

Following the 'problem' of examinations in our data set in terms of frequency is 'involvement in an accident'. Two of the testimonies fell under this theme:

> A2*: I just heard the sound //hwee// then the car was lifted from the road. Then it started*
>   *somersaulting.*

> C4: *When my brother was saying accident victim, I just remembered level hundred (100) (.)*
>   *second semester. Why should I continue living? While the one who sat in front of me lost*
>   *his life. The one who sat on my (.) left got her arm amputated. Was I so different-oh…*

UCC, as a public university, hosts students who come from different parts (regions) of the country and beyond (such as Nigeria, Togo, and Ivory Coast). Students travel in and out of campus for various reasons: to spend holidays, attend programmes, and to obtain financial support from benefactors, etc. Road accidents have become the bane of the Ghanaian government as in the last four years Ghana has recorded a higher number of accidents on the Cape Coast-Takoradi and Cape Coast-Accra roads.

There was a testimony which highlighted the problem of sickness as quoted below:

> When I completed school in 2007 that is the WASSCE. In fact I was very sick that I nearly died-God forbid. We were five students who were sick. The first student died after err the first student died before the end of the paper like a day before. He died of jaundice. He was a guy, his name was Charles. The other student who was a lady also died the same day (.) we were writing the Social Studies, that was 1st June, 2007 I remember that date very well. And two other people died within, em after err they went home. (C2)

As can be seen in the above, the speaker was grateful to God for saving him from death as those he had fallen sick with had died but he had survived, passed his examination and also gained admission to further his education. The theme of immorality is captured rather indirectly in the following:

> In fact I knew that, that was all the time God needed, needed to deliver me. Because to tell you the truth, there were a whole lot of things I was doing- laughing, murmuring and clapping. There were a whole lot of things I was doing (.) but then during the period that God took me through the school. He revealed Himself to me and right now am standing here in front of everyone for the very first time to tell everyone that indeed I am saved and I love Jesus so much-Amen. (B3)

The Resolution

The next move in oral testimonies among Christians at UCC is 'the resolution'. The resolution in oral testimonies is always characterized by "divine intervention", as put forward by the speakers who were later interviewed. In A2, the speaker narrates how he was miraculously delivered from an accident.

> Then it started somersaulting (.) how it happened was a mystery…They were surprised, those people who saw the condition of the car and realized that the occupant survived couldn't help it but just gave thanks to God.

Also, in C4 the speaker acknowledged the divine intervention of God through these words:

> Why should I continue living? While the one who sat in front of me lost his…Was I also different...oh, it is just by the grace of God…

Again the speaker in testimony B3 recounted the ordeal that God took him through "the school" in order to save him:

> There was, there was a time I didn't know Christ…
> In fact I knew that, that was all the time God needed to deliver me. Because to tell you the truth, there were a whole lot of things I was doing…
> …tell everyone that indeed I am saved and I love Jesus so much.

Interestingly, this move – resolution – did not utilize much textual space. In other words, presenters of testimonies in all three Christian groups did not spend much time on this move. This is surprising as one would have expected presenters to share with their listeners how they managed to get 'divine' intervention.

Generalization

This move of the oral testimony is, in the words of most of the speakers, to serve as "encouragement and exhortation" to the audience and to stress, "the effectiveness of prayer" to others. These three different discoursal/pragmatic functions of generalization in the data set are identified and summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: *Generalization in the texts*

Christian groups	Encourage	Advice	Assurance	*Total*
A1	**+**	**-**	**-**	*1*
A2	**+**	**-**	**+**	*2*
A3	**+**	**-**	**-**	*1*
A4	**-**	**-**	**+**	*1*
B1	**-**	**+**	**-**	*1*
B2	**+**	**-**	**-**	*1*
B3	**-**	**-**	**+**	*1*
B4	**-**	**+**	**-**	*1*
C1	**+**	**-**	**-**	*1*
C2	**-**	**-**	**+**	*1*
C3	**+**	**-**	**-**	*1*
C4	**+**	**-**	**-**	*1*
Total	*7*	*2*	*4*	*13*

As can be seen in the above table (2), the specific pragmatic functions numbered 13, although the number of testimonies was 12. In other words, whereas all the testimonies utilized one pragmatic function within the generalization move, one presenter (A2) used two functions. Seven out of twelve speakers used encouragement because that is the primary purpose of testimonies among Christians, as corroborated by Sekyi-Baidoo (2007). Two speakers gave advice and four gave assurance, as students who were later interviewed after the church services suggested that the audience may face one experience or the other and will need such words to move on in life.

In general, the generalization move allows the speaker to underscore the relevance of his or her particular experiences to the audience. The means by which this is achieved is citing texts from the Bible as seen in;

> C4: *Even whenever we are unfaithful (.) He says he will not deny himself but remain faithful (2 Timothy 2: 13).*
> A4: *The Bible says (.) as many that are led by the spirit of God are the children of God.*
> *It is also expressed in a form of encouragement as in;*
> C3: *So I want you to know that when you pray, God will answer that prayer. The next prayer that God will be answering is yours.*
> A1: *Brethren, there is nothing that God cannot do. If you believe that God cannot do it, that is your problem but as for me, I know that God can do everything.*
> C4: *Beloved in the Lord, I want to encourage you that, never lose hope in any situation you find yourself for our Lord is lover of all.*

Testimonies serve a didactic purpose, providing lessons on morality to be learnt or establishing some truth.

Closing Salutation

The last move enables the speaker to signal to the congregation the closure of the narration. Evidence from the data shows that all twelve speakers ended with "Amen" which means "let it be" or "shall it be done" and the congregation responded likewise. For instance, "Amen" elicits the response "Amen." In one or two cases, others added "God bless you". Refer to Table 3 below for details.

Table 3: *Closing salutations in texts*

	Christian groups	A1	A2	A3	A4	B1	B2	B3	B4	C1	C2	C3	C4	*Total*
Closing salutation	Amen	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	*12*
	God bless you	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	*5*
	Total	*1*	*1*	*2*	*2*	*1*	*1*	*2*	*1*	*2*	*1*	*2*	*1*	*17*

There were seventeen closing salutations in the fourteen testimonies presented 'Amen' is preferred (twelve times) to 'God bless you (five times) ostensibly because the speakers believe that whatever they have said and whatever God has promised them will surely be experienced no matter the challenges they encounter. This means that five speakers used both expressions. As expected, this move was the shortest of the moves used by presenters.

Conclusion and Implications

The present study sought to investigate mainly the generic structure of spoken testimonies among some Christian groups at a public university in Ghana. Drawing on Swales' (1990) rhetorical move analysis, it was realized that all the testimonies had four obligatory moves: problem, resolution, generalization, and closure while almost all the testimonies constituted a five-move template. Second, each 'move' seemed to have lexico-grammatical features associated with it, given their different sub-communicative purposes. As expected, the vocabulary related to particular experiences, especially in recounting the 'problem', utilized exclusive pronoun 'I'(rather than inclusive pronouns); and words such as "Almighty God", "Amen", "Hallelujah", and "Lord" tended to be mainly familiar to the religious discourse community.

 The above findings have two key implications: Swales' rhetorical move analysis is a useful approach in analyzing and understanding a key spoken genre used among Christians. An interesting observation relates to the use of a song in the opening move. The presenter in A3 used a song as an introduction to thank God before presenting the problem but B3 and C4 used the songs to sum up their narration as a form of appreciation to God. On the whole, however, these do not constitute significant (not in statistical terms) deviations from the norm but rather to a large extent confirms the view of genre analysts that members of a discourse community can manipulate the generic potential of a genre to meet personal needs.

Second, this research adds to the existing scholarship on the language of religion, in that few studies had been done on testimonies unlike sermons, as seen in the review of related literature (e.g., Dzameshie, 1997; Wharry, 2003; Taiwo, 2006, 2007), greetings (Sekyi-Baidoo, 2007), and text messages (Chiluwa, 2003). The present study on the interface between religion and language, focusing on oral testimonies, broadens the coverage of studies as most of these studies have focused on Anglo-American, European, and other contexts.

Given the plethora of various Christian programmes on the Ghanaian media landscape which makes use of oral testimonies, it will be interesting to find out the extent to which findings in the present research can be generalized to include those found on television stations. Further research on testimonies may compare written and oral testimonies in some selected Christian churches and as well as spoken testimonies presented in English and those in the Ghanaian local languages.

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