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EDIFICATION AND PERSUASION IN THE GERMAN CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The presented results of the research are focused on the categories of edification and persuasion, which are considered to be structure-forming for German Pastoral Letters and sermons. Pastoral Letters and sermons are the main genres of religious communication, whose main function is the stimulating one realized through communicative and pragmatic categories of edification and persuasion. The application of stylistic, interpretative, content textual and content analysis help to reveal the characteristics of the studied categories in German religious texts. The category of edification is based on semantic oppositions, such as material – spiritual, creativity – routine, sin – salvation, which support the speaker’s appeal to God and create the image of God - world's savior. The authors state that axiology in German Pastoral Letters and sermons has an absolute character with God being the absolute value, and the rest values deriving from the absolute one. Sublimated ethic evaluations based on Christian norms prevail in the Catholic Pastoral Letters and sermons, the positive evaluation correspond with the norm and the negative with anti-norm. The linguistic means of the persuasion are determined: modal verbs, compound nominal predicate, copulative verbs. Obligation in German religious discourse is directed not only to the addressee but towards the speaker as well.

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1. Introduction

Institutional communication in the social institute of religion is in the focus of interest of the scientists all over the world. Thus, Kornienko (2016) studies the influence of religious practices, which are realized in the social institute of church, on the formation of different institutional frames in the American society (p. 22); Kirghiz scientists Zhunushova and Edilbek (2019) consider the institute of religion as one of the forms of self-organization of society (p. 145). Religious discourse is defined as “the language of religion, theological language, and depending upon one’s perspective, much if not all of empirical language. Religious discourse is composed of all the utterances of religious individuals regarding their experiences of the Divine” (Grimes, 1994, p. 21), “special area of communicative action proceeding from institutionalized churches mainly and from believers” (Kuße, 2012, p. 113). Such characteristics as sacredness, fideism, institutionalism, theatricality, ritualization are embodied in religious discourse. As Maingueneau (2019) states, religious discourse is “self-constituting discourse. It forms a network of genres, which are distributed over a scale. More exactly, two complementary hierarchies must be distinguished. The first one opposes ‘archetexts’ and ‘ordinary texts’; the other ‘top’ and ‘secondary’ genres”.

2. Problem Statement

The religious sermon discourse attracts attention of scientists from different spheres of humanitarian knowledge. It is characterized by a high degree of institutionality and ritualization; the collective addressee, edification, a direct call to action. It is as well characterized by restricted topics of religious communication concerning ideological problems, spiritual values on the one hand, and empirical conclusions, reflections on the basis of the addressee’s personal experience on the other hand. We consider the sermon and Pastoral Letter (Hirtenbrief) to be the main speech genres of religious sermon discourse. They are the components of worship service and are communicatively orientated to the collective addressee and God. The collective addressee is worshipers, who come to the service, or all believers of this confession in the case of indirect communication.

According to the goal of the religious sermon discourse, consisting in edification and enlightening, it is characterized as edifying. The main objectives of this type of discourse are the translation of religious experience; education; promotion of religious values, norms, patterns of behavior; the impact on the cognitive, emotional and motivational spheres of the addressee.

In fact, the term “edifying” adds to such characteristics of religious discourse as enlightening. Edification is seen in the process of transferring values, norms and rules by the addresser who represents a public or state institution. Moreover, edification is revealed in the direct “moral impact on the individual with regard to moral norms of the society” (Avdosenko, 2018, p. 9). The purpose of any edifying piece of work is “incorporation of new notions in the recipient’s worldview, informing him of environmental components unknown to him, which may force the recipient to change his behavior and/or attitude towards the reality” (Avdosenko, 2018, p. 8). Edification is the basis of most speech genres of religious sermon discourse.

Both the religious sermon and Pastoral Letter are a public speech of the addresser, who represents the religious institution, during the worship service. The religious sermon is supposed to be a public speech of a preacher during the worship service directly in the church or indirectly via mass media. The speech appeals to listeners and contains clarifications of the dogma, comments on the Holy Scriptures, and recommendations for appropriate behavior. The goal of the sermon is to make religiously motivated impact on the ideology and behavior of the collective addressee by bringing to their consciousness certain maxims of Christian dogma.

The difference between the sermon and Pastoral Letter is in the type of communicators. Pastoral Letters seem to have two types of addresser: a single addresser, the head of a certain Christian church or bishopric, and the group of addressers - a group of clergymen with the status of a bishop or clergyman. Depending on the content of the Pastoral Letter and the format of the presentation, written or verbal, the Pastoral Letter may have several types of addressee: 1) officials of a church or government; 2) worshippers in the church during Pastoral Letter; 3) readers of religious sites.

The content of the Pastoral Letter is focused on informing addressees about the main events of the church and the state life, clarifying fundamental tenets of Christianity and glorification of church holidays. Modus frame of the content has several speech genres: congratulations, wishes, edification, glorification (Orekhova, 2015, p. 13).

The core function of the public speech genres of Pastoral Letter and sermon is the regulatory function, since their purpose is to influence the ideology and behavior of believers. This function is implemented through the categories of edification and persuasion.

3. Research Questions

Religious ethics includes a set of moral ideas about a person's behavior and content of moral consciousness, based on the divine commandments set out in the precedent texts of world religions. The distinctive feature of religious ethics is "establishing norms of person's attitude to God and interpreting ethic norms as divine settings which have absolute meaning apart from relationships between people" (Slovar'..., 2007). That is why "If there is, for example, a fundamental conflict between what God wants and what humans naturally want, then religious ethics will make fundamental the principle that human wants should be sacrificed for God's" (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019). Religious ethization occurs through instructions, where the special role is given to edification. As Shutova (2016) notes, the difference between instruction and edification is that "both admonition and edification are laconic instructions how to act in a certain situation, though edification means not only instruction but a list of certain actions with the help of which one can achieve favorable result" (p. 72). Edification means the approval of a specific system of values, norms and assessments.

4. Purpose of the Study

In this article the authors discuss the realization of edification and persuasion categories within institutional religious communication in the speech genres of sermon and Pastoral Letters produced during the worship service in the church or via mass media. Communication during a worship service and

religious communication of a preaching type via TV, radio or the Internet is a subtype of religious discourse. While in the church it reveals a hierarchy between the members of the religious society: a priest and a worshiper. Explanation of the creed, appeal to the faith and virtue are the goals of this kind of preaching performance.

Texts of sermons and Pastoral Letters of Catholic priests Archbishop of Hamburg Dr. Stefan Heße, Bishop of Stuttgart Dr. Gebhard Fürst and Bishop of Augsburg Dr. Konrad Zdarsa are analysed.

5. Research Methods

Pragmalinguistic and cognitive-stylistic approach are applied in the process of the research of discourse. To analyze and describe the language material we use the following methods: interpretative analysis, elements of conceptual analysis, methods of contextual analysis, linguistic and stylistic, methods of content analysis and general scientific methods of observation, introspection, comparison and systematization of linguistic facts.

6. Findings

The category of edification in the religious conceptual system is expressed through lexical semantics and manifests itself, in particular, in the use of appropriate keywords and leitmotifs. In German religious sermon discourse the following lexemes function as key words: *Gott, Liebe Gottes, Hoffnung, Freude, Sohn Gottes, Mensch, Geschöpf, Aufgabe, Gottes Abbild*, etc. The main concepts expressed by key words form basic semantic oppositions. The following axiological dichotomies are typical for Christian Catholic sermons: material goods – spiritual values; creativity – routine; sin – salvation, etc.: “*Wo Gott Wohnung nimmt unter den Menschen, da verwandelt sich die Welt, da wird aus Unfriede Friede, da entsteht im Streit Versöhnung, da wandelt sich Verzweiflung in Zuversicht*” (Fürst, 2017). This example is based on the general human values ‘*Der Friede(n)*’, ‘*die Versöhnung*’, ‘*die Zuversicht*’, which contrast with anti-values common in the modern society, such as ‘*der Unfriede*’, ‘*der Streit*’, ‘*die Verzweiflung*’. Thus, a preacher openly expresses his assessment and points to its veracity by appealing to the authority of God, forming the image of God the Savior, mediator and creator who rules the world.

Characterizing the evaluation system in religious discourse, one should indicate its absolute nature, since the absolute ideal – God – is established, as well as his attributes and qualities. More than that, we witness the value hierarchy, because other Christian values such as faith, church, Christian virtues are derivatives from the idea of God. “*Selbst in Situationen, in Zeiten, in denen wir uns verschätzt und verfehlt haben, gibt es Hoffnung auf Gottes rettendes Handeln*” (Fürst, 2018a). Word combination ‘*Gottes rettendes Handeln*’ (God’s saving actions) in this example points to “the last instance”, almighty being, who is able to correct everything.

In Catholic sermons and Pastoral Letters sublimated ethical evaluations based on Christian norms prevail: positive assessment is the norm, while negative assessment means anti-norm. Everything which corresponds to God’s will is assessed positively, while all that deviates from it has a negative evaluation. For instance, “*Wo die Kraft, die von diesem Kind ausgeht, wo die Kraft des Jesus von Nazaret wirksam wird, da richtet sich kein Mensch gegen den anderen, vielmehr treten wir in dieser Kraft mutig für andere*

ein“ (Fürst, 2017). It is normal for a religious behavior to help and protect another man (*mutig für j-n eintreten*), and internal motive is faith in God and his son Jesus (*in der kraft des Jesus von Nazaret*). Joint prayers and participation in worship services are positively assessed as well: *“Es ist gewiß gut, wenn jemand zu Hause ein frommes Buch oder sogar die Hl. Schrift liest, aber noch wichtiger ist es, wenn Christen gemeinsam handeln, miteinander beten und miteinander den Gottesdienst feier“*. This abstract contains positive evaluation of reading spiritual literature and religious precedent texts. However, Dr. Gebhard Fürst highlights the special significance of joint actions of Christians, using the adverb ‘*gemeinsam*’ and pronoun ‘*miteinander*’ in combination with the adjective in comparative degree ‘*wichtiger*’. In this way the preacher builds the hierarchy of religious norms of Christian behaviour. World temptations, immersion into routine, thoughtless use of digital technologies get negative evaluation in Catholic sermons: *“Als Christinnen und Christen haben wir den Auftrag, die gesamte Schöpfung, uns Menschen und letztlich auch Gott selbst vor dem Zugriff des technologisch Machbaren zu schützen”* (Fürst, 2018a). Lexical units ‘*der Zugriff*’, ‘*das technologisch Machbare*’ and ‘*schützen*’ are the indicators of negative evaluation in this example. Explicit character of evaluation, which is another peculiar property, is revealed in semantics of basic concepts GOD, GOOD, LOVE, FAITH and their oppositions. Evaluation of the discussed object is expressed from the position of Christian morals, fully shared and approved by the author of the sermon. The usage of inclusive pronoun in the plural form *Wir* alone or in combination with the appositive *Wir Christen* or predicative attribute *Wir als Christinnen und Christen* give the assessment objectivized character.

Modal operators can be represented in the statement by modal words, modal word combinations, modal introductory sentences giving a positive or negative assessment: *Es ist wahr, dass...*, *Es ist falsch (gewiss, unmöglich)*, adverbs: *gut-schlecht; richtig-falsch*, evaluative lexemes expressing axiological modality: *Unbestritten sind viele Innovationen wichtig und gut. Vieles aber nimmt auch eine bedrohliche Form an*. Markers of modality in this example are positively (*wichtig, gut*) and negatively estimated (*bedrohlich*) adjectives, the participle ‘*unbestritten*’. Bishop Heße (2018a) uses several lexical units expressing the category of modality in his sermon: *“Offenbar hat er selber genau dort gelebt. Vielleicht brauchen wir manchmal solche Wüstenzeiten, Zeiten, in der wir auf die Stille lauschen. Das kann man nur, wenn man so eine kleine Wüste um sich hat”*. The author uses a whole arsenal of modality means: modal words and word combinations, verbs, intensifying particles. All this allows him to create a plausible image of the past time and draw parallels with the modern Christian world, forming required evaluation and further model of behavior.

Personal evaluation comes to the first place when it is conditioned by increased emotional attitude of a preacher to the subject of the speech: a clergyman speaks on behalf of himself, using the first person singular *Ich*. *“Als ich vor einigen Wochen auf einer Pilgerreise in die Ausgrabungen des Wohnorts Jesu bei der Familie des Petrus hinunterschaute, hat mich das sehr bewegt und beeindruckt“* (Fürst, 2017). The preacher speaks about his feelings during the visit to Capernaum using evaluative verbs ‘*bewegen*’ and ‘*beeindrucken*’. Personal pronoun *Ich* serves often to create a certain image and forms a certain attitude to some problem or situation. For example: *“Und schließlich hören wir auf die Stimme der Schöpfung, von der ich manchmal den Eindruck habe, dass Sie uns anwimmert und sie dann fleht, dass wir auf sie hören”* (Heße, 2018a). The use of inclusive *wir*, then personal pronoun *ich* and then again *wir*

allows the author to switch from the collective addresser to the individual one and then back to the collective one. Such technique makes it possible to affect the listeners, making them virtual participants of events and co-authors of the thoughts and experience of the speaker.

The subjective assessment gets special intensity when a priest exposes vices of church itself. Thus, in one of the sermons bishop of Stuttgart Dr. Fürst (2018b) uses pejorative emotional evaluative lexemes, expressing his indignation about the facts of pedophilia among priests: *“Ich selbst bin erschüttert über das Ausmaß der äußerst schrecklichen Verbrechen, die Priester und Ordensleute an Kindern und Jugendlichen, begangen haben“*. The author’s negative evaluative means are highly emotional and intensive and express his own personal attitude to the events. The verbs ‘*erschüttern*’, ‘*erschrecken*’ and adjectives with suffix – los ‘*sprachlos*’, ‘*fassungslos*’ belong to the means of negative evaluation.

The second category under discussion in this article is the category of persuasion. Means expressing persuasion correspond to patterns of communicative intention in different types of discourse and speech genre. According to ethic norms, persuasive means maybe categorical, non-categorical and neutral; direct and indirect.

Indirect persuasion in religious communication supposes persuasion by explaining certain maxims of Christian dogma to the listeners in order to impel them to act in religious and extra-religious spheres of life. Instead of imperative statements, descriptive declarative sentences are used, containing a description of state of affairs and author’s arguments as well as statements expressing the modality of necessity, duty, desirability and appeal.

The category of persuasion reveals itself mainly through different modality means. Duty and responsibility in religious communication have always been considered to be attributes of “moral law”. Persuasive modality and modality of obligation (debitive modality) are connected with each other since obligation justifies persuasion and contains an indication to act mentally or physically or to reject the action. Therefore, linguistic means expressing persuasive and debitive modalities intervene and have much in common.

The main means expressing obligation in the German language are constructions with modal verbs ‘*müssen*’ and ‘*sollen*’. Constructions with the verb *müssen* mean obligation arising from necessity which is connected with moral or civic duty: *“Sie merken dann oft genug, wie schwierig es ist, sozusagen zwischen allen Seiten stehen zu müssen”* (Heße, 2018a). In the above cited sermon at ecumenical worship in honor of opening the congress of members of CDU in Hamburg bishop Hesse appeals to the experience of believers, speaking about deputies’ duty to take into account all sides concerned. The verb ‘*müssen*’ in this fragment points to civic duty of those who were elected by people. We find another example of this verb usage in the sermon by Dr. Zdarsa (2018): *“Schon bei der Bezeichnung dieses allgemeinen Feiertags müssen ja Gläubige und Ungläubige, Tiefverwurzelte und Unbedarfte anheben und ins Fragen und Erklären kommen”*. In this example the verb is used to indicate the inner necessity of a person to search the meaning of the feast of the body of Christ.

The constructions with the verb ‘*sollen*’ in German religious discourse are quite frequent as they are commonly used in citation or reference to religious maxims from the Bible or opinions of the authorities. These constructions express intention, request, demand, or appeal to perform an action: *“Sie schicken ihre Schüler, die sich mit Jesus abgeben sollen”* (Heße, 2018b). In this example the verb ‘*sollen*’

refers to the Pharisees who were impelled to go to Jesus to trap him and thereby discredit in the eyes of the citizens. The preacher often appeals to the audience pointing out the necessary actions: *“In diesem Sinne dürfen wir uns sehen und unseren Nächsten, den wir lieben sollen wie uns selbst”* (Fürst, 2018b). In this case the verb *‘sollen’* expresses demand by the Holy Scriptures, - one of the Gospel commandments (Matthew 22, P.39). It should be noted that when used with the second person, the verbs *‘müssen’* and *‘sollen’* express the highest degree of obligation, the range of actions may refer to different spheres of activities. When the verbs are used with the first person or the collective addresser including the speaker, the obligation acquires the moral aspect.

The constructions with the modal verb *‘dürfen’* and negation express the meaning of strong prohibition of any action: *“Wir dürfen den Umgang mit den Feiertagen nicht einseitig verfolgten ökonomischen oder individualistischen Interessen überlassen”* (Fürst, 2018a) The use of inclusive pronoun *Wir* highlights the moral aspect and reduces the strength of the statement, because the demand appeals not only to the audience but also to the speaker himself. The similar meaning we can find when the subject of the sentence, referring to the collective doer, is expressed by the relative pronoun in complex sentences with a subject clause: *“Eines aber können wir daraus lernen: Wer überzeugen will, der darf nicht an Unwesentlichem, der darf nicht an den Gütern dieser Welt hängen”*. The collective doer, expressed by interrogative pronoun *Wer* and demonstrative pronoun *der*, refers not only to believers, parishioners and the speaker himself but also to people who are far from religion.

Some verbal and substantivized constructions refer to language means expressing the category of persuasion besides modal verbs. For instance, in the passage from Dr. Fürst’s sermon the construction with extended attribute expressed by Infinitive 1 with the particle *‘zu’* means objective necessity: *“Die christlichen Feste halten die unter keinen Umständen zu verletzende Würde des Menschen fest”* (Fürst, 2018c). The demand to preserve human dignity is enhanced by the use of adverbial modifier *‘unter keinen Umständen’*.

Statements with lexical units *‘Auftrag’* (obligation), *‘Anfrage’* (request) and *‘Aufgabe’* (task, purpose) express less strong obligation especially when combined with the appeal, which is addressed to all believers including the preacher and the church: *“Um dieses kulturellen Gedächtnisses willen ist die Bewahrung der christlichen Feiertage eine dringliche, auch gesellschaftspolitische Aufgabe der Kirche”* (Fürst, 2018c). The meaning of obligation in such kind of statements often intervenes with the meaning of moral duty and appeal.

The sentence patterns with compound nominal predicate and copulative verbs *sein, heißen, gelten* are often used to formulate moral demands: *“...dann heißt das für unsere Zeit: Seelsorger dürfen keinen Unterschied machen; die Kleinen und die Großen, die Armen und die Reichen, alle sind gleich zu behandeln”* (Fürst, 2018a). The lexemes with the meaning of obligation highlight the meaning of duty: *‘bedingungslos’, unverbrüchlich’*: *“Das ‚Ja‘ Gottes zum Menschen ist grundlegend, es gilt bedingungslos und bleibt unverbrüchlich“* (Fürst, 2018a).

Thus, persuasion and obligation in religious sermon discourse are addressed not to another person but also to the speaker himself, that is why it doesn’t bring arrogance or separation, but expresses universal obligation which promotes unity and faith.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of speech genres of sermon and Pastoral Letters in German religious sermon discourse shows that it is determined by the edifying character which consists in the statement of moral, ethical and religious norms, moral conviction and emotional impact.

Communicative pragmatic categories of edification and persuasion are the main categories of religious sermon discourse. The category of edification reflects the main goal of religious discourse to reveal religious doctrine and form the system of religious notions and principles. The consolidation of values and models of behavior is achieved through edification. Communicative pragmatic category of edification is revealed through key religious concepts, semantic oppositions, which are the basis of religious axiology, appeal to the Holy Scriptures and personal experience of a preacher.

Persuasion as a characteristic feature of religious sermon discourse is supposed to make the audience motivated and stimulate them to an appropriate action in religious and non-religious spheres of life. Spiritual unity of the author of the sermon or Pastoral Letters with the collective addressee makes it possible to use indirect and implicit forms of persuasion instead of direct imperativeness. Indirect persuasion in religious communication is accomplished through the information, clarification and inspiration of a certain maxim of Christian doctrine, as well as by means of debitive modality.

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