

## Reference and Persuasion: A Relevance-Theoretic Study of Church Posters in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*This essay is a pragmatic study of the roles that referential elements play in the titles of church print posters in Nigeria. Perhaps it is unarguable that church print posters are meant to persuade the audience to fall in line with the ideology that the posters represent. What is probably not clear is the modus operandi of the interplay between the linguistic items deployed in those posters and the human cognitive system. This essay therefore describes the roles that linguistic items, particularly referentials, play in the persuasiveness of church posters. It is against this background that this paper establishes that referential elements aid persuasion by reducing processing cost in the utterance computation process and making the mental representation of objects in the physical world easily accessible. In doing this, the researchers collected fifty posters from selected churches that have national outlook and strong media outlets. In other to make our analysis more explicit, the researchers deployed Wilson and Sperber's Computation Heuristics. This study therefore concludes that reference elements (definite noun phrase and indefinite noun phrase) create accessibility of mental concepts at the explicit level which automatically translates to less processing effort, and this has a persuasive effect at the implicit level on the reader of the church posters.*

**Keywords:** *reference, persuasion, relevance, posters, cognition, explicature, implicature.*

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This study examines the cognitive significance of referential elements in titles of church print posters in Nigeria. The nucleus of discourse in reference is identification. Church print posters use linguistic forms to draw the attention of readers to objects, ideas and concepts. These concepts usually fall within the contextual preoccupations of the print adverts. The linguistic forms that perform the referential functions must be ostensive (See Yus, 1997 for the features of ostensive stimulus); that is, they should draw the attention of the reader, and direct that attention to the communicative intention of the posters.

The major feature of reference is the issue of identification, and what has preoccupied scholars (logicians, philosophers, linguists, et cetera) is the methodology of this identification. In cognitive linguistics, the study of reference assignment focuses on speaker (x), and how the speaker is able to transfer the mental representation of objects (z) to the hearer using linguistic expressions (y). However, this study extends it to demonstrate that speakers infuse persuasive appeals in transferring the mental representation of (z) to the addressee. This means that linguistic expressions not only serve as a vehicle for referent identification, but also help to transfuse emotional concepts such as persuasion. Within the context of language use, reference has to do with how speakers (users) deploy linguistic expressions to identify items within the given cognitive environments. In the words of Abbott (2012, p.2), "just as we do not think that knives can cut on their own, we should not think that words can refer on their own." What this means is that, in pragmatics, we look at the communicative intention of a speaker in assigning reference.

## **Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

### **Church Advertising**

This section looks at works that have been done on Church adverts. Colson and Pearce (1998, p. 80) note that "the people who developed the art of modern advertising in the early part of this 20th Century were largely Christians, often sons of clergymen, who imported the methodology of religious revivalism into the commercial arena." This is an interesting point because it draws one's attention to the fact that Christianity is not new to advertising. Cooperman (2004, p. 18) argues that "organised religion is becoming a commodity. We package ourselves carefully for new buyers, emphasizing the selling points that will meet the market researched needs."

King (2015) looked at church advertising methodology and philosophy. To him, the reason why there is so much advertising these days is because we live in a consumer-based culture where competition for dollars is fierce (King 2015, p.1). One of the motivations behind King's study is to examine the rationale behind church adverts: "I wanted to explore the biblical principles of pre-evangelism to see if

scripture truly allowed church advertising to take place, or if it was simply a matter of trying to make scripture say what some wanted it to say” (King 2015, p.5).

In order to achieve this aim, King (2015) surveyed one hundred pastors in the United States and Canada. And arrived at the conclusion that “church advertising is a means of pre-evangelism that seeks to cultivate the soil to gain an opportunity to share the gospel.” As noted earlier, King’s work is closer to this study because our data centre on church adverts. However, King’s focus is general because it looked at all forms of church advertising. Also, King (2015) focused on the philosophical and methodological rationale behind church adverts. This study is specific because it looks at church print posters (a form of advertising), and our analytic tool is linguistic pragmatics.

Appiah, Dwomoh & Kyire (2013) examined the relationship between church marketing and church growth. Motivated by the current realities in Ghana where using marketing elements to promote religious services has become a top bracket business, they sought to know if church public relations has any significant impact on church attendance (Appiah, Dwomoh and Kyire 2013, p. 9). Data were randomly drawn from a sample size of 132 which included 12 pastors and 120 members from six (6) charismatic churches. They found out that:

- a) There is a positive correlation between the independent variables and church attendance growth.
- b) The Radio PR (Public Relations) plays a vital role in influencing the growth of church members in Ghana (Appiah, Dwomoh & Kyire 2013, p15).

They noted that although there are commercial pastors who exploit the marketing tools in the execution of their commercial agenda, the genuine ones should also avail themselves of the benefits of the marketing tools (Appiah, Dwomoh & Kyire 2013, p15). Appiah, Dwomoh and Kyire’s study, just like King’s, is not linguistic. It is a sociological survey of the correlation between church advert strategy and church growth.

Spurlock (2014) investigated the efficacy of religious outdoor messages in the Southern United States. His motivation stemmed from his observation that though religion and advertising are typically not mentioned in the same breath, they seem to be complementary in promoting church services, philosophies, and ideas or concepts (Spurlock 2014, p.171). Spurlock (2014) sampled three hundred and thirty-five (335) undergraduate and graduate students from a medium-sized Southern university. Those students were made to fill both pretest and post-test questionnaire after exposing them to religious messages. Spurlock (2014, p.187) discovered that exposure to outdoor religious adverts does not increase one’s intention to attend church services or engage in active prayer.

Spurlock's study is related to this study because some of the outdoor adverts observed include print posters. However, our focus and analytic intentions differ. While Spurlock preoccupied himself with a quantitative survey of the perlocutionary effects of outdoor adverts, this study does a linguistic pragmatic analysis of the contents that make up the messages. Whether the strategies are successful or not is out of our content purview.

Nwankwegu, Noke and Nwode (2014) examined features of language use in advertising discourse. To them, messages in adverts are usually highly sub-textual and emotive; adopting persuasion techniques and supra-semantic expressions meant to massage and amplify the inadequacies of the audience (p.137). So they gathered twenty-six (26) church advert posters and handbills from Abakaliki metropolis and tested them against Grice's conversational principle to ascertain the extent to which they obey or flout the maxims. They discovered that:

- a) The words used to label an event determine the response to it.
- b) The choice of language to convey specific messages with the intention of influencing people is very important.
- c) Visual content and design in adverts have a very great impact on the consumer, but it is language that helps people identify a product and remember it (Nwankwegu, Noke and Nwode 2014, p. 148).

They, therefore, concluded that church programme advertisers make many presuppositions and claims which are hidden under pragmatic elements (p.18). Nwankwegu, Noke and Nwode's work has similarities with this study: to examine the linguistic strategies deployed by church advertisers to persuade their audience. They appear to have subsumed the strategies discovered under the carpet name: "pragmatic elements." This sounds vague. However, this study identifies these strategies as cognitive linguistic, which we believe are deployed both at the explicit and implicit levels of communication. Also, that Nwankwegu, Noke and Nwode (2014) subscribed to Grice's theorization inevitably makes them fall into the flaw of incomprehensibility of the Gricean model. This account for the use of carpet names such as "pragmatic elements." Nonetheless, their work is helpful to this study because it has helped us show that an inferential model can be used to explicate persuasive strategies in church posters and handbills.

Peter and Duro-Bello (2014) studied speech acts in Pentecostal gospel programme adverts in Northern Nigeria. The researchers observed the increasing dominance of Pentecostal programme adverts on the pages of newspapers, billboards, and even on the walls of residential buildings across towns and cities in Nigeria, and as such, they wanted to find out the acts contained in these adverts and to examine their adherence to the felicity conditions. Peter and Duro-Bello (2014)

sampled twelve (12) gospel adverts collated from national dailies, television, billboards, and walls of residential buildings. They found out that:

- a) Commisive acts are more predominant in church programme adverts than the other acts. This is attributed to the audience's hope of having their expectations met (Peter & Duro-Bello 2014, p127).
- b) There are some striking similarities and differences between the language of advertisement in the Christian circle and in the commercial/secular world.

They therefore concluded that gospel advertisers adhere to the conditions set by the speech act theorists, just like the secular world advertisers do. However, gospel advertisers cannot be accused of deception since the contextual belief is that they perform the acts on God's behalf.

A speech act analysis of church adverts is commendable, but may not be as explicitly exhaustive as relevance theory would be. For instance, in one of Peter and Duro-Bello's analyses, they described the use of words such as "sons," "fire," "eagle," as ambiguous. However in relevance theory, particularly within the sphere of explicature, such words would have been inferentially modulated to fit into its context of use as necessitated by the reader's search for relevance.

### **Relevance Theory**

There are different theoretical accounts of reference assignment; notably three cognitive accounts which explain the importance of reference to the overall interpretation of the utterance they occur in. These cognitive accounts are: David Lewis' account of pragmatic acceptability which is based on the rules of truth, informativeness, and warranted assertion, Clark's account of bridging and the relevance theoretic account of consistency with the principle of relevance (which is the one applied in this research).

Within relevance theory, there are contextual factors that justify the hearer's acceptance of the first acceptable interpretation. This is so because, according to Wilson (1992, p.176), "a speaker aiming at optimal relevance should try to formulate her utterance in such a way that the first acceptable interpretation to occur to the hearer is the one he (the speaker) intends to convey." With this, the speaker is said to have complied with the principles of optimal relevance:

An utterance in a given interpretation is optimally relevant if and only if:

- a) It achieves enough effects to be worth the hearer's attention;

- b) It puts the hearer to no unjustifiable effort in achieving those effects (Wilson 1992, p.175; Wilson & Sperber 2012, p. 65).

For the purpose of reference assignment, and in order to be specific, we shall paraphrase the principle of optimal relevance as follows:

An assigned reference in a given utterance is optimally relevant (within the utterance it occurs in) if and only if:

- a) It achieves enough effects to be worth the hearer's attention;
- b) It puts the hearer to no unjustifiable effort in finding out its effects in the given utterance.

It is for this reason that Lucas (2011, pp. 9-10) concluded that the use of a definite NP is an invitation to the addressee to search within a set of mutually manifest objects (Lucas called it "P-set"), and the search can be done at a minimal cognitive effort. Recall that ostensive stimuli do not only express information about something, but also express an addresser's intention to make this information manifest to an addressee (Anderson, 2001, p. 30). If a definite reference does this, it is relevant by Sperber and Wilson's standard. What this implies for this section is that the use of definite reference in church print posters is a deliberate invitation (of the addressee) to a set of mutually manifest objects within the cognitive environment of the discourse. This invitation raises an expectation of relevance, and its satisfaction generates a persuasive effect on the hearer/reader.

Scott (2013) observed that the use of the demonstratives "this" and "that" draws attention to a particular entity in the physical environment. This further increases the accessibility of its representations, and so the hearer will test it first as a potential referent, and stop when his expectation is satisfied. What this implies for the present study is that the researchers shall examine how reference elements contribute to this accessibility, the degree to which they widen the scope of the reader's accessibility to the assumptions (implicit or explicit), and inevitably, how this reduces the effort that would have been expended by the reader- thereby contributing to relevance.

## **Methodology**

This research is descriptive. As a non-empirical but text-based cultural study, this research adopts specifically Cultural Studies as well as Hermeneutics and arguments by analogy. Also this study would lean towards textual analysis especially as it has its affinity with cultural studies. This is against the background that cultural studies exist at the borderline between textual and social research. The churches under study are:

- a) Church of God Mission International (CGMi)
- b) New Covenant Gospel Church (NCGC)
- c) Omega Fire Ministry (OFM)
- d) Christ Apostolic Church of God Mission (CACGM)
- e) Rock of Ages Christian Assembly (RACA)

These churches are indigenous to the Benin cultural setting, and they synchronise with the purpose of the study. They were selected because of their national outlook, and because they have strong media outlets, which made the researchers' access to data easy. Those five churches were selected as the target population to provide the researcher with data. This study can, therefore, be used as snapshot of how a society cognitively influences language use and interpretation (an area that is important to sociolinguistics). Our data sampling is purposive. Ten posters were collected from each church, from which the researchers selected the ones in which the definite and indefinite reference elements were deployed.

## Results

### Reference Assignment

In our sample data, thirty-four (34) print posters have reference elements. We shall discuss the types of reference assignment deployed in our data. However, let us tabulate the different distributions, thus:

Table 1: *Distribution of Variables (Definite Noun Phrase (DNP) and Indefinite Noun Phrase (INP)*

Churches	Number	Definite NP	Indefinite NP
CGMi	4 posters	1	1
NCGC	8 posters	3	2
OFM	13 posters	2	3
CACGM	8 posters	3	3
RACA	1 poster	1	1
Total	34 posters	9	10

**Definite NP Reference (DNP).** The definite NP reference occurred ten (10) times out of the thirty-four (34) print posters. Recall that the goal of reference assignment in an utterance is to help the reader recognize the propositions and propositional attitude intended by the speaker (Wilson 1992, p. 167), and this is done at a minimal processing effort (Lucas 2011, p.10).



Source: OFM (collected at Adolor, Benin City)

Figure 1: Kill the lion and get the honey



Source: RACA (Collected at Uselu Market, Benin City)



Figure 2: A night with the King



Source: CACGM (Collected at UBTH, Benin City)

Figure 3: CACGM, I will eat the good of the land

In the titles, the definite NPs help narrow the search for the intended referents, and in doing this, it directs the attention of the reader to the implicated premises (most times from the Bible). This reduces the effort the reader would have spent in testing hypotheses. The ease of processing effort has a persuasive effect on the proposition expressed, and consequently on the implicated conclusion. For instance, “the lion,” “the king,” “the good of the land” help narrow the search for the intended referents. One of the premises “the lion” invokes the biblical story of how Samson killed a lion as recorded in Judges 14 vs 5 (though, this appears to be an ad hoc concept). The definite article “the” makes the enrichment of the head “lion” ostensive and accessible. That is, “the” makes it obvious that the reader should look beyond the literal lion, and begin to construct a context that would make the title significantly relevant to him.

Thus lion could be enriched to mean sickness, demotion, financial limitation, or anything that obstructs (challenges of life) the reader from achieving his desired goals. That is to say, underneath the encoded meaning of lion are gaps that can be filled with different hypotheses depending on the meaning that strikes the contextual implication of each reader of the poster. This referent needs to be pragmatically enriched to get the actual intended referent of the poster title. “The king” refers to God, and “the good of the land” refers to the positive promises in the Bible. In the case of “the king,” the definite article makes the retrieval of the referent (God, Jesus, as the case may be) easily accessible, because the Christian religion recognizes and worships only one God. However, in the case of “the good of the land,” the definite article only draws the attention of the reader to the need to enrich the head “good” to satisfy his search for relevance. If contextualized within the Nigerian socio-cultural polity, “good” could be enriched to mean: jobs, promotion, oil money, agricultural products, et cetera, depending on the one that satisfies each reader’s search for relevance.

The above definite NP references are persuasive by taking the minds of the readers back to key personalities and instances in the Bible (An average reader would want to be associated with such referents), and also by leaving options open to be filled by the chosen enriched concept at the explicit level (that is, E), of meaning computation. For a more lucid explanatory effect, let us impute “the good of the land” into the computation heuristics (the computation heuristics was developed by Wilson and Sperber (2012, p.68), but modified in this essay for simplicity purpose), thus:

- a) Decoding of Speaker’s (S) utterance: CACGM says “I will eat the good of the land.”
- b) Expectation raised by S’s utterance in line with the communicative principle of relevance: this utterance is relevant enough to be worth the reader’s processing effort, and it is the most relevant utterance compatible with the poster’s ability and preferences.
- c) Expectations raised by meeting the requirement of the communicative principle of relevance: this utterance can be relevant to the reader if it helps him benefit from what the country has to offer.
- d) Invocation of implicit assumption/implicit premise: the good of the country has been hijacked by the high and powerful, and it takes one who possesses a higher power to compete and benefit
- e) Invocation of explicit enrichment to (a): (i) the reader will benefit from what the country has to offer.  
(ii) CACGM promises to help the reader benefit from what the country has to offer.
- f) Derivation of strong implicature (e (a) + d/c): the reader should identify with CACGM in order to benefit from what the country has to offer.
- g) Derivation of weak implicature (f + d1-n/n): CACGM has a higher power to help the reader compete with the high and powerful in the country.

Take note of how the DNP (the good of the land) makes the assumption (that the country’s national cake is the right of the reader) easily accessible, thereby reducing the processing effort it would have taken if it was not made manifest by the DNP. This assumption contributes to the computing process in deriving the implicature, and the ease at which it is done (recall that the DNP contributes to this ease) generates a persuasive effect.

Also these definite NP references help the reader adjust contexts in order to satisfy his expectation of relevance. For instance, the reader of for example “The Gifted Woman” would find the title useful if it highlights the positive side of her

femininity. The proposition of this utterance is made lucid through the introduction of a referent in the Bible (the gifted woman- James 1 vs 5) that helps the reader adjust her implicated premise. The context surrounding the poster is that on May 14th 2017, CGMi would hold a programme for women. So the reader (female) who reads the poster knows that it is an invitation to attend the programme. This raises her expectation of relevance. So what must interest her should be something that is beneficial to her, that is, it must be something that has a corresponding contextual implication as raised by the poster title. Thus, the definite NP is a reference to a character in the Bible and an invitation for her to mentally represent herself in the NP. That is, it is a two-edge reference. In our data, we only have two instances where a two-edge reference assignment is deployed:

- 1) The Gifted woman
- 2) Manifesting the Eagle's anointing

This double-edge reference is assigned for persuasive purposes. They refer to positive personalities in the Bible, and also serve as an invitation for the reader to input herself in the NP. Finally, the head of the definite NP reference require pragmatic modulation of meanings. For instance, in example (3), the poster could not possibly have been referring to a literal lion. However, the literal meaning of lion is expected to be broadened to include “a burden,” “a barricade,” “a ferocious obstacle” (not necessarily an animal).



Source: CACGM (Collected at CACGM Isihor, Benin City)

Figure 4: 7 weekend of destiny encounter

Also, “the rise” refers to a cognitive reinvention of a moment in history when a popular pastor, Ayo Babalola, was at his peak. A better understanding of the story of Ayo Babalola will project the referent in the NP above, and consequently make lucid the persuasive effect it has on the overall interpretation of the title. Ayo Bababola was a man of God that shook the western part of Nigeria. He was known for his miracles, spiritual foresight, visions, prophecies, et cetera. So, even though he is dead, the DNP

is a deliberate attempt to draw the reader's attention to those "good old days," and give him/her a mind to dare to envision such recurrence.



Source: NCGC (Collected at Upper Lawani, Benin City)

Figure 5: Let's spread the gospel

Furthermore, "the gospel" is a reference to, not just the word of God, but the one that projects Jesus Christ as the only means of salvation. The reference not only draws attention to the availability of other religious schools of thought, but also pontificates the originality of the Christian version. The persuasive knack of this use of DNP is that it draws attention to other implicated premises around the NP, such as the church's validity and sincerity of purpose. This projection of referents is also deployed in the transformed life:



Source: NCGC (Collected at NCGC Edokpolor rd, Benin City)

Figure 5: The transformed life



Source: NCGC (Collected at Uniben Main Gate, Benin City)

Figure 6: NCGC, My wedding must hold this year

Here, the definite reference gives an idea of “other lives” which are not transformed, and then projects a salient life which the reader should aim at. The DNP reduces the processing effort of searching for the appropriate referent, by encouraging the reader to conceptually represent herself as the intended referent. However, this conceptual representation is realizable only if the reader attends the programme. This is the persuasive strategy in the title.

In “Come, Let’s Bless the Lord”, “the lord” does not only identify God, but also projects Him as the most powerful and supreme God. This implies that there are other gods, and the poster acknowledges their existence. This idea was also discussed by Egharevba (1986, p.8) who noted that the Binis have a culture of “thick paganism,” hence they were very reluctant to relinquish their culture in favour of Christianity. That explains why there are pockets of idols here and there in the city. Also this is implied by the pragmatic projection of the supreme God, using the DNP “the lord.” Therefore, the DNP “the lord” as used in this example, conceptually projects the supremacy of the Christian God over other communal gods. In another instance, the DNP is used to make ostensive the urgency behind the idea it projects. This is the case in the title: “My Wedding Must Hold this year, 2018.” The DNP highlighted above emphasizes the urgent nature of the issue as already conveyed by the auxiliary ‘must.’ This emphasis has a persuasive effect on the reader at the implicit level of computation. Let us demonstrate it below:

- a. Decoding of Speaker’s (S) utterance: NCGC poster says “my wedding must hold this year, 2018.”

- b. Expectation raised by S's utterance in line with the communicative principle of relevance: this utterance is relevant enough to be worth the reader's processing effort, and it is the most relevant utterance compatible with the poster's ability and preferences.
- c. Expectations raised by meeting the requirement of the communicative principle of relevance: the utterance in the poster would be relevant if it is able to solve the reader's problem of getting married as soon as possible.
- d. Invocation of implicit assumption/implicit premise: One who wants to get married as soon as possible should attend a church programme where supernatural enablement is given to one to get married.
- e. Invocation of explicit enrichment to (a): The reader's wedding must take place as soon as possible.
- f. Derivation of strong implicature (e (a) + d/c): the reader who wants his wedding to take place as soon as possible should attend the programme advertised by NCGC.
- g. Derivation of weak implicature (f + d1-n/n): attending the programme advertised by the poster is a prerequisite to getting one's wedding to take place as soon as possible; the church that owns the above poster has a supernatural power to make one's wedding take place as soon as possible, et cetera.

The persuasive strategy is in the interplay of language and cognition which is reflected in d, e, and f. The presence of g emphasizes this persuasive effect because it creates room for the reader to add f (strong implicature) into the computation heuristics to generate more weak implicatures. They are called weak implicatures because they may not have been intended by the writer, and as such the reader takes the greater part of the risk of misinterpretation. The ease of processing effort, and the fact that the posters say so much in few, simple linguistic formats makes it manifest that the contextual bond between addresser and addressee is strong.

***Indefinite reference.*** The indefinite NP reference occurred ten (10) times out of the thirty-four (34) print posters having reference assignment. The range of referents of the indefinite reference is not specified. For instance, a phrase such as "a man" could mean any man.

However, this does not appear to be so for the indefinite NPs above. Their references are defined by the biblical contexts from which they are exhumed. For instance, in example (2), the poster does not refer to "any man" nor "any God" as literally encoded by the NPs. The above NPs now have a pragmatic force of specificity. "A man" refers to the Christian, and "a God" refers to the Almighty God in the Bible.

The best way to describe the use of the indefinite NPs above is that the context constrains the reference to a select group within the discourse.



Source: CGMi (Collected at Sapele rd, Benin City)

Figure 7: Finding a life partner

For instance, in the example above, “a life partner” does not refer to any spouse, but the one within the Christian faith. This is so because the context conditions it (context: do not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever).



Source: OFM (Collected at New Benin Market, Benin City)

Figure 8: If I be a man of God

Likewise “a man of God” refers to the pastor of the church that owns the poster. In fact, this INP is contextually adjusted by the biblical story of Elijah who boasted about the supremacy of his God and the legality of his status in Him (1 Kings 18 vs 22). In that story, there was a contest between Prophet Elijah and four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. After the above utterance was made, fire fell from heaven to consume the prophets and the sacrifices before them. This contextual adjustment is a call for a spiritual battle, and to reassure the reader of the originality of the pastor of the church. The implication of this cognitive foregrounding is to also remind the reader of the existence of other fake pastors in the city who are out to exploit unsuspecting members.



Source: OFM (Collected at Kings Square, Ring Road, Benin City)

Figure 9: I am not a Christmas goat

“A Christmas goat” (when pragmatically modulated) refers to that naïve and insensitive Christian that usually falls prey to the enemy. This shows that the referents of some INPs are clearly resolved when the heads of the NPs are modulated. This modulation has to be contextually guided. Generally, in the country, there is a phobia for the last quarter of the year (September, October, November, and December). This is so because, over time, the country has recorded several cases of disasters; accidents, kidnapping, rituals, armed robbery, et cetera. So the INP draws attention to this periodic disaster, and the possibility being a victim of it. This can cause fear in the heart of the reader, and the persuasive strategy is in the act of negating the INP. That is to say, this title raised fear and doused it.

Let us infuse the above title into the computation heuristics, thus:

- a. Decoding of Speaker’s (S) utterance: OFM poster says “I am not a Christmas goat.”



- b. Expectation raised by S's utterance in line with the communicative principle of relevance: this utterance is relevant enough to be worth the reader's processing effort, and it is the most relevant utterance compatible with the poster's ability and preferences.
- c. Expectations raised by meeting the requirement of the communicative principle of relevance: this utterance can only be relevant to the reader's if it assures him of safety this Christmas period.
- d. Invocation of implicit assumption/implicit premise: during Christmas periods it is wise to seek divine protection.
- e. Invocation of explicit enrichment to (a): the reader will not be a cheap victim of the evil ones during Christmas
- f. Derivation of strong implicature (e (a) + d/c): to avoid being a cheap victim of evil doers during Christmas is a wise action.
- g. Derivation of weak implicature (f + d1-n/n): attending the OFM programme that the poster advertises is a major step to avoiding the traps of evil doers during Christmas.

Note the enrichment in stage e; there is a sense of ordinariness made easily accessible by the indefinite article. In the Nigerian socio-cultural parlance, a Christmas goat is an animal meant for sacrifice. While the goat suffers the pang of a knife passing through its throat, the humans around celebrate. Thus, that goat is not given any sense of importance; the people are not interested in the goat as a creature, but in the meat it transforms into after going through heating. This sense of unimportance and ordinariness is made accessible by the indefinite article "a" at a low processing cost. This thereafter contributes to relevance, and by extension the persuasive effect, at the level of implicature.

However, this sense of ordinariness is not the case in NCGC's "Be an Agent of Change." Here, the INP makes accessible the encyclopaedic assumptions around the concept 'disciple,' and this has an effect on the communicative intention, and by extension the persuasive effect on the reader.

- a. Decoding of Speaker's (S) utterance: NCGC says "be an agent of transformation."
- b. Expectation raised by S's utterance in line with the communicative principle of relevance: this utterance is relevant enough to be worth the reader's processing effort, and it is the most relevant utterance compatible with the poster's ability and preferences.

- c. Expectations raised by meeting the requirement of the communicative principle of relevance: this utterance can be relevant to the reader if it helps him achieve the quest of becoming a tool in God's vineyard.
- d. Invocation of implicit assumption/implicit premise: (i). A disciple is an important tool in God's vineyard.  
(ii). A disciple gets the blessings of God.
- e. Invocation of explicit enrichment to (a): (i). Be a disciple whom God would use to transform people's life.  
(ii). NCGC urges the reader to be a disciple whom God would use to transform people's lives.
- f. Derivation of strong implicature (e (a) + d/c): NCGC can help the reader achieve his quest of becoming a tool in God's vineyard.
- g. Derivation of weak implicature (f + d1-n/n): the reader should identify with NCGC to achieve his quest of becoming a tool in God's vineyard.

The Indefinite reference (an agent) makes obvious the need to invoke the concept "disciple," and makes the encyclopaedic assumptions around it accessible at a least processing effort.

### Conclusion

The referent items discussed above (DNP and INP) make the mutual understanding that the writer assumes to exist between him and the reader obvious. The referent items also make the withdrawal of the concepts they represent easily accessible, thereby contributing to the relevance, and by extension the persuasive effects, of those posters on the readers. To reiterate our points, the followings were observed:

- a) Reference resolution is a strong persuasive strategy in the titles of church print posters (at the explicit level). This is so because reference items possess ostensive and procedural forces, and they also form a formidable concatenation with encoded ad hoc concepts which are then mutually adjusted at the implicit and explicit levels to create a persuasive effect on the reader. Also, the fact that this process takes place at a low processing cost contributes to relevance, and by extension, to persuasion.
- b) The use of definite expressions anchored by the definite article "the" draws the attention of the reader to the urgent need to enrich the head of the phrase. This makes the definite article significantly ostensive, and it contributes to relevance (and

therefore, persuasive) because it reduces the processing effort it would have cost the reader to arrive at this informative intention.

c) With regards to the above, the definite noun phrase (DNP) creates a higher degree of accessibility, thereby reducing the effort it would have taken the reader to construct the concept encoded by the referent items.

It is on this note that we conclude that reference assignment has a high degree of cognitive significance. Some of which are: saliency, accessibility, bridging, and above all, consistency with the principle of relevance. As an ostensive stimulus, reference items have the power to get the reader's attention, and direct it to the intended meaning of the addresser. Therefore in this study, it is an effective persuasive tool at the explicit level.

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