



**Pentecostalism and Nigeria's English Usage: A Pragmatic  
Analysis of Select Expressions**

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**Abstract**

The paper attempts to investigate the pragmatic choices interactants make in the use of the selected expressions: *it is well, (we) thank God, glory be to God, it is not my portion, by the grace of God, I am rich, I am strong, my case is different, may God go (be) with you and the devil is a liar* spoken by Nigerian English users, especially among the Pentecostal adherents in their daily communicative activities. Specifically, the study aims to analyse the semantico-pragmatic peculiarities in terms of the contextual usage of the constructions. The theories considered relevant to the study are van Dijk's Context Models and Mey's theory of Pragmatic Acts. The theories are relevant because they account for the situational appropriateness of language use where meaning is contextually-determined by participants with shared situation knowledge and linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds. Data for the study were generated by means of participant observation by the researcher who is also a Pentecostal Christian and speaker of Nigerian English in informal and formal domains. The findings indicate that the creations are aspects of contextual (mis)appropriation of biblical incidences into Nigerian English usage in specific interactive situations to pragmatically function as: interruptive marker, expression of empathy and religiosity, pragmatic presupposition, advance rejection of tragedy, exercise of faith and escapist stance, among others. The study is expected to enhance the desired comprehension during interactions involving Nigerian English users of different religious affiliations, and foreign speakers of English.

**Key Words:** Pentecostalism, Nigerian English, Pragmatic analysis,  
Select expressions, Contextual usage.

## **1.0 Introduction**

Colonialism has had a multidimensional impression on Nigeria and Nigerians. These range from the political, religious, sociocultural, linguistic, legal, administrative, educational to the commercial spheres. The colonial masters came with political authority, Christian religion and the English language. Through political authority, Nigeria was divided then into protectorates for administrative convenience. The Christian religion was propagated through the activities of the undaunted missionaries that engendered the proliferation of churches grouped into the orthodox and unorthodox or the Pentecostal. The English language which was the communication tool of the British had been successfully implanted with increasing roles in education, politics, commerce, administration, law, religion, government and governance. The dynamic and flexible nature of English lend it to the increasing acceptance of emerging linguistic items to account for the contextual usage of creations that are mutually intelligible to interlocutors with shared linguistic and socio-religious backgrounds.

According to Boyd (1933), the earliest translation of the Bible into English was done in 1382 by John Wycliffe. Boyd claims that William Tyndale did the printed copy of the English Bible in 1522 while the King James edition came in 1611. This development facilitated the fusing and introduction of a number of forms and expressions in the process of its translation into the English language. The English translation affords Christians the world over the adequate utilization of the Bible, through reading, comprehension and the practice of scriptural events, doctrines and admonition, and the application of Biblical allusions to non-Biblical communication situations. The Pentecostal waves in Nigeria from the 1970s have enabled the increasing domestication of a number of English expressions. The sociolinguistic outcome of Pentecostal English usage in the Nigerian linguistic diversity appears to have aided the extraction of Biblical allusions and scriptural messages for use among Christians in different speech events and contexts. A pragmatic assessment of such allusions and the similar creations could only help to

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disambiguate them by contextualising the constructions with the intended meanings known to the discourse participants who have the shared situation knowledge and referential mechanism for adequate interpretation. This paper, therefore, investigates the scriptural origin, contextual usage and meanings of the selected expressions in the Nigerian English. It is believed that the analysis will enhance meaning explication of the selected and similar expressions adapted to Nigerian English usage.

### **1.1 Statement of problem**

English is adjudged to be the most widely spoken language globally. It enhances and bridges the communication gap in heterogeneous and multilingual nations like Nigeria. Because of its wide usage, it serves as the medium for international communication and transactions in communicative activities involving interlocutors from diverse national, ethnic and religious affiliations who must have acquired/learned English(es) in different sociolinguistic contexts. The differences in terms of situations of usage and meanings in the Nigerian English expression with religious colouration and Biblical origin, particularly interactions involving participants of dissimilar religious backgrounds constitute the problem of the study. Therefore, this study attempts to account for the scriptural origin of the selected references and their contextual usage and meanings among Nigerian Pentecostal Christians in order to ease the desired comprehension and mutual intelligibility in speech events involving Nigerian English users and non-Nigerian speakers of English.

### **1.2 Research questions**

The study specifically seeks to answer the following questions:

- i. What are the scriptural origins of the selected Nigerian English expressions?
- ii. What category of Nigerians mutually understands these expressions?
- iii. What are their pragmatic dimensions in Nigerian English usage?

### **2.0 Literature review**

Pentecostalism is a charismatic protestant Christian movement that places emphasis on direct personal encounter with Jesus Christ (God)

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as the healer and saviour of mankind through the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the belief of converts to be “born again” (Kalu, 2008; Rotimi, Nwadiolor & Ugwuja, 2016). It is a revival movement with unique tenets and mode of worship which has gradually expanded in terms of number of adherents and denominations. Specifically, Pentecostal churches are the denominations that uphold the belief that all Christians should seek a post-conversion experience called baptism of the Holy Spirit which is believed to be accompanied by a sign - the gift of tongues as encountered in the Book of Acts in the Bible (Isaacson, 1990; Rotimi, Nwadiolor & Ugwuja, 2016). The doctrines of this set of Christians are premeditated with the inspiration and recognition of the undiluted facts that there is one true God, salvation of mankind, baptism of the Holy Spirit, divine healing, final judgment of man, the heaven and the earth, among other tenets.

Historically, in Nigeria, Pentecostalism started in the early 1960s following the establishment of the Scripture Union (SU) Movement. Through the evangelical students' revival in the 1970s, the Movement created their own spaces for worship by combining elements of African worship which was widely spread in the early 1980s by the establishment of many churches propagating similar creeds (Kalu, 2008; Marshall, 2009; Aremu, 2013). Deriving its name and mission from the historical event of the Biblical Pentecost, from the time of its foundation in Nigeria, it has propagated experiential Christianity. It does this through the spiritual revival of congregants by physical baptism with evidence of the Holy Spirit shown in speaking in tongues. Magbadelo (2004) claims that the increasing expansion of Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria from the 1980s is as a result of the country's economic and political crisis which psychologically lured the frustrated populace to seek solace in these denominations. To Magbadelo, it is not a sort of blessing but an act elicited by 'helplessness'. On the contrary, Ukpong (2006) maintains that Pentecostalism, from its existence in Nigeria, has been a blessing to the Church and a reawakening call to the reality of man as a spiritual entity living to proclaim and propagate the gospel of Christ.

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Viewed in the negative or positive perspectives, its decade of practice has exerted influence on English language use in Nigeria.

In sociolinguistics considerations, Pentecostalism exhibits traits of some foreign language techniques influence on Nigerian Christians during visits for crusades. Its beliefs and dogmas have some level of impact on the English language usage and communication among Nigerian Christians (Offiong, 2003; Ugot & Offiong, 2013). The influence in this respect, has expectedly created some linguistic choices with peculiar registers and style among the target population. Similar studies have established that Nigerian Pentecostal Christians are evident in their character and language with peculiar linguistic phenomenon that shows stylistic deviations and diverse expressions that place their speech events in the Pentecostal context. The investigations show that Christianity as a faith has been seen to have developed a system of communication with specialised terms and expressions upon which meanings and usage may be redefined, modified or extended (Onoja, 2010; Amadi, 2013; Awonuga, 2016; Ushie & Nweze, 2019). The diverse expressions which redefine, extend or modify meanings in the contextual usage conform with the Nigerian sociocultural space that determine the assigned meanings by the interlocutors with common experience.

Therefore, English usage by worshippers, is intended to integrate and unify speakers of different Nigerian indigenous languages. The integrating function is performed through the communication of the shared sociocultural experience, often marked by expressions that tend to construct and perceive the Nigerian environment with entries from scriptural and religious sources (Chiluwa, 2007; Taiwo, 2009; Umera-Okereke & Ahaotu, 2018). These peculiarities in the usage of English in Nigeria are often described within the concept of Nigerianism. Nigerianism in English usage is a phenomenon that represents the domestication of English as a second language such that it accommodates some variants that express indigenous norms and sociocultural beliefs acceptable and intelligible in Nigeria (Aremu, 2013; Ikoru, 2018). For the elements of Nigerianism, Kperogi (2015, 2019) enumerate them to include linguistic improvisation, British

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archaism, normalized usage errors, and mishmash of American and British English. Kperogi reiterates that Nigerian English is a fastest growing non-native variety globally which bears contemporary but distinct grammatical, structural and stylistic features that appear very interesting.

In the context of Nigerian Pentecostal English usage, Aremu (2013) avers that the expressions are attributive to the sociocultural knowledge of participants who communicate with religious registers in religious and non-religious interactions to recontextualise the circumstances from scriptural events. In this direction, Aleke (2018) states that Nigeria's usage of the expression *to God be the glory* could account for different meanings depending on the communicative situations. It could be an expression of empathy, performative, conclusive, presupposition and response markers, meta-discourse or interruptive device. The frequent uses of these expressions by the Pentecostal Christians have provided new dimensions in their contextual interpretations in Nigerian English usage. On this note, Kperogi (2019) avers that the Pentecostals have emerged as a fundamental source of the linguistic seepage of scriptural registers and expressions into popular Nigerian English occurring in increasingly vast domains. The scholar further hints that expressions such as *it is well, it is not my portion*, among other Biblical repertoire, are default expressions to show concern and express religiosity in tragic situations, and the conferment of positivism in obviously grievous circumstances. The terms are contextually conceived with meaning appropriations and extensions among the target set of Christians.

As insightful as the scholarly views above are, they are not broad enough to account for the various pragmatic dimensions available in the Nigerian English users concerning expressions with Biblical inferences and references. The thrust of this research is to broaden the scope of the earlier studies in terms of the number of such expressions. The study also provides the origin of the expressions with scriptural references in addition to an expansive pragmatic

analysis of their contextual meanings and situational usage among the Nigerian Pentecostal Christians.

### **3.0 Theoretical framework**

The theories considered relevant to this study are Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory and van Dijk's (2008, 2009) Context Models. Mey's (2001) Theory of Pragmatic Acts proposes the relevance of allowing sociocultural context into the interpretation of linguistic texts. Mey emphasizes on the environment from which interactants derive their affordances; that is, the contextual situation that determines meaning in relation to what is said, what is actually being said and what it meant. The Acts propel interactants' adaptation to context and the context to the interlocutors relying on linguistic and extralinguistic factors. According to Mey (2001), the theory is premised on the elasticity of interactive possibilities with two major components: the activity part (interactants) and the textual part (context). The activity part is concerned with speech acts, indirect speech acts, psychological acts, dialogue acts, physical acts and prosodic acts. The textual component considers the contextual inference, relevance, reference, voice, shared situation knowledge, metaphor and metapragmatic joker. The conception is that the interlocutors and discourse context are pivotal to the understanding and meaning of pragmeme. Also, van Dijk's (2008, 2009) Context Models suggest that language users adapt their discourse patterns to the prevailing social and communicative environment within the notion of appropriateness. The models according to van Dijk, exercise a fundamental control function specifically in the manner conversations are produced appropriately in communicative situations. The models are activated and construed in situations where participants of similar background and experience engage in conversations within a defined sociolinguistic environment. The theories are relevant to the study because they account for the contextual appropriateness and appropriation of language use by discourse participants with common sociocultural environment where meaning is derived. Particularly, the dialogue in question, the physical acts such as the interactant(s') emotion, the inferential circumstance, the Biblical reference, the contextual relevance of the

utterance and the shared situation knowledge underscore the application of the theory to the research. This study proposes the inclusion of sociolinguistic and sociocultural backgrounds of the interlocutors to Mey's proposition. The Nigerian Pentecostal Christians have a common sociocultural and religious background that influences the appropriation of contextual meanings to these particular English expressions.

#### **4.0 Methodology**

The data for this study were generated from primary and secondary sources. Data were derived from participant observation by the researcher who is also a Pentecostal Christian and speaker of Nigeria English. The relevant data were extracted from the daily spoken usages of Nigerian Pentecostal Christian interlocutors particularly in Cross River State; in class rooms, offices, markets, commercial and private vehicles, homes, mourning houses, churches, viewing centres, along the streets and other domains as participants were engaged in diverse fields of discourse. Also, the researcher made use of secondary materials especially the *Holy Bible* and other written texts to extract the origin of the expressions, and other useful insights. The two data collection sources and the domains of usage of the selected expressions are believed to be reliable enough to aid this study.

#### **5.0 Data presentation and discussion**

The findings of this study are divided into two broad headings: scriptural origin of the expressions and contextual usage.

##### **5.1 Scriptural origin of the expressions**

The geometric increase in the number of churches and in membership within the Pentecostal set of Christendom, have influenced the infiltration of Biblical texts into the spoken Nigerian English. It is the sociolinguistic outcome of religion (Christianity) and language (English). This set of Nigerian English speakers extract various scriptural verses and appropriate them for use in non-religious situations. The expressions with such Biblical origin from where it filtered into Nigerian English usage include *it is well, to God*



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*be the glory, it is not my portion, (we) thank God, my case is different, I am strong, I am rich, by the grace of God, the devil is a liar and may God go (be) with you/go with God.* These expressions are considered below:

### **5.1.1 It is well**

There are two references to the origin of the expression *it is well*, one and the earliest is from the *Holy Bible* and the other by the Chicago's attorney Horatio Spafford. The Biblical reference is recorded in the Book of 2 Kings 4:26: "Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, is it well with thee? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child? And she answered, it is well". It was the Shunammite's response to Gehazi, the servant of Elisha even in the circumstance of the death of her only son. Elisha has sent Gehazi to enquire of the wellbeing of the Shunammite's family at the time her son was lying lifeless, her shocking response to the calamity that struck was *it is well* which situationally contradicts the tragic occurrence. Also, the origin of the usage is credited to Horatio Spafford, an emotionally battered, but a successful attorney in Chicago who composed the hymn titled "it is well" in the mid 1800s after he lost everything he had (children, property and investment) to disease and mishaps, leaving behind only her wife who they both later dedicated their lives ministering to the down trodden (Wetherell & Walton, 2017; Hawkins, 2019).

### **5.1.2 To God be the glory**

As it is with the origin of *it is well*, the earliest usage of *to God be the glory* has two sources, first in the *Holy Bible* and later in the hymn published by William Howard Doane. The expression is used in the epistle of Paul the apostle to the Galatians, in Galatians 1:4-5: "... God our Father: To whom be the glory...". The verses reveal the ministerial encounter with the Galatians who encourages to glorify God for the gift of His only son who died for the sins of mankind. Also, according to information accessed on [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org) and <https://www.godtube.com> the hymn titled "To God be the glory" was written by the British blind Methodist girl, Fanny Crosby in the 1800s and published by William Howard Doane in 1875, and in Lawry and

Doane's song collection, "Brightens and Best" in 1954. The song glorifies God amid physical impairment.

### **5.1.3 It is not my portion**

The scriptural origin of the use of the expression is found in the *Holy Bible* in the Book of Lamentations 3:24: "The Lord is my portion...". The verse is connected with Jeremiah's lamentations on the pathetic condition of Judah following her conquest by the Babylonians. It is the reassurance of mercy and hope for God's people. According to Kperogi (2015, 2019), the expression is used in Nigerian English as a misappropriation or rebuttal of whatever is not good and not of God. In the Biblical context, the Lord which is good is the portion of Christians and anything that is evil (as portrayed by the suffering Judah) is not the portion of Christians. The author noted that the earliest instance of inverting the scriptural "it is my portion" to "it is not my portion" was by the Indian Nobel Prize winning poet, Rabindranath Tagore a century ago.

### **5.1.4 (We) thank God**

*(We) thank God* is also seen to have had its earliest usage in at least two prominent Books in the *Holy Bible*. One is Ephesians 5:20: "Giving thanks always for all things unto God ..." and I Thessalonians 5:18: "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God ...". These are among the series of Paul's teachings with the brethren at Ephesus. In the occasions, Paul emphasizes that Christians are admonished to give thanks to God in anguish and in merry, in mourning and in births, in losses and in abundances, in poverty and in riches; in all circumstances.

### **5.1.5 My case is different**

The expression was probably unpopular in Nigeria until January 24, 2017 when the General Overseer of the Living Faith Church, Bishop David Oyedepo declared it as the year 2017 theme for the Church, while in New York ([www.winnerchapelny.org](http://www.winnerchapelny.org)). The Nigerian born preacher derived the text from the Book of Isaiah 8:18: "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders ...". The verse reiterates Isaiah's prophecy that the children

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of God in Jerusalem will be saved from the impending calamity. Other supportive Biblical texts written in situations include I Peter 2:9, Matthew 17:20, Philippians 4:13, among others.

### **5.1.6 I am strong**

The next Nigerian English construction considered is *I am strong*. The expression is believed to derive its origin from the *Holy Bible*, specifically in the Book of Joel 3:10: "... let the weak say, I am strong". It is the prophecy of God's judgement on the conspiring nations against the converted Jews. This reflects prophet Joel's charge on the people; that the military and those trained in military discipline must convert their fields' instruments into weapons of war. He charges the weak as a result of diseases or old age not take as excuses but to claim strength and bravery and proceed to the battle fronts. The text is used also in Isaiah 2:4 and 2 Corinthians 12:10 in similar contexts.

### **5.1.7 I am rich**

Another expression in this category is *I am rich*. It is believed to be Christians' appropriation by extension of Joel 3:10 to include "Let the poor say I am rich". This implies in the religious context that, if the weak could say they are strong, the poor could as well say they are rich. As it was in the time of prophet Joel, the text abides by the belief that Christians, in spite of the conditions, should speak and act positively even in daring circumstances.

### **5.1.8 By the grace of God**

Among the contemporary Nigerian English expressions that originated from the Bible is *by the grace of God*. The expression is written in the Book of 2 Corinthians 12:9: "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness..." and Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest say men should boast". In Paul's sermons in the churches in Corinth, he quoted Jesus Christ to spiritually strengthen the brethren with the understanding that the grace God is enough for the Christians to do exploits. In Ephesus, Paul also educates the worshippers on the fact that salvation is attained by human strength

or works, and cautions that no one should boast of being 'saved' of out personal efforts but of the grace of God given freely to Christians. The extract is 'shortened' to *by the grace of God* in present day secular usage.

#### **5.1.9 The devil is a liar**

Again, the expression *the devil is a liar* with Biblical origin has filtered into Nigerian English. In the Book of John 8:44, the *Holy Bible* says: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it". This is John's account of Jesus Christ's teachings to the Jewish audience at the mount of Olives. Jesus says this to rebuke the claim of the Jews that they are the children of God and the descendants of Abraham. He likens their characters to the devil who they take after in genealogy. The current usage is implied in semantic shift and extension.

#### **5.1.10 May God go with you/go with God**

The final Biblical verse, considered in this study that is used by Nigerian Christians is *may God go (be) with you/go with God*. Exodus 33:14 says: "And he said, my presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest" and Deuteronomy 31:6 repeats: "Be strong and of good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee". The reference verses represent the Biblical origin of *may God go (be) with you/go with God*. In the former, God assures Moses of His presence with him (and the Israelites) while in the latter, Moses encourages and assures Israel of God's unwavering presence with them in the battles ahead. The Biblical situational reflect certain predicaments the Israelites find themselves and the divine affirmation of God's presence and guide.

### **5.2 Contextual usage of the expressions**

Pragmatics is concerned with the study of language use particularly the meanings of utterances derived from the way they are used in

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relation to the context (Osisanwo, 2008). A pragmatic analysis should therefore examine the contextual appropriateness of utterances in relation to the shared sociocultural experience and knowledge of discourse participants in a defined sociolinguistic environment. The discourse participants in this context are the Pentecostal congregants with shared situation knowledge, sociocultural, sociolinguistic and religious experience particularly in the research area. The context of usage and meaning of expressions conform with the communicative situations upon which the utterances are deployed. The excerpts are selected from the conversational activities that portray similar conceptions. The Biblical references are expressed to communicate the following dimensions of meanings.

### **5.2.1 Expression of concern and empathy**

In Cross River State, Nigeria, particularly among Pentecostal Christians, certain expressions with scriptural etymology are used in some communicative situations to express concern and empathy. Let us examine the interaction below:

#### **Excerpt 1**

- A: Mr Ukam said that Atiku Abubakar has just tweeted that his son has tested positive for the deadly coronavirus.
- B: My brother, *it is well*.
- A: Na so o. And our country has just recorded the first death resulting from the Covid 19 in the hours of 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2020. It was announced on 7a.m. network news today.
- B: You mean the ex-Director of PPMC?
- A: Yes o! *It is well*. And John just called that his father died this morning. Not of the virus o.
- B: How old was the father?
- A: Eighty-two years. *We thank God*.
- B: It's okay. *To God be the glory*.

In excerpt 1 above, the expressions *it is well*, *we thank God* and *to God be the glory* are used as consolatory practs to express concern and empathy; concern for Atiku whose son has contracted the ravaging coronavirus and the ex-Director of PPMC who died of same as participants with shared situation knowledge. These are psychological acts revealing the interactants' emotions. The

expressions in the Nigeria English are used in otherwise hopeless, tragic, destructive, disappointing and grievous situations. Kperogi (2019) claims that it is so because in Nigeria the consistency in the occurrence of preventable tragedies are increasingly 'well'. The author reiterates that it is rather offensive and intolerably annoying when same is said in similar contexts in the English native speakers' environment. On the contrary, the expressions are used by native speakers to express gratitude not consolation and empathy as contained in the communicative events among Nigerians.

### **5.2.2 Expression of advance rejection of tragedy and maintenance of escapist stance**

In certain communicative situations, Pentecostal Christians deploy a few of the selected expressions to mean an advance rejection of tragedy and unpleasant event or to maintain an escapist stance. The interaction below characterises the Nigerian context of usage.

#### **Excerpt 2**

- C: The wild wind last night blew off the roof of Mr. Johnson's house, rendering the entire family homeless.
- D: This is serious! *It is not my portion*. Just as a gas cooker exploded in my neighbour's home this morning, destroying property.
- C: So much of bad news these days. My brother, *my case is different!* I am a winner.

In the excerpt above, the use of the expressions *it is not my portion* and *my case is different* re-enact Pentecostal Christians' confidence that nothing evil could come their way and have the contextual relevance in the communication situation. Kperogi (2015, 2019) also maintains that Nigerian English speakers reflect the rampant contradictory, narcissistic and escapist fatalism in Nigerian expression of religiosity. *It is not my portion* is observed to be in use beyond the research area and even among non-Christians. For example, Aisha Buhari was spotted to have used same during the husband's presidential campaign on 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2015 in Benin, Nigeria: "The girl child doesn't have to leave her country to go and prostitute. *It is not her portion...*". The expression denotes the outright rejection and denunciation in advance of unforeseen tragedies while distancing from, and taking the escapist stance on unpleasant circumstances.

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The expression establishes the predetermined and divinely arranged good expectations from the God they serve.

### **5.2.3 Expression of faith and limitation of human's capabilities**

Again, Nigerian Pentecostal Christians use certain creations with scriptural origin to express faith in the reality and occurrence of unseen things they hope and the natural restraint in man's all-round capacity to achieve or perform certain actions as the excerpt below illustrates.

#### **Excerpt 3**

- E: This is the third time you are writing UTME?  
F: Yes! But I'll pass it this time around, *by the grace of God*. Eee heh, what stage is that your father's building?  
E: The work has gone far, they are fixing doors now. He said *by the grace of God*, we'll pack in by this December.  
F: *By the grace of God*, my father will start ours soon.

In the interaction between speakers E and F in excerpt 3 above, the focus of the conversation is the exercise of religious faith on things they hope for and request for the sufficiency of the grace of God to succeed in the UTME which the applicant is writing for the third time. The same faith is expressed in the provision of the financial breakthrough for the father to build a house. The conversation in the context points clearly on the limitless possibilities provided when the grace of God is upon adherents. The allusions are expression of Biblical inferences.

### **5.2.4 Expression of divine protection and the omnipresence of God**

Among English speakers in Nigeria, the expression *may God go (be) with you* or *go with God* is in the appropriate communicative situation deployed as a call for divine protection and expresses the omnipresence nature of God. Let us observe its contextual usage is in the conversation below.

#### **Excerpt 4**

- G: Will you still be travelling tomorrow?  
H: Yes dear. My flight is by 8:45am.  
G: Oh! *May God go with you*.

H: Thank you dear. *May He be with you* until my return.

In excerpt 4 above, the contextual usage and meaning of *may God go (be) with you* communicates the presence of God in every part of the earth and beneath, and His capability of protecting believers in all circumstances. He is therefore invisibly visible in all places and situation to protect and guide. The shared sociocultural and religious backgrounds of the interactants reveal the speaker's intention which strengthens the hearer's understanding.

### **5.2.5 Utterances as inferential elements**

Another consideration is the use of some of the expressions as inferential elements for positivism. The utterances in this category are contained in the speech event below:

#### **Excerpt 5**

I: My brother, please, would you assist me with N100,000.00

J: Oh! And *I am rich* now. *I am strong* too. I just used the little money I am left with to buy drugs.

I: *The devil is a liar!* Get well quick!

J: Certainly! I'll survive all.

The utterances *I am strong* and *I am rich* in the above context are used inferentially by the speaker to connote positivism based on prior evidential conclusions on the absolute power of God to change situations. The speaker deliberately ignores his poor situation and deteriorating health to affirm the opposite based on experience. Also, *the devil is a liar* in the communicative situation above personifies the existence of the devil in human form given the Biblical account of the prevaricacious nature of satan. The utterances among Pentecostal Christians underscores the expression of the Christian faith and belief that God is capable of reversing unfortunate situations to pleasant ones.

### **5.2.6 As pragmatic markers of presupposition, interruption and conclusion**

Pragmatic presuppositions are assumptions resulting from shared beliefs and information that determine meanings in relation to the speaker, hearer and the context (Osisanwo, 2008). The shared knowledge presupposes the contextual usage and meaning which



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some of the selected Nigerian English utterances express. Also, Aleke (2018) asserts that pragmatic markers occur in some instances in Nigeria discourse as interruptive device to cause a break in communication or bring a conversation to an end. Let us observe the conversations below.

### **Excerpt 6a**

K: The Nigerian Senate is set to approve a 30 billion dollars loan plan sent by the President.

L: *It is well.*

### **Excerpt 6b**

M: Mr. Joshua has had enough of tragedies this year. Just in a few months, his car was stolen, he lost his parents and now his wife is...

N: *To God be the glory.*

### **Excerpt 6c**

O: The Federal Government has withheld the salaries of lecturers who did not enroll in the Integrated Personnel Payroll System.

P: *We thank God.*

In excerpt 6a above, the response *it is well* presupposes that the interlocutors share common background knowledge of the insensitivity in mortgaging the future of Nigerian in accumulated, huge and perennial debts. The most painful and regrettable experience is that even when such loans are granted, as it was in the past, will never be used for the purpose for which it was granted. The context of usage and meaning presupposes that it is rather not well.

Also, in excerpt 6b, the utterance *to God be the glory* by speaker N in the communicative situation is not actually an expression of gratitude or excitement, rather it is an interruptive device deployed to interrupt speaker M to cause a pause in the communication. Apparently, speaker N is not interested in the continuous enumeration of the tragedies that befell Mr. Joshua and his family within the short period. It is a politeness strategy that suggests harmony which is mutually interpretable by the speakers M and N.

Also, in excerpt 6c, it is clear that the interactants are conversant with the developments leading to the withholding of the University lecturers' salaries which suggest that the information might not be

fresh. Speaker P's response *we thank God* is not in this context intended to thank God in the actual sense but uttered as a conclusive marker to end the conversation which reminds them of a rather pathetic situation which has brought untold hardship on the lecturers and their dependants.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

Generally, the examples in the English usage in Nigeria are meant to express religiosity and contextually devised to communicate the religious consciousness of interlocutors in diverse discourse domains. The study has demonstrated that, the advent of Pentecostalism in Nigeria has had a successful and enormous impact on Nigeria's English usage in interactions within religious and secular domains which is spreading further to include non-Christians. Although the selected Nigerian Pentecostal Christian English expressions illustrated in the study cannot be said to be exhaustive, but they are insightful enough to establish their adaptations in terms of contextual usage and meanings within the Nigerian sociolinguistic milieu. The study has carried out an etymological review of the expressions with the conclusion that they all have a common source – the *Holy Bible* from where they are (mis)appropriated into Nigerian English usage. In Nigerian communicative situations of this nature, the terms are contextually adapted as expressions of concern and empathy, advance rejection of tragedy and maintenance of escapist stance, faith and limitation of human's capabilities, divine protection and the omnipresence of God, as inferential elements and other context-dependent meanings. The texts Biblical references are used in the study as dialogic resources, psychological acts to express emotions and draw inferences from experiential events which are relevant and appropriately placed in the communication situations. The participants and communication situations of the utterances revealed the modification, redefinition and extension of the forms in Nigerian English arising from the shared situation knowledge, and sociocultural and sociolinguistic backgrounds. The discussions have also provided insights into adequate comprehension of the selected expressions by speakers and non-speakers of Nigerian English.

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