

Themes and Lexical Choices in Selected Roman Catholic Bishops' Lenten Pastoral Letters in the Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha, Nigeria

V.C. Okafor (B.A, M.A., P.G.D.E, Ph.D.)

(Principal Lecturer, English Language)

Department Of General Studies

Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti

Ekiti State

Nigeria

Abstract

This study examined the themes and the lexical choices deployed in the Lenten pastoral letters of the Roman Catholic bishops in the Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha, Nigeria, with a view to establishing a correlation between the two. Ten pastoral letters of five Roman Catholic bishops were used as data, and these were purposively sampled from five out of seven dioceses in the province, that is, two letters from each bishop. The sampling was based on consistency in the publication of the letters as well as their thematic preoccupations. Data were analysed based on M.A.K. Halliday's (1985) model of Systemic Functional Grammar, because of its emphasis on form-function correlation in language use. Analysis, which revealed four major themes, namely: faith, loyalty, repentance, and love, conveyed through the use of theme-related words, antonyms, synonyms and lexical repetitions, showed a correlation between theme and lexical choice.

Keywords: Themes, Lexical choices, Roman Catholic bishops, Pastoral letters, Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province

1.0 Introduction

The Lenten pastoral letters of the Roman Catholic bishops in the Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha, Nigeria, are written for the purpose of encouraging the Roman Catholic faithful in the province to use the Season of Lent to reflect on their lives as Christians and make amends where necessary. In other words, it is aimed at promoting good Christian living among the faithful in the province. Since the Lenten period is a period when Christians are expected to reflect on their lives as Christians, the bishops through their Lenten pastoral letters provide the faithful with subjects to reflect on for the season. The letters usually deal with any subject or topic which the bishops consider good enough for reflection. This study examines the themes of the selected Lenten pastoral letters and the lexical choices made in conveying them, so as to establish a correlation between theme and lexical choice. Theme refers to the subject or the central topic of a discourse, while lexical choice refers to the word selections made for the purpose of communicating meanings.

M.A.K. Halliday's model of Systemic Functional Grammar is a relevant framework for this study because of its emphasis on form-function correlation in language use, form referring to the structure of language and function its purpose or use. It is a sociologically oriented linguistic theory which views language as a social activity, and sees a connection between the social functions of language and the linguistic system (de Beaugrande, 1991). To Halliday, form and function are so closely connected that they cannot be separated. According to him, language has evolved to satisfy human needs, and the way it is organised is functional with respect to those needs (Halliday, 1985). The patterns of language use in a particular social context are seen to reflect the function that language is performing in that context. Thus, M.A.K Halliday's Systemic Functional theory incorporates both form and function as two complementary levels of linguistic analysis. Analysis of themes and lexical choices in the bishops' Lenten pastoral letters will be based on form-function relationship in language use as theorised by Systemic Functional Linguistics. It will show how the lexical choices made in the pastorals function to convey the themes of the letters.

2.0 Methodology

The data for this study are ten Lenten pastoral letters of five Roman Catholic bishops' in five out of seven dioceses in the Ecclesiastical province of Onitsha. The five dioceses are the Archdiocese of Onitsha, the dioceses of Nnewi, Awka, Awgu, and Enugu. The ten Lenten pastoral letters are *God is calling us to reconciliation* (GCTR, 2001, Enugu), *Okwukwe ezi olu* (OEO, 2010, Enugu), *Repent and believe the good news* (RBGN, 2008, Awka), *Call to conversion* (CTC, 2000, Awka), *If only you have faith* (IYHF, 2006, Onitsha), *The measure of love* (TML, 2005, Onitsha), *From faith to faith* (FFF, 2004, Nnewi), *We walk by faith* (WWF, 2003, Nnewi), *Living in the amazing love of God* (LALG, 2008, Awgu), and *Living the faith* (LTF, 2006, Awgu).

The dioceses were sampled because the bishops are consistent in publishing the pastorals annually. They thus provide the researcher with a wide range of pastorals to choose from. The ten pastorals were chosen because certain themes were found to cut across them. These are themes of faith, repentance, love, and loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church. The researcher therefore considers it worthwhile to select the pastorals with themes across the board so as to see how different bishops use language to convey the same message.

3.0 Data Analysis

The Roman Catholic bishops' Lenten pastoral letters, which are aimed at encouraging good Christian living among the Roman Catholic faithful in the Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha, deal with four major themes, namely: faith, loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church, repentance, and love. These are conveyed through specific lexical choices such as words, synonyms, antonyms, and lexical repetitions.

3.1 Themes of the Pastoral Letters

A theme is the subject or the central topic of a discourse, which brings depth and cohesion to it. In the selected Roman Catholic bishops' Lenten pastoral letters in the Onitsha Province, four major themes are identified. These are themes of faith, loyalty, repentance, and love.

3.1.1 Theme of Faith

The bishops exhort the audience to have complete trust in God, and shun anything that can distract them from total dependence on God. They express sadness over the fact that many present-day Christians are yet to appreciate the necessity and centrality of faith in the life of a Christian. The bishops consider lack of faith to be the main reason why, in the face of normal problems of life such as sickness, death of a beloved one, violence, betrayals, hunger, childlessness, poverty, delay in marriage, joblessness, etc., Christians run from place to place in search of solutions. They enjoin Christians to have faith and complete trust in God whatever their circumstances because God never fails those who trust in him.

3.1.2 Theme of Loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church

This is the second major theme found in the bishops' Lenten pastorals. The bishops express worry over the non-Catholic behaviours of some of the faithful and the facility with which a good number of them defect to non-Catholic Churches and groups, abandoning the Roman Catholic Church which, according to them, is the Ark of Salvation. They are of the view that the Roman Catholic Church has all the ordinary means given by Jesus Christ for the sanctification and salvation of men and women, as it has remained the historical link with Christ and the apostles to whom Christ passed on his work of preaching, teaching, sanctifying and shepherding. The bishops therefore ask the faithful to guard against anything that can threaten their steadfast adherence to the Roman Catholic faith and perseverance in the Roman Catholic Church, as this would endanger their eternal salvation.

3.1.3 Theme of Repentance

Theme of repentance is the third major theme in the bishops' letters. The bishops are disturbed by the wide gap between religion and morality in the Nigerian society. They decry the irony that while the society continues to witness proliferation of churches, prayer centres, crusades, night vigils, and other religious activities, there is no corresponding improvement in the moral and spiritual lives of the people. Instead vices such as greed, bribery and corruption, materialism, idolatry, occultism practices, armed robbery, stealing, adulteration of products, and other forms of immoral acts continue to be on the increase. This, the bishops argue, is because Christianity, for some people, has nothing to do with how they live their lives. They submit that it is not enough to observe pious or religious practices but that religion must be rooted in good works. They therefore call on the faithful to repent from their sins and live a life that is in consonance with the faith they profess.

3.1.4 Theme of Love

Theme of love is the fourth major theme in the bishop's Lenten pastoral letters. The bishops express concern over the absence of love in our society which has led to a number of social vices and evils such as greed, injustice, violence, deceitfulness, selfishness, bribery and corruption, abuse of power, lust, nepotism, and sectionalism. They enlighten the faithful on God's unconditional love for man despite man's sinfulness and unworthiness. According to them, God is a loving father who desires to have an intimate relationship with his children, and this he has demonstrated through the gift of his only son Jesus Christ to humanity. The bishops therefore appeal to the faithful to return God's love by also loving Him, their fellow human beings, as well as the whole creation, unconditionally. They make clear to the faithful that Christians are compelled to live a life of love because Christianity is a religion founded on love.

3.2 Lexical Choices Signifying the Themes

Lexical choices are word selections or decisions made by an author in a discourse in order to express the meaning he wishes to communicate. Robin (1990) defines lexical choice as "the choice of open-class lexical items (whether phrasal patterns or individual words) appropriate to express the content units of the utterance being generated in a given situation of enunciation." In the bishops' letters, the lexical choices deployed to convey themes are theme-related words, synonyms, antonyms, and lexical repetitions.

3.2.1 Words Signifying Themes

3.2.1.1 Words Signifying the Theme of Faith

These are words that collocate with faith. They constitute 55.6% of the total number of faith-related lexical choices deployed, which is 286. The bishops have carefully selected words relating to faith to communicate to their audience the theme of faith in God. Examples of faith-related words found in the letters are: *belief, trust, church, devout, evangelization, Christian, fidelity, commitment, adherence, magisterium, worship, prayer, sacrament, conviction, loyalty, creed, etc.* By choosing these words, the bishops foreground the theme of faith to enhance its understanding by the faithful. Consider the choice of the words *faith, believe, and trust*, for example, in text 1 below:

Text 1:

...many Christians today are men and women of sight and not of **faith**. They **believe** and **trust** their senses so much so that **faith** has no place in their lives. (*IYHF*, p.21)

In this text, the words *faith, believe, and trust* suggest the theme of faith. *Believe* means to accept something or somebody as true; *trust* means to means confidence in something or somebody. Trust is borne out of belief in something or somebody. *Faith* incorporates the meaning of both *believe* and *trust*. It means trust, confidence or strong belief in God. The words are brought together to emphasize the theme of faith. The emphasis is intensified by choice of the words *sight* and *senses* which in this context are antonymous to faith. In the context of this text, the bishops express worry over the attitude of the faithful when faced with normal problems of life. They go to any length in search of solutions, even if it means going to places or doing things that are contrary and detrimental to their faith. The faithful are therefore enjoined to remain steadfast in their faith.

Another example of choice of faith-related words to convey the theme of faith is seen in the use of the words *worship, faith, and believe* in text 2 below:

Text 2:

Worship in itself is an act of **faith**: "What we **pray** we **believe** and what we **believe** we **pray**." (*LTF*, 39)

The word *worship* means to honour God or a god with praise, prayer, hymns, etc. As such it requires *faith* or belief in the existence of God or a god being honoured and his or its ability to receive and appreciate the worship given. The theme of faith is also intensified by the word *pray*. We pray with the belief or faith that we would obtain what we pray for. The text occurs in the context of the bishops' admonition of the faithful to nourish their faith in God by constant prayer. The quoted words are a translation of the Latin slogan used to support the view that worship is an act of faith. The words *worship, faith, believe and prayer* are therefore appropriate in foregrounding the theme of faith. One can only worship or pray to a god he or she believes or have faith in.

3.2.1.2 Words Signifying the Theme of Loyalty

These are Roman Catholic Church-related words. They constitute 68.1% of the total frequency of loyalty-related lexical forms, which is 185. They are used to convey the theme of loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church. Examples include words such as *grotto, rosary, Mass, scapular, medals, crucifix, Eucharist, confessional, saints, celibacy, Mary, statues, images, purgatory, shrines, cults, cardinals, See, pope, indulgence, papal, cathedra, Catechumen, sacramental, magisterium, etc.* By making these lexical selections the bishops indicate the Roman Catholic nature of the discourse and demonstrate the theme of loyalty to the Catholic Church. For example, in texts 3 and 4 below, the collocations *Holy Mass* and *Eucharistic Celebration*, as well as the lexical items *Catholic* and *confession* are peculiarly Catholic:

Text 3:

The Holy **Mass** is the same sacrifice of Christ which the Church continues to carry out in memory of Him as Jesus Christ mandated at the Last Supper. (FFF, p.94)

Text 4:

The **Catholic** is bound to the following fundamental religious obligations: active participation in Sunday **Eucharistic Celebration**, receiving Holy Communion and going to **confession** frequently... (FFF, p.89)

The *Holy Mass* in text 3 refers to the Roman Catholic Church liturgical celebration which has the Holy Eucharist at its centre. Hence it is synonymous with *Eucharistic Celebration* in text 4. It is a celebration in which the redeeming sacrifice of Christ on the Cross at Calvary is re-enacted as a sacramental memorial for the living and the dead. The choice of the words is appropriate as it enables the bishops not only to project the Catholic faith and doctrine, but also to enhance the faith development of the faithful and to carry them along in the discussion. The celebration of the Holy Mass requires maximum faith from the participants.

The Holy Eucharist is believed to contain the abiding presence of Jesus Christ in the form of bread and wine, and the celebration is believed to draw the participants, day by day, into closer union with God and with each other. The choice of the word *Mass* is therefore appropriate in a Catholic discourse of this nature which is aimed at promoting Catholic faith and its practice among the faithful. The collocation *Holy Mass* emphasizes the sacredness of the Eucharistic Celebration and its sanctifying power.

3.2.1.3 Words Signifying the Theme of Repentance

To communicate the theme of repentance, the bishops have selected lexical items relating to repentance. These constitute 67.8% of the total frequency of repentance related lexical forms deployed, which is 183. Such words include *conversion, reconciliation, forgiveness, sins, indulgence, Lent, purification, atonement, salvation, penance, confessional, renewal, holiness, transformation, change, surrender, submission, etc.* This way they keep their message in the constant focus of the faithful thereby ensuring its understanding. Consider the choice of the word *conversion* in text 5:

Text 5:

This story of the prodigal son is the classical story of **conversion**. Any event of **conversion** is a return journey to the Father. (CTC, p.7)

The word *conversion* means change of the form or functions of one thing into another, change from one religion to another, from one currency to another or from one measuring system to another. The functional word here is change; change from one state to another. *Conversion* in the context of the above text is strictly related to repentance. It means a change of focus from the world to God, a change from sinful life to a life of righteousness, a change from bad old ways to new and good ways of life. The word conveys the theme of repentance which is one of the preoccupations of the bishops in their pastoral letters. The story of the prodigal son gives a clue to the meaning of *conversion* in this context. The prodigal son, after squandering his father's wealth through bad life, realises his mistakes and returns to his father asking for forgiveness. *Conversion* is thus a return journey of a sinner to the Merciful and Loving God who is ever willing to accept him back. In this sense, conversion is synonymous with repentance, which is a change of heart, a feeling of remorse for wrong doing. Through the word *conversion* the bishop admonishes the faithful on the importance of holiness of life in securing a peaceful relationship with God and man and in gaining eternal salvation. Similarly, the words *Lent, repent, sins, and change* are appropriately chosen in text 6 to project the theme of repentance.

Text 6:

Each **Lent**, Our Holy Mother Church calls us to **repent** of our **sins** and **change** lives. She calls us to make serious efforts and **turn** to God completely. (*GCTR*, P.36)

Lent is a liturgical season observed by Christians between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday to commemorate the forty-day fasting of Jesus Christ as well as his suffering, death and resurrection. In the context of the above text, *Lent* is used to mean a season of repentance, a season when Christians mourn for their sins and make efforts to change from their old sinful life to a new life in Christ. The words *repent*, *sins* and *change* thus relate to this meaning of lent and together they constitute lexical collocates of repentance. The meaning of repentance is restated in the second sentence, as indicated by *turn to God completely*. By choosing these words, the bishop emphasizes the theme of repentance and persuades the faithful to renew their lives.

3.2.1.4 Words Signifying the Theme of Love

Just as words are appropriately chosen to convey the themes of faith, loyalty, and repentance, love-related words are chosen by the bishops to convey the message of love to the audience. They constitute 47.2% of the total frequency (163) of love-related lexical forms in the letters, and include words such as *charity*, *bond*, *compassion*, *intimacy*, *bosom*, *mercy*, *agape*, *friendliness*, *selflessness*, *sacrifice*, *care*, *tenderness*, *desires*, *attachment*, *fondness*, *altruism*, *generosity*, *almsgiving*, *self-denial*, *giving*, *goodness*, *affection*, etc. In text 7 below, for example, the words *sacrifice* and *love* reflect the theme of love in the letters:

Text 7:

Christ paid the supreme and selfless **sacrifice** by His blood in order to save man and creation. Hence greater **love** than this no man has, that a man should give his life for his friends (cf. Jn.15:13). (*TML*, p.19)

Sacrifice is the offering of a slaughtered person or animal to God or a god, or the giving up of something valuable for the sake of someone or something else. Love means admiration and care for another. Sacrifice is usually borne out of love. In the context of the above text, the use of the word *sacrifice* shows the degree of love Jesus Christ has for humanity. It means that Jesus offered himself to be slaughtered for the sake of humanity; he gave up his life that we might live. This is love at its peak, the kind that nobody else has ever demonstrated in the history of humanity. The nature of this sacrifice is specified by the use of the adjectives *supreme* and *selfless*. The bishops have carefully chosen this word to show the faithful the extent they are expected to go in demonstration of their love for God and man. Christ's example is presented to them as a model. They are thus enjoined to tow the line of this agape love when dealing with others. The choice of the word *sacrifice* is therefore appropriate to foreground the theme of love in the bishops' letters.

Another example of the choice of appropriate word to project the theme of love in the bishops' letters is the word *charity* in text 8 below:

Text 8:

Although we have to work towards transforming the structures of injustice that make it possible for some people to be poor and needy, we also have to build up structures of **charity** that make it possible for those in need to receive spontaneous and enduring help without tampering with or encroaching on their dignity and sense of self-worth. (*LALG*, p.58)

The word *charity* means reaching out to people in need by way of rendering assistance to them. In text 8 above, the bishops use the word to refer to an institution or organisation concerned with rendering assistance to the needy. By calling for an establishment of such an institution, the bishops indirectly call for a demonstration of love for the less privileged. One is naturally first moved to pity and love before demonstrating this feeling through charity. Charity is therefore an act of love. The choice of the word by the bishops is suitable to project the theme of love and move the faithful to the desired action.

3.2.2 Synonyms Signifying Themes

Synonyms are different phonological words which have the same or very similar meanings (Saeed, 2009). Different words which have the same referent are also considered to be synonymous.

3.2.2.1 Synonyms Signifying the Theme of Faith

In the bishops' pastorals, synonyms relating to the theme of faith constitute 19.6% of the total number of faith-related lexical forms deployed.

They include *journey-pilgrimage, idolatry-superstitious, believe-adhere, reject-doubt, obligation-task, devotion-reverence, confidence-trust, steadfast-faithful, supernatural-religious, acceptance-acknowledgement, grace-privilege, trust-faith, etc.* In text 9 below, for example, the synonymous pair *confidence* and *trust* are used to foreground the theme of faith:

Text 9:

The man or woman of **faith** has supreme **confidence** and **trust** in God's providence. No matter the situation, the problems and difficulties, the child of God says in **faith**, like Abraham, the Lord will provide (*IYHF*, p.48).

In the above text, the synonyms *faith, confidence* and *trust* are used to echo the theme of faith in God. The three words denote firmness and resoluteness in the belief expressed. The last two are a restatement of the meaning denoted by the first. Confidence means trust or belief in a person or thing, while trust is belief or reliance on the truth, goodness, character, power, or ability of someone or something. They are used as qualities or markers of faith, such that a man or a woman will be measured by his or her level of confidence and trust in God. The bishop has deployed the synonyms in order to make clear to the faithful the need for total dependence on God, his power and ability to provide for them in all circumstances. This way they reinforce the theme of faith to facilitate understanding.

Also consider the use of the synonyms *oppression and persecution* and *steadfastly* and *unwavering* in text 10 below:

Text 10:

They [the forefathers in faith] suffered **oppression** and **persecution**. Yet they were **unwavering** in their faith and **steadfastly** bore witness to it through good Christian living. (*LTF*, P.4)

Oppression and *persecution* are used synonymously in the text, and so are *unwavering* and *steadfastly*. The first pair of synonyms belongs to the class of abstract nouns. The words denote suffering inflicted by an external force. Despite this suffering which is supposed to constitute a setback to the faith of the forefathers, they remained resolute. The words *unwavering* and *steadfastly* denote this resoluteness, which is a characteristic feature of real faith in God. They are considered to be synonyms although they belong to different parts of speech: the former is an adjective while the latter is an adverb. The synonyms are used by the bishops to emphasise the strength of faith demonstrated by the early Christians despite numerous oppositions. The bishops are of the view that that real faith in God is that which stands the test of time, that which triumphs over challenging circumstances. This is the kind of faith they expect the faithful to demonstrate. This message is effectively communicated through the use of synonyms.

3.2.2.2 Synonyms Signifying the Theme of Loyalty

In addition to the use of lexical repetitions, the theme of loyalty to the Roman Catholic faith is also portrayed through the use of synonyms, which constitute 6.5% of the total frequency of lexical forms relating to the theme of loyalty, as can be seen in the text 11:

Text 11:

...in all, the mystery of the Church shines forth for all who **believe**. It is only in **faith** that one identifies the Church of the Creed and **holds on to** it without straying into many attractive bye-ways presented to men and women in our days as the promised land. (*FFF*, p.34)

The words *believe* and *faith*, as well as the expression *hold on to* are in synonymous relations though they belong to different parts of speech. *Believe* is a finite verb, *faith* a noun, and *hold on to* a phrasal verb. The three synonyms denote acceptance, adherence or loyalty to something, in this case, the Roman Catholic Church. The emphasis is on faith as the only way through which the mystery and the divinity of the Catholic Church are understood. The faith meant here is faith in the Roman Catholic Church. Adherence to any other faith is considered as going astray. Through the synonyms, the theme of loyalty to the Roman Catholic faith is communicated.

Text 12 provides another instance of the use of synonyms in the bishops' pastoral letters to express the theme of loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church:

Text 12:

A Catholic who **doubts** or **rejects** a Catholic doctrine...or teaches a doctrine contrary to the Catholic faith...is endangering his or her communion with the Catholic Church through heresy. (FFF, p.3)

In the context of the above text, *doubts* is synonymous with *rejects*. Both imply unwillingness to accept something. The meaning of one of the synonyms reinforces the meaning of the other. It is doubt about something that leads to its rejection. The synonyms relate to the theme of faith. The bishops use them to make clear to the faithful the danger or risk inherent in questioning the Catholic doctrine. The word heresy also fortifies the theme of loyalty to the Catholic Church, as it relates to the issue of doubting or rejecting a doctrine one is supposed to uphold. The consequent danger is excommunication from the Catholic Church. The essence of the synonyms is to emphasize the theme of loyal to the Catholic Church. By framing the sentence as a threat, the bishop intensifies its persuasive force.

3.2.2.3 Synonyms Signifying the Theme of Repentance

Just as synonyms are used to advance the themes of faith and loyalty in the bishops' letters, they are also used to convey the theme of repentance. Repentance-related synonyms constitute 10.4% of the total frequency of repentance-related lexical forms deployed. Examples are *conversion-repentance*, *sinfulness-foolishness*, *sin-evil*, *holiness-sanctity*, *sinned-turnedaway*, *penance-mortification*, *sin-death*, *authentic-genuine*, *suffering-misery*, *turbulence-temptation*, *gentleness-mildness*, *misfortunes-setbacks*, etc. The use of synonyms to project the theme of repentance in the letters is exemplified by text 13:

Text 13:

By denying oneself of legitimate pleasures through **fasting** and **abstinence**, one prepares oneself to be able to stand firm in times of **turbulence** and **temptation**. (RBGN, p.24)

Here *fasting* and *abstinence* are used synonymously, and so are *turbulence* and *temptation*. *Fasting* and *abstinence* imply denying oneself of something, usually by way of prayer, while *turbulence* and *temptation* in this context share the meaning of trouble or tribulation. The first pair is presented as a remedy to the situation denoted by the second pair, a situation which is capable of leading one to sin. The two pairs of synonyms are used in the context of the bishops' exhortation of the faithful to engage in fasting and abstinence so as to deepen their relationship with God and derive enough spiritual strength that will enable them to withstand any trial that can shake their faith and lead them to sin. The synonyms are thus appropriately deployed to intensify the theme of repentance.

In text 14 below, we find another example of the use of synonyms to foreground the theme of repentance in the bishops' letters:

Text 14:

The Holy Spirit impels us to develop a sense of sin by **returning** into ourselves and thus see the need to **go back** to the Father's house (Lk. 15:17-20). The call for on-going **conversion** as the indispensable condition for authentic Christian witnessing in our society is very important because we seem to be destroying the very foundation of an ethically correct version of human existence. (GCTR, p.15)

Here *returning*, which is a gerund and *go back*, which is an infinitive, are used synonymously. They imply a turnabout, a reversal of direction. These qualities are associated with repentance. The need to make a U-turn or to reverse one's direction may be as a result of the fact that one has been on the wrong direction. The wrong direction in this context is sin and the right direction is God. Sin has taken man away from God, which is the right direction. The bishops' call is for a change of direction back to God. They call on the faithful to make a U-turn in their lives from sinfulness to righteousness. Since by their sins they have turned away from God, they need to return to God in righteousness. The synonyms are thus jointly synonymous with *conversion*, which, in this context, means a change of life from sinfulness to righteousness. The bishops have used these synonyms therefore to emphasize the theme of repentance and reconciliation with God.

3.2.2.4 Synonyms Signifying the Theme of Love

The theme of love is further conveyed through the deployment of synonyms constituting 22.1% of the total frequency (163) of love-related lexical forms.

Examples include synonyms such as *sacrifice-suffering*, *collegiality-communion*, *heart-centre*, *honest-sincere*, *peaceful-cordial*, *care-concern*, *charity-generosity*, *familiarity-intimacy*, *emotions-feelings*, *passionate-possessive*, *intimacy-tenderness*, *sacrificial-selfless*, *gentleness-mildness*, *loved-cared for*, *consummate-enveloping*, *total-undivided*, *loving-caring*, *duty-responsibility*, *closer-more intimate*, etc. Consider text 15 below:

Text 15:

In his words and deeds, Jesus demonstrates that what a sick person needs is not **condemnation** and **isolation**, but **attention** and **care**. (*LALG*, p.21)

Here, the words used synonymously are *attention-care* and *condemnation-isolation*. Attention and care denote love, and so in this context share the meaning of concern, fondness and kind consideration. On the other hand, condemnation and isolation denote lack of love, and its related qualities. By using the love synonyms, the bishops emphasise the need for the faithful to show love to the sick just as Jesus Christ has demonstrated. The beauty of giving attention and care to those who need them is made to shine out through contrast with *condemnation and isolation*. The choice of the opposing synonyms in the context of a message on love intensifies the theme of love.

In text 16 below, we find another example in which the theme of love is projected through synonyms:

Text 16:

Prayer is primarily a response to the gratuitous love of God and it nourishes our **familiarity** and **intimacy** with God. (*RBGN*, p.22)

The words that are synonymous here are *familiarity* and *intimacy*. They are used in the context of the bishops' exhortation of the faithful on the importance of prayer in building a close and intimate relationship with God. The synonyms are thus used to emphasize that intimacy, to specify the depth of the relationship man can establish with God through prayer. To maintain a familiar or intimate relationship with a person is to allow that person entry into one's privacy. All obstacles or barriers are dismantled, and all secrets are made open. Requests are rarely turned down. These are the benefits the faithful stand to enjoy, if they establish an intimate relationship with God. But the access, the gate, the thoroughfare to all these is prayer. Through the use of the synonyms, the bishops present their message of love vividly and emphatically to ensure proper understanding by the faithful.

3.2.3 Antonyms Signifying Themes

Antonyms are words that have opposite meaning. Palmer (2000) identifies three kinds of opposites as gradable, complementary, and relational opposites. Gradable opposites are seen in terms of degrees of the quality involved, as in *wide/narrow*, *old/young*, *big/small*, etc. Complementary opposites involve items that are complementary to each other, as in *married/single*, *male/female*, *alive/dead*, etc., while relational opposites exhibit the reversal of a relationship between items, as in *buy/sell*, *lender/borrower*, *parent/child*, *give/receive*, etc.

3.2.3.1 Antonyms Signifying the Theme of Faith

In the bishops' letters, the theme of faith in God is conveyed through the use of antonyms, which constitute 16.8% of the total frequency of faith-related lexical forms deployed. Examples of faith-related antonyms in the letters are *weakness-strength*, *faith-fear*, *faith-sight*, *doubt-hold*, *freedom-slaves*, *visible-invisible*, *human-divine*, *seen-unseen*, *power-weakness*, *faith-works*, *believing-doubting*, *foundation-starting-point*, *hearers-doers*, etc. Consider text 17 below:

Text 17:

The profession of Simon Peter shows clearly that the light of God's grace transforms human being's **limited** vision to the **higher** vision of God: The revelation of the true identity of Jesus Christ was not by **sight** but by **faith**. (*WWF*, p.45)

Antonymous relations exist between the adjectives *limited* and *higher* and between the nouns *sight* and *faith*, in the text above. In the context of this text, the bishops admonish the faithful to remain steadfast in their faith in God, as it is only through this that they will be able to understand the plan of God for them. The text is a Biblical example cited to buttress this message. The antonyms *limited* and *higher* are used to mark the difference between the realm of the divine which is the realm of God, and the realm of reality which is the realm of man.

The former is higher while the latter is limited. It is only through faith, which is a grace given by God, that man can attain that higher realm and be able to see beyond the realities around him. Through the contrast brought about by the use of the antonyms the bishops emphasizes the need for faith in God.

The second pair of antonyms, *sight* and *faith*, is parallel to the first. *Sight* corresponds to *limited* vision while *faith* corresponds to *higher* vision. Revelations from God are received through the eyes of faith, and not through physical sight. The emphasis of the bishops, through the use of these antonyms, is on faith in God. The contrasts enable the faithful to understand the difference between the realm of the divine and of the physical, and the role of faith in linking the two.

A further example of the use of antonyms to portray the theme of faith in God is seen in text 18 below:

Text 18:

Beyond the external verbal profession of faith or ritual religious acts, **faith** has to be expressed in good **works**. St James was very clear on this when he stated that **faith** without good **works** is dead. (*IYHF*, p.29)

In this text, *faith* and *works* are contrasted to reflect the wide gap there is between the lives of the faithful and the faith they profess, and the need to strike a balance. The bishops' message is that faith is useless if it does not reflect in the daily living of faithful. They are of the view that Christian faith, as a practical faith, cannot be separated from and good works and so should reflect in the day to day living of the faithful. By contrasting between *faith* and *works*, therefore, the theme of faith is emphasized. This is further intensified by the repetition of the antonyms in the paraphrased quotation from St James in the Holy Bible. The bishops' message of faith is thus foregrounded by the use of antonyms and validated by Biblical quotation.

3.2.3.2 Antonyms Signifying the Theme of Loyalty

Antonyms, in addition to loyalty-related words, are also used to convey the theme of loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church. They constitute 14.6% of the total frequency of loyalty-related lexical forms. Text 19 below is an example of the use of antonyms to convey the theme of loyalty in the bishops' letters.

Text 19:

We must be very careful in these days of explosion of preachers and teachers to know and **hold** tenaciously the **true** doctrines and **reject** the **false** ones being spread with frenzied zeal (*FFF*, p.38)

The antonymous pairs in the above text are *hold* and *reject*, *true* and *false*. To hold something especially a belief, which is the case here, means to stand on it with conviction. What is held onto is usually considered to be the truth by the person holding onto it. On the other hand, to reject something means not to accept or approve of, probably because it is considered not to be genuine. The polarity created here is between the Catholic doctrines and non-Catholic doctrines. The former are to be held onto because they are true, while the latter are to be rejected because they are false. Through the contrasts created by the choice of these antonyms, the bishops foreground the theme of loyalty to the Catholic faith. The antonyms occur in the context of the bishops' warning to the faithful against contrary doctrines. These are seen as posing dangers to their Catholic faith.

Furthermore, in text 20, the antonyms *un-Catholic* and *Catholic*, *catholic* and *protestant* are deployed to foreground the theme of loyalty to the Catholic faith:

Text 20:

We are not surprised when we see characters that are **uncatholic** and prayer attitudes that are strange to **Catholic** ways in our parishes today. Unfortunately, these distracted brothers and sisters of ours are often neither good in their **catholic** doctrines and pieties nor better in the **protestant** prayer cultures. (*OEO*, p.19)

The antonyms *Catholic-uncatholic* and *catholic-protestant* in text 20 are all adjectives. The first pair of antonyms is used to describe the Roman Catholic faithful whose activities are not according to the ways of the Roman Catholic Church. In other words they are catholic by appellation, but non-Catholic by behaviour. The second pair is a repetition of the first pair of antonyms but with modification. The word *uncatholic* is now specified as *protestant*. Both describe the doctrines and cultures now found in the lives of those faithful, presenting them as neither fully Catholic nor fully protestant. The antonyms are used to portray this dilemma in their character as a mark of disloyalty to the Catholic faith. The faithful are enjoined to shun anti-Catholic behaviours.

3.2.3.3 Antonyms Signifying the Theme of Repentance

The theme of repentance is again manifested in the bishops' letters through the use of antonyms, and these make up 12.0% of the total frequency of repentance-related lexical forms, which is 183.

Examples of repentance-related antonyms deployed include *evil-salvation*, *forgiveness-sin*, *doctrine-practice*, *repair-damage*, *renounces-gains*, *Christian-unchristian*, *vices-virtues*, *light-darkness*, *life-death*, *eternity-time*, *strength-weakness*, *triumph-despair*, *good-evil*, *ability-inability*, *struggle-success*, *commission-omission*, *spiritual-corporal*, *lose-find*, *folly-wisdom*, *earthly-heavenly*, *perishable-imperishable*, *restless-rest*, *hard-easy*, *rich-poor*, etc. By means of antonyms such as these, the message of repentance and reconciliation is communicated to the faithful, as exemplified by text 21 below:

Text 21:

...baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion. It is by baptism that one **renounces evil** and **gains salvation**. (CTC, p.7)

Here, *renounces evil* is contrasted with *gains salvation*. These antonyms are lexical collocates of repentance and so are appropriate in projecting the theme of repentance. To renounce means to give up, usually what is not wanted because it is unpleasant, and in this case it is evil that is renounced; while to gain implies to avail oneself of something advantageous, something profitable, and here it is salvation that is gained. While the former is a negative verb that chooses a negative complement, the latter is positive verb which chooses positive complement. The antonyms are used by the bishops to draw a sharp contrast between the old way of life which the faithful are called to give up and the new way of life which they are enjoined to embrace. The old way of life is associated with evil and so should be abandoned, while the new way of life is associated with salvation and so should be embraced. The ladder through which to move from the old evil way to the new way of salvation is baptism. The message here is on the importance of baptism in spiritual renewal, in repentance and reconciliation with God. The occurrence of the word *conversion* in the co-text strengthens the theme of repentance.

In text 22 below, the theme of repentance is also underscored through contrast between the highlighted pairs of words:

Text 22:

Our Christians must swim against the prevailing current of moral and spiritual decadence by mounting the noble platform of true Christian living. They cannot do this unless they are truly converted. Conversion means a change of the centre of joy from **self** to **God**, from **hatred** to **love**, and from **vices** to **virtues**. (GCTR, P.16)

The antonyms are *self* and *God*, *hatred* and *love*, and *vices* and *virtues*. These antonyms are associated with conversion which implies a change from one state to another, a change from 'moral and spiritual decadence' to 'true Christian living.' The antonyms are used to mark the wide gap that exists between the opposing states. One state is characterised by self, hatred and vices, the other by God, love and virtues. Conversion thus becomes the means of moving away from the unpleasant state which is the former, to the pleasant state which is the latter. The bishops define the meaning of conversion by means of these antonyms so as to emphasise the change that is needed in the renewal of life--change from a sinful life to a righteous one. The change expected is from negative attributes which are self-centredness, hatred and vices to positive ones which are God-centeredness, love, and virtues. Conversion here is synonymous with repentance.

3.2.3.4 Antonyms Signifying the Theme of Love

As in the case of the portrayal of the themes of faith, loyalty and repentance, the theme of love is also portrayed by the bishops through the use of antonyms. Love-related antonyms constitute 22.1% of the total frequency (163) of love-related lexical forms in the letters. Examples include *hatred-love*, *peace-disorder*, *rich-poor*, *human-divine*, *male-female*, *husband-wife*, *action-definition*, *passion-reason*, *permits-forbids*, *altruistic-fools*, *folly-wisdom*, *earthly-heavenly*, *freedom-enslavement*, *man-woman*, *total-selective*, *Eros-Agape*, *faithful-unfaithful*, *giving-receiving*, *includes-excludes*, *words-deeds*, *joy-sadness*, *virtue-vice*, *young-old*, *sickness-good health*, etc. Text 23 below is an example for illustration:

Text 23:

Love is a single entity that has a **giving** and a **receiving** end. Neither **giving** alone nor **receiving** alone is enough, for love is reciprocal. Our capacity and readiness to **give** or show love should be equalled by our readiness for and **receptivity** to love. Only those who are open and **receptive** to love can really **give** love in return. (LALG, pp.44-45)

The antonyms deployed here are *giving* and *receiving*. In the first sentence, the words function as participles qualifying the noun *end*. In the second sentence, they are deployed as gerunds functioning as the compound subjects of the main clause of the sentence. Then in the third sentence, the antonyms are repeated as *give* and *receptivity*, the former being a finite verb and the latter a noun. In the last sentence, the antonyms again change forms to *give* and *receptive*, a finite verb and an adjective. The essence of the antonyms and their repetition into various forms is to emphasize the reciprocity of love, to emphasize the fact that love is not a one-sided affair, but something that is given and returned. The Biblical idea that it is more blessed to give than to receive does not seem to apply here. In the view of the bishops both the capacity to give and the capacity to receive love should be equalled. The antonyms are thus used to communicate the theme of love. The six-time repetition of the word *love* adds to the thematic emphasis.

In the same vein, the pairs of antonyms highlighted in text 24 point to the theme of love and enhances its understanding by the faithful:

Text 24:

God loves us unconditionally...in spite of our **sinfulness** or **sanctity** of life, **weakness** or **strength**, **failure** or **success**. (LALG, p.21)

The antonymous pairs are *sinfulness-sanctity*, *weakness-strength*, and *failure-success*. Each word in a pair is joined to the other with a coordinating conjunction *or*. The antonyms denote human conditions which the love of God transcends, but which determine human love. *Sinfulness*, *weakness*, and *failure* denote unpleasant conditions, while *sanctity*, *strength*, and *success* denote pleasant ones. Ordinarily, while the positive conditions attract God's love, the negative ones should not. This is where the unconditional love of God comes in, the type the faithful are enjoined to embrace. The synonyms are deployed to stress the fact that God loves humanity despite all odds. It is this unconditional love that made him sacrifice his only son for man despite man's sinfulness. The appeal the bishops make to the faithful here is that they should respond appropriately to the love of God by also showing unconditional love to one another and the entire creation.

3.2.4 Lexical Repetitions Signifying Themes

Lexical repetition is the occurrence of the same lexical item more than once in a text. Apart from serving a cohesive function, it is a strong pointer to the themes of a text. It keeps the reader focused on the topic or idea being repeated. Thompson (2004) observes that by repeating a wording or a meaning, speakers signal that they are keeping to the same topic, whereas absence of repetition might make it difficult for the hearers to understand that they are.

3.2.4.1 Lexical Repetitions Signifying the Theme of Faith

Faith-related lexical repetitions have the lowest frequency rate of 8.0% of the total frequency of faith-related lexical forms in the letters, which is 286. Words, such as *faith*, *believe*, *Church*, *mystery*, *Christianity*, *God*, *cross*, *Christian*, *commitment* etc., are repeated to keep the theme of faith in the consciousness of the audience to ensure concentration and understanding. In text 25 for example, the word *commitment* is repeated three times and the word *Christ* two times, to emphasise faith in God:

Text 25:

Faith in Jesus **Christ** which Paul harps upon is not merely an intellectual acceptance of a body of truth, but a total surrender and **commitment** to the person of **Christ**. It is not a **commitment** that is made once and for all. Rather, it is a **commitment** that is to be nurtured so that it can grow.... (LTF, p.17)

Commitment means devotion to something, somebody or a cause. It involves much attention and a sacrifice of both time and resources and so relates to faith. So does the word *Christ* relate to faith. Christ himself is the basis of Christian faith. By hammering on the words, *commitment* and *Christ*, the bishop registers the theme of faith in the minds of the faithful, as faith in God is considered by them to be a very important subject in Christianity.

Christianity as a religion which bothers mainly on mysteries requires faith for its acceptance and practice. Repetition of the faith-related words in this text is therefore important in ensuring that this message of faith is made clear to the faithful. The force of the repetition is intensified by the use of related words such as *acceptance* and *surrender*. These emphasize the degree of commitment to Christ expected of the faithful.

Another example of the use of lexical repetition to communicate the theme of faith in the bishops' letters is found in text 26 below:

Text 26:

The God we worship is a **mystery**. The Trinity is a **mystery**. The incarnation is a **mystery**. The teaching of Christ is **not according to the wisdom of this world**. The truths we teach are **mysteries, hidden from all eternity**. The death and resurrection of Christ are **mysteries**. The Church is a **mystery**. The Sacraments are **mysteries**. The priesthood is a **mystery**. The Christian life itself is a **mystery**. (WWF, pp.3-4)

Here, the word *mystery*, together with its variant *mysteries*, is repeated eleven times in various forms: six times as a singular noun, three times as a plural noun, and two times as restatements in other words (in sentences 4 and 5). This is a way of emphasising the fundamentality of faith to Christian religion. If everything about the Christian religion—God, the Trinity, the incarnation, the teaching of Christ, the truth taught by the Church, the death and resurrection of Christ, the Church, the Sacraments, the priesthood, and Christian life itself—is all mysteries, then the indispensability of faith in its practice becomes evident. The word *mystery* refers to something that is unfathomable, something, that is, beyond human understanding. It is therefore only through faith that such a thing can be accepted. Both the eleven time repetition of the word *mystery* and a catalogue of the essentials of Christianity which are all mysteries combine to make the message of faith in God stand out clearly. The faithful are made to see clearly the need for them to live a life of faith. The repetition, apart from emphasising the theme of faith, adds beauty and rhythm to the text.

3.2.4.2 Lexical Repetitions Signifying the Thee of Loyalty

Lexical items are also repeated in the bishops' letters to communicate the theme of loyalty to the Roman Catholic faith. They make up 10.8% per cent of the total frequency of loyalty-related lexical forms in the letters. The use of lexical repetitions in relation to the theme of loyalty is exemplified by text 27 below:

Text 27:

...**the Catholic Church** does not teach according to the popular opinion or expectations! The **Catholic Church** teaches and holds strongly to what has been handed on to her by God through Jesus Christ and the Apostles.(FFF, p.91)

In text 27, the noun phrase *the Catholic Church* is repeated two times as the subject of the two sentences in the text, the first sentence being negative and the second positive. The essence of the repetition is to lay emphasis on the Church as the true Church of God, a Church that is of divine origin, whose teachings are handed from God. The Church is presented as unique and superior to other Churches as its teachings are of divine origin, unlike those of other Churches. This may smack of pride, but the intention is to get the faithful to become proud of the Catholic faith and remain loyal to it. The repetition of the phrase *the Catholic Church* conveys this theme of loyalty to the Catholic faith.

Another instance of the use of lexical repetition to foreground the theme of loyalty to the Roman Catholic faith is seen in the repetition of the words *Catholic* and *faith* in text 28:

Text 28:

A **Catholic** who rejects or doubts a **Catholic** doctrine proposed to be believed with divine and **Catholic faith** or teaches a doctrine contrary to the **Catholic faith**, especially a **dogma fidei**, a dogmatic expression of **faith** is endangering his or her communion with the **Catholic** Church through heresy. (WWF, p.33)

Here, *Catholic* is repeated five times. In its first occurrence, it is used as a noun referring to an adherent of the Catholic faith. In its repeated occurrences it is used as an adjective qualifying *doctrine*, *faith*, and *Church*. The essence of the repetition is to emphasize adherence to the Catholic teachings as a necessary part of communion with the Church. In other words, loyalty to the teachings of the Church is a prerequisite for communion with the Church. Lack of such loyalty incurs the punishment of excommunication from the Church. This is meant to alert the faithful on the danger inherent in non-adherence to the Church's doctrine.

3.2.4.3 Lexical Repetitions Signifying the Theme of Repentance

As in the case of the theme of faith and loyalty, lexical repetition is also used to convey the theme of repentance.

Repentance-related lexical repetitions constitute 9.8% of the total frequency of repentance-related lexical forms deployed. Examples of the words repeated include: *Lent, conversion, repentance, sins, renewal, Christ, reconciliation, holiness, new, forgiveness, ashes, etc.* In text 29, for example, the word *Christ* is repeated eight times to emphasize the theme of repentance:

Text 29:

Our pastoral plan during this Lenten Season is centred on **Christ** and aims at leading our faithful to know, love and imitate **Christ** so that all may live the life of the Trinity and with **Christ** transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem. It is through fidelity to this that we all can live the life of **Christ**, the life from **Christ**, the life in **Christ**, and the life with **Christ**. This will then enable us to proclaim **Christ**, mould our communities with the hue of Christian heaven, and bring the incisive values of Christianity on all segments of our society and cultures. (*GCTR*, pp.4-5)

Here, the word *Christ* is repeated eight times. By means of this repetition the bishops emphasise the transforming power of Christ and the need for the faithful to avail themselves of this power by embracing Christ. Christ died to set man free from sins. He has thus delivered man from the shackles of sin and condemnation. Embracing Christ therefore is an acceptance of this freedom and a rejection of sin and its deadly consequences. It will result in the renewal of lives in all ramifications in line with Christian values. The word *Christ* thus connotes repentance, salvation and transformation. The rhythm formed by the repetition makes the message sticky and memorable. The essence of the repetition therefore is to emphasise and foreground the theme of repentance and reconciliation with God, and keep it in the consciousness of the faithful to enhance understanding.

In text 30 below, the lexical item *new* is repeated three times to foreground the theme of repentance:

Text 30:

This [Lenten period] is a period of a **new** beginning, a **new** birth, and a **new** spring time in our spiritual life. (*GCTR*, P.32)

New implies change from the old ways. Although the new way may sometimes be unpleasant and therefore unacceptable, the new way implied in the above text is pleasant and attractive. This is indicated by choice of the words *birth and spring* which denote phenomena that are happily welcomed. The word *new* together with *beginning, birth, and spring* connote newness and freshness of life. This is what repentance from sins means. By repeating the word *new* in the above text, the bishops emphasise the significance of the Season of Lent as a season of renewal of life, a season of repentance and reconciliation with God, and draw the attention of the faithful to the need for them to renew their lives by repenting of their sins especially during this season of renewal.

3.2.4.4 Lexical Repetitions Signifying the Theme of Love

Lexical repetition is one of the reiterative devices through which the theme of love is conveyed in the bishops' letters. Lexical repetitions make up 8.6% of the total frequency (163) of love-related lexical forms in letters. Examples of such words that are repeated include: *love, Agape, Christ, God, intimacy, Father, Christianity, care, etc.* Text 31 below is an example of the use of lexical repetition to express the theme of love in the letters:

Text 31:

In Jesus, the incarnate expression of divine **love** and mercy, we are taught the centrality of **love** in our lives and our relationship with **God**. Jesus teaches us that **God is love** (cf. I Jn.4:8), whoever **loves** is a child of **God** and knows **God** (cf. I Jn. 4:7) (*TML*, p. 10)

Here the word *love* is repeated four times: three times as a noun, and once as a verb to emphasis the theme of love. The word *God* is also repeated four times. By this repetition the message of love is fore grounded and understanding is enhanced. The message given to the faithful is that Jesus is a symbol of God's love and that they should emulate the kind of love he demonstrated, as such love is important in their lives and in their relationship with God who himself is love. It is only this God-like love symbolised by Jesus Christ that qualifies one to be a child of God and to know God. The hammering on the words *love* and *God* is an emphasis on the divinity of love and its necessity in relationship with God and man.

The repetition makes the message sticky and memorable in the minds of the faithful.

The same way, in text 32, the words *intimacy* and *love* are repeated to emphasise the love-relationship between God and man:

Text 32:

...there is an **intimacy** between God and us human beings; an **intimacy** made possible by the **love** that God has poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which he has given to us (Romans 5:5). Sometimes, the Bible uses the figure of mothers to represent this **intimacy** of **love** and care between God and human beings (Is. 49:14-15) (RBGN, p.11).

Intimacy is repeated three times while love is repeated two times. This is meant to emphasize the closeness that exists between God and man as a result of God's unconditional love for man. In the first occurrence of the word *intimacy* the faithful are informed of the existence of this closeness; in the second occurrence, the closeness is described, and finally, in the third occurrence, the faithful are told how it is represented in the Bible. Love is presented as the reason for this intimacy between God and man. The repetition of the two related words, in addition to their collocation with the word *care*, fortifies the theme of love. The message is validated by two references to the Holy Bible.

4.0 Conclusion

In this study, we have been able to examine the themes of the Roman Catholic bishops' Lenten pastoral letters in the Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha, as well as the lexical choices deployed to convey them, using Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar as a descriptive framework. Analysis revealed four major themes, namely: faith, loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church, repentance, and love. These were conveyed through lexical choices such as theme-related words, antonyms, synonyms, and lexical repetitions.

Frequency count of the lexical choices showed that the frequency of lexical choices relating to the theme of faith was 286 which was 35.0% of the total frequency deployed (817), and this was the highest. Next in high frequency were lexical choices relating to the theme of loyalty whose frequency was 185, that is 22.6% of 817. Repentance-related lexical choices were third in high frequency with a total of 183, which was 22.4% of 817. Finally, love-related lexical choices had the lowest frequency which was 163, that is 20.0% of 817. Of the lexical choices deployed to convey each of the themes, theme-related words had the highest frequency. In the case of the theme of faith, it was 55.6% of 286, loyalty 68.1% of 185, repentance 67.8% of 183, and love 47.2% of 163. The frequency of the lexical choices in each pastoral letter reflected a correlation between theme and lexical choice. For example, the frequency of faith-related lexical choices is higher in the letters dealing with the subject of faith than in those dealing with the subject of loyalty, repentance or love. The same is true of the lexical choices in the letters dealing with the other subjects.

The high frequency of lexical choices relating to the theme of faith reflected emphasis on the theme of faith, and suggested that the theme was of utmost importance to the bishops. It was also not a coincidence that the theme of loyalty ranked next in emphasis, judging from the number of lexical choices relating to the theme. This is because faith in the Roman Catholic Church draws from Faith in God. This is suggested by the order in which the two occur in the Apostles' Creed.

Tables: Lexical choices and Themes

Theme-related lexical choices	CTC	GCTR	WWF	FFF	TML	IYHF	RBGN	LALG	LTF	OEO	Total	%
Faith-related	6	14	56	50	5	49	14	13	47	32	286	35.0
Loyalty-related	19	22	36	43	14	13	2	5	14	17	185	22.6
Repentance-related	41	51	16	10	4	3	32	10	9	7	183	22.4
Love-related	3	8	11	7	50	5	11	63	3	2	163	20.0
Total	69	95	119	110	73	70	59	91	73	58	817	100.0

3.1 Distribution of Lexical Choices Relating to Themes

• Faith-related Lexical Choices

Faith-related lexical choices	CTC	GCTR	WWF	FFF	TML	IYHF	RBGN	LALG	LTF	OEO	Total	%
Words	6	14	27	22	4	26	10	11	24	15	159	55.6
Synonyms	-	-	11	15	-	10	2	-	11	7	56	19.6
Antonyms	-	-	12	10	1	7	2	2	8	6	48	16.8
Lexical repetitions	-	-	6	3	-	6	-	-	4	4	23	8.0
Total	6	14	56	50	5	49	14	13	47	32	286	100.0

Table 3.2: Distribution of Lexical Choices Relating to the Theme of Faith

• Loyalty-related Lexical Choices

Loyalty-related lexical choices	CTC	GCTR	WWF	FFF	TML	IYHF	RBGN	LALG	LTF	OEO	Total	%
Words	17	19	23	22	14	8	2	2	9	10	126	68.1
Antonyms	1	2	5	9	-	4	-	2	1	3	27	14.6
Lexical repetitions	-	-	5	9	-	-	-	1	3	2	20	10.8
Synonyms	1	1	3	3	-	1	-	-	1	2	12	6.5
Total	19	22	36	43	14	13	2	5	14	17	185	100.0

Table 3.3: Distribution of Lexical Choices Relating to the Theme of Loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church

• Repentance-related Lexical choices

Repentance-related lexical choices	CTC	GCTR	WWF	FFF	TML	IYHF	RBGN	LALG	LTF	OEO	Total	%
Words	28	32	12	7	2	3	21	8	6	5	124	67.8
Antonyms	3	5	1	2	2	-	4	1	2	2	22	12.0
Synonyms	5	5	3	1	-	-	3	1	1	-	19	10.4
Lexical repetitions	5	9	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	18	9.8
Total	41	51	16	10	4	3	32	10	9	7	183	100.0

Table 3.4: Distribution of Lexical Choices Relating to the Theme of Repentance

• Love-related Lexical Choices

Love-related lexical choices	CTC	GCTR	WWF	FFF	TML	IYHF	RBGN	LALG	LTF	OEO	Total	%
Words	3	6	8	5	19	5	7	19	3	2	77	47.2
Antonyms	-	1	1	2	15	-	3	14	-	-	36	22.1
Synonyms	-	1	2	-	9	-	1	23	-	-	36	22.1
Lexical repetitions	-	-	-	-	7	-	-	7	-	-	14	8.6
Total	3	8	11	7	50	5	11	63	3	2	163	100.0

Table 3.5: Distribution of Lexical Choices relating to the Theme of Love

References

Primary Data

- Gbuji, A.O. 2001. *God is calling us to reconciliation*. Enugu: SNAAP Press Ltd.
- Okafor, S.A. 2008. *Repent and believe the good news*. Awka: Fides Communications.
- Okafor, S.A. 2000. *Call to conversion*. Awka: Fides Communications.
- Okeke, V.M. 2006. *If only you have faith*. Enugu: SNAAP Press Ltd.
- Okeke, V.M. 2005. *The measure of love*. SNAAP Press Ltd.
- Okeke, P.O. 2004. *From faith to faith*. Onitsha: Goodmark Prints Production Inc.
- Okeke, P.O. 2003. *We walk by faith*. Onitsha: Goodmark Prints Production Inc.
- Okoye, J.I. 2008. *Living in the amazing love of God*. Enugu: SNAAP Press Ltd.
- Okoye, J.I. 2006. *Living the faith*. Enugu: SNAAP Press Ltd.
- Onaga, C.V.C. 2010. *Okwukwe ezi olu*. Enugu: Black Belt Konzult Ltd.

Secondary Sources

- De Beaugrande, R. 1991. *Linguistic theory: the discourse of fundamental works*. Essex: Longman Group.
- Halliday, M.A.K. 1985. *An introduction to functional linguistics*. London: Longman.
- Palmer, F.R. 2000. *Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Robin, J. (1990). *Lexical choice in natural language generation*.
- Academiccommons.columbia.edu/download/fedora...cucs-040-90pdf. Accessed on July 21, 2014.
- Saeed, J.I. 2009. *Semantics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Thompson, G. 2004. *Introducing functional grammar*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder Arnold.