



A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Selected Sermons of Pastor David Ibiyeomie and Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah

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ABSTRACT

Sermons are socially consequential speech events in Nigerian public life. While previous studies on Nigerian religious discourse have focused largely on pragmatics, speech acts, and power relations, little attention has been given to the lexico-semantic structure of sermons. This paper investigates the lexico-semantic strategies deployed by two of Nigeria's most influential preachers: Pastor David Ibiyeomie of Salvation Ministries, Port Harcourt, Nigeria, and Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of the Catholic Diocese of Sokoto, Nigeria. The study analyses two sermon transcripts (one from each preacher) selected from verified organisational websites. Theoretically, it is framed within Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, as extended by Kövecses (2002), and Halliday and Hasan's (1976) theory of lexical cohesion, which together serve as complementary analytical lenses for examining metaphorical and cohesive structures in the data. The data were analysed qualitatively using this framework. The study reveals that both preachers strategically employ lexical repetition, metaphorical expressions, semantic fields, and stylistic registers to persuade their audiences and project distinct theological visions. The study concludes that lexico-semantic analysis provides deeper insight into how Nigerian Christian sermons function not only as religious messages but also as social and ideological texts that shape audience perception, spirituality, public and religious consciousness.

Keywords: lexico-semantics, sermon, David Ibiyeomie, Matthew Hassan Kukah, religious language, conceptual metaphor, lexical cohesion.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary medium through which human beings create, share, and contest meaning. According to Etuk (2021, p.3), "...it is in language and through language that the society can express and make routine their assumptions, knowledge, ideas and perceptions which guide their

daily living". The term, lexico-semantic, is a discipline that combines lexicology, (vocabulary) and semantics, (meaning) in a single, integrated framework. "lexico-semantics" combines lexis(words) and semantics (meaning). Thus, it concerns itself with the study of meaning at the lexical level. It examines both the denotative and connotative meanings of words, as well as semantic relations which is one important aspect of lexico-semantics. Semantic relations are: synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, polysemy, homonymy, and collocation. These semantic relationships contribute significantly to textual interpretation and discourse analysis (Urujzian, 2016). Lexical choices often reveal underlying ideologies, emotions, social identities, and cultural values (Etuk & Akpan, 2023). Scholars have long understood that meaning is not just the direct dictionary meaning of words. Instead, meaning is shaped by society, context, and ideology; therefore, they use lexico-semantic analysis to examine how language reflects power relations, political opinions, social injustice, and human experiences. In contemporary studies, it is also employed in the analysis of songs, speeches, social media posts, and political discourse.

One of the most fertile sites for lexico-semantic investigation is religious discourse, particularly the sermon. The sermon is a highly institutionalised, purpose-driven speech event in which a preacher deploys language with calculated intentionality to instruct, inspire, persuade, and sometimes challenge an audience of believers (Crystal & Davy, 1969; Taiwo, 2009). Sermons are not merely spiritual texts; they are social acts performed in specific cultural and political contexts, and their word choices carry enormous ideological weight. Pastor David Ibiyeomie, the founder and General Overseer of Salvation Ministries (Home of Success), based in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, commands one of the largest single-congregation churches in the world. His sermons, broadcast globally, are characterised by a distinctive blend of biblical exegesis, prosperity theology, and populist rhetoric. Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah, on the



other hand, is a Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, who is equally prominent but occupies a markedly different discursive position: his homilies and public addresses are celebrated for their prophetic engagement with politics, governance, and social justice, earning him a reputation as one of Nigeria's most fearless public intellectuals.

Although Nigerian sermons are culturally important and rich in language, the lexico-semantic features of sermons by leading Nigerian preachers have not been widely studied. Most previous studies on Nigerian religious discourse focus mainly on pragmatics, such as speech acts and politeness, or on broader discourse issues like power and ideology. For instance, Adegbite (2004) applies critical discourse analysis to examine how power relations between preacher and congregation are encoded in sermon discourse. Obiechina (2012) examines gender ideology in Nigerian sermon discourse, analysing how preachers construct and reinforce patriarchal social relations through language. Taiwo (2009) analyses how Nigerian Pentecostal preachers use directive speech acts: commands, exhortations, warnings, to construct authority and manage congregational behaviour, focusing heavily on illocutionary force and the pragmatics of audience positioning, with virtually no engagement with lexical semantic structure. This study sets out to analyse the lexico-semantic features of selected sermons delivered by Pastor David Ibiyeomie and Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah, with particular attention to how each preacher deploys meaning, lexical relations, register, and conceptual metaphor in the construction of their respective theological visions and social identities.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Lexico-semantics, concerned with the meaning of words and the semantic relations between them, has attracted sustained scholarly attention across a wide range of discourse contexts. Cruse (2011) provides one of the most comprehensive accounts of lexical meaning, examining the complex relationships of synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, polysemy, and connotation that organise the lexical system of a language, and demonstrating that word meaning is not a fixed, context-independent property but a dynamic, socially negotiated phenomenon. Enang, Urujzian and Udoka (2013) similarly argue that semantics cannot be reduced to the study of isolated lexical items but must attend to the ways in which meaning is constructed through the interaction of words in specific discourse contexts (Etuk & Umoh, 2024).

Leech (1974), identified seven types of meaning — conceptual, connotative, stylistic, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic, a typology that has proven remarkably durable and continues to inform lexico-semantic analyses across diverse discourse domains (Mbede, 2024a). Stubbs (2001), working within the corpus linguistics tradition, demonstrated that lexical meaning is significantly shaped by patterns of co-occurrence and collocation, arguing that words accumulate semantic associations through their habitual appearance in specific linguistic environments. The application of lexico-semantic analysis to religious discourse has produced a growing body of scholarship that directly informs the present study. Mbede (2024b) demonstrated the value of register analysis for understanding how different discourse contexts produce different patterns of lexical choice, a theoretical perspective that informs the present study's attention to register variation between the two preachers under analysis.

Scholarly interest in the language of religion, and the sermon in particular, has a long and distinguished history. Crystal and Davy (1969), in their pioneering text, *Investigating English Style*, identified religious English as a distinct register characterised by archaism, formulaic expression, elevated diction, and a peculiar blend of the intimate and the formal. Their foundational observations established the sermon as a linguistically complex genre deserving rigorous analysis. Taiwo (2009) examined the discourse features of Pentecostal sermons, focusing on how preachers use language to construct authority and engineer audience participation. His work draws attention to the performative dimensions of sermon language (the use of repetition, parallelism, and direct address) but does not engage systematically with lexical semantics. Similarly, Akindele (2011) explored the pragmatics of Christian sermons in Nigeria, analysing speech acts and implicature in Pentecostal preaching. Ayoola (2013) investigated the role of metaphor in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons, demonstrating that preachers systematically deploy conceptual metaphors to translate theological abstractions into emotionally accessible images. Babatunde and Aremu (2014) examined the use of code-switching in Yoruba Pentecostal sermons, showing how preachers alternate between English, Yoruba, and pidgin to achieve various rhetorical effects. Their findings confirm that Nigerian sermon language is a site of complex multilingual negotiation, a point that has implications for lexico-semantic analysis since borrowed lexemes carry distinct semantic and cultural values. Okafor (2015)



analysed the discourse of prosperity theology in Nigerian Pentecostal churches, arguing that the semantic field of wealth, success, and divine favour has been systematically expanded in Nigerian religious discourse to accommodate neo-liberal economic ideologies. Okafor's analysis, though primarily sociological, has direct lexico-semantic implications: it demonstrates that new lexical fields can emerge within religious discourse in response to external social pressures. Likewise, Ndimele (2016) examined semantic change in Nigerian Pentecostal discourse, documenting how words have undergone semantic broadening and re-specification within the Nigerian Pentecostal lexicon.

Adekunle (2010) examined the language of Catholic homilies in Southwestern Nigeria, noting the tendency toward formal, Latinate vocabulary and extended doctrinal exposition. The study predates Bishop Kukah's emergence as a prominent public preacher and does not address the distinctively political register that characterises his discourse. Ugwuanyi (2017) offered a discourse-analytic reading of Kukah's public addresses, analysing the rhetorical strategies through which he constructs a prophetic public identity.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory as extended by Kövecses (2002), and Halliday and Hasan's (1976) Theory of Lexical Cohesion. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) revolutionised the study of metaphor by arguing that metaphor is not merely a linguistic ornament but a fundamental cognitive mechanism through which human beings understand one domain of experience in terms of another. Conceptual metaphors operate at the level of thought. Metaphor is not just something used in poetry or literature; it is a part of everyday thinking and communication (Urujzian, 2023). Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) is about how people use familiar ideas and experiences to understand abstract or difficult concepts. According to the theory, human thinking is largely metaphorical because people use one concept to understand another. It is based on the relationship between the concept of meaning and the abstract idea being explained, and it helps individuals organise experiences, express emotions, and communicate complex ideas effectively. Central to this theory is the distinction between two conceptual domains through which every metaphor operates: The source domain and the target domain. The source domain is the familiar, concrete, or physical domain from which the metaphorical expression is drawn; it is the

known idea or experience that serves as the vehicle of understanding. The target domain, on the other hand, is the abstract, complex, or less familiar concept that is being explained or understood through the source.

Kövecses (2002) extended this framework by showing how conceptual metaphors vary systematically across cultures and discourse contexts, and by providing refined analytical tools for identifying and classifying source (the familiar idea) and target (the abstract idea being explained) domains. Metaphors in sermons are not mere decorative figures of speech; they are cognitive tools through which abstract theological realities are mapped onto familiar, concrete domains of experience. In the analysis of sermons, conceptual metaphor theory illuminates how preachers construct theological meaning by mapping abstract spiritual realities onto familiar concrete domains.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) identify lexical cohesion as one of the primary mechanisms through which textual unity is achieved. They argue that a text is not simply a collection of unrelated sentences; rather, it becomes meaningful because its parts are linked together through different cohesive devices. Lexical cohesion specifically refers to the semantic relationships between (words) in a text. Lexical cohesion explains how words in a text are connected to create unity, continuity, and meaningful interpretation (Urujzian & Etuk 2024). It occurs when words are related through repetition, synonymy, antonymy, collocation, or other semantic connections. These relationships help readers or listeners follow the flow of ideas within discourse. Halliday and Hasan (1976) identify two major categories of lexical cohesion: reiteration and collocation. Reiteration is the repetition of a lexical item or the use of a synonym, near-synonym, or superordinate. It involves the repetition or restatement of a lexical item in different forms. This may occur through exact repetition, synonyms, near synonyms, superordinates, or general words. Reiteration reinforces important themes and helps maintain coherence throughout a text. Collocation, on the other hand, refers to the tendency of certain words to occur together because of habitual or semantic association. Words such as church, pastor, prayer, Bible, and worship belong to the same semantic environment and naturally appear together in religious discourse. Collocation therefore contributes to the overall thematic structure of a text by creating networks of meaning.

IV. METHODOLOGY



This study adopts a qualitative research design and employs lexico-semantic analysis as its method of analysis. The data were purposively selected, and the study is situated within the Nigerian religious environment, with particular focus on two major Christian traditions: the neo-Pentecostal movement as represented by Salvation Ministries, Port Harcourt, (Pastor David Ibiyeomie) and the Roman Catholic tradition as represented by the Catholic Diocese of Sokoto, (Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah). The data for this study consist of two sermon transcripts, one from each preacher, collected from verified organisational websites.

The data were analysed using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory as extended by Kövecses (2002), and Halliday and Hasan's (1976) Theory of Lexical Cohesion, as guide. On the ground of conceptual metaphor theory lies the analytical framework for identifying and interpreting the structures through which the preachers map abstract theological and socio-political realities onto familiar, concrete domains of experience. On the ground of lexical cohesion, lies provision of tools for examining how the semantic relationships between words (through reiteration, near-synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, and collocation) create textual unity, and sustain dominant theological themes.

EXCERPT ONE

The Power of God's Love

Message by Pastor David Ibiyeomie
(Eph. 3:17-19, *1 Cor. 2:9-10*, Matt. 22:37-40, Rom. 13:8-10)

When you are rooted and grounded in the love of God, you become a grand commander over the affairs of life; the result and effect you will have will surpass all the knowledge of man because you will be filled with the fullness of God. When the love of God burns in your life, it puts you above all the situations and circumstances of life. When God occupies the centre of your life, you have central command over the issues of life.

The impact of the love of God cannot be scientifically analyzed. In Matt. 22:36-40, a young ruler asked Jesus about the

greatest commandment of the law and Jesus responded that it is love for God and humanity. The love of God in your heart is the fulfilling of the law.

When the law is fulfilled, supernatural breakthroughs become the proof. When you fulfil the law, you commit God to your unlimited breakthrough and love is the fulfilling of the law. Therefore, when the law is fulfilled, Deut. 28:1-14 comes to play in your life because fulfilling the law is your entrance to those blessings. That is how powerful the mystery of the love of God in a man's life can be. Until you discover the love of God, you have not discovered the secret of fulfilment. As you discover and then engage in the love of God, you will be ushered into a world of fulfilment of promises. God bless you.

Conceptual Metaphor Analysis (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2002)

The preacher declares: "when you are rooted and grounded in the love of God," to describe a spiritual life as a plant. The source domain is botany and agriculture while the target domain is the believer's spiritual condition. Just as a plant draws nourishment and stability from deep roots in fertile soil, the believer receives spiritual power and resilience from being grounded in divine love. The sermon blends two overlapping expressions: "rooted" from botanical discourse and "grounded" from architectural discourse; into a single compound phrase, creating what Kövecses (2002) describes as a metaphorical blend in which organic growth and structural foundation converge to establish love as the irreplaceable basis of spiritual life.

Again, Ibiyeomie presents "you become a grand commander over the affairs of life" and "you have central command over the issues of life" to present a believer as a military commander. The source domain is military command structure while the target domain is the believer's relationship with life's challenges. The intensifier "grand" suggests total, overarching authority, while "central command" positions the believer at the controlling centre rather than the periphery of life's battles, constructing spiritual authority as positional,



conferred by love rather than earned by effort. This is an instance of the broader metaphor that life is a battle, identified by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as one of the most pervasive in human thought. "When the love of God burns in your life" introduces divine love as fire. The source domain is fire and combustion while the target domain is the transformative effect of God's love in the believer's life. Fire burns upward by nature, mapping onto the claim that love "puts you above all the situations and circumstances of life," and burns away impurities, suggesting the removal of spiritual obstacles. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) identify emotion as fire, a cross-linguistically widespread metaphor. However, in this sermon, it carries the additional biblical resonance of the Holy Spirit, symbolised as fire in Christian scripture. "When you fulfil the law, you commit God to your unlimited breakthrough" presents the source domain as a legal and contractual discourse, while the target domain becomes the believer's relationship with divine blessing. The expression "commit God" is the most semantically daring phrase in the sermon, constructing God as legally obligated to deliver promised blessings once the believer fulfils the covenant condition of love. Kövecses (2002) classifies this as the ontological metaphor, in which abstract spiritual gifts are conceptualised as concrete, acquirable objects governed by the logic of covenant transaction.

Lexical Cohesion Analysis (Halliday & Hasan, 1976)

Halliday and Hasan's (1976) lexical cohesion: reiteration and collocation are operative in this sermon and together, they produce a discourse of remarkable semantic coherence. At the level of reiteration, the lexeme "love" is the sermon's primary cohesive instrument, appearing in virtually every paragraph: "the love of God," "love the Lord thy God," "love thy neighbour," "love is the fulfilling of the law," "engage in the love of God." These function as the unbreakable semantic thread that holds the entire discourse together. Its relentless repetition does not merely describe the centrality of divine love but enacts it through the very structure of the language. The lexeme "law" undergoes concentrated repetition within a short textual span: "the greatest commandment of the law," "love is the fulfilling of the law," "when the law is fulfilled," "fulfilling the law is your entrance." These build steadily toward the climactic equation so that by the time it is stated the audience has been fully prepared by reiteration to receive it. The word "breakthrough" recurs in close

proximity: "supernatural breakthroughs" and "unlimited breakthrough." These create a tight cohesive chain linking the fulfilment of the law to its expected consequence.

Near-synonymy reinforces the sermon's core claims with lexical variety. Spiritual completeness is reiterated through "filled with all the fullness of God." The undiscovered state: "until you discover the love of God, you have not discovered the secret of fulfilment," is opposed to "as you discover and engage in the love of God, you will be ushered into a world of fulfilment," the discovered state. This antonymic pair keeps the sermon's fundamental binary of human limitation versus divine empowerment constantly operative across the discourse.

At the level of collocation, the pairing "rooted and grounded" blends botanical and architectural source domains into a single semantic unit of stability. The expression "situations and circumstances" is so conventionalised within Nigerian Pentecostal discourse that it functions as a near-compound noun for comprehensive adversity. The collocation of "supernatural" with "breakthrough" in the sermon carries accumulated affective and theological charge within the Nigerian Pentecostal discourse community that far exceeds the literal meaning of either term individually.

EXCERPT TWO

To Mend a Broken Nation: the Easter Metaphor:

(Easter Message by Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah, Diocese of Sokoto.)

1: Hello brothers and sisters in Christ, men and women of goodwill everywhere, I send you hearty greetings and felicitations as we celebrate the risen Christ. Easter is here again. For all Christians, Easter is a metaphor for our lives as individuals, families, communities or nations. Easter is a metaphor for how shame, scandal, powerlessness, weakness, and opprobrium suddenly transform into glory, honour, pre-eminence, laudation and applause. It is a fulfilment of what the Master himself had foretold when He said, 'Unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single



grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit' (Jn. 12: 24). And the Psalmist had said, 'Those who sow in tears will sing when they reap.' (Ps. 126:5).

2: The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are central to the Christian faith and yet, as St Paul said, 'We preach Christ crucified, a scandal to the Jews and nonsense to the Gentiles' (1 Cor. 1: 23). St Paul continues: 'What seems to be God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom and God's weakness is stronger than human strength' (1 Cor. 1:25). Without the claims of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, millions of people would be Christian today. As with the times of Jesus, the very idea is preposterous and incomprehensible yet St. Paul still insists that 'If Christ has not been raised, then our faith is a delusion and we are still in our sins' (1 Cor. 15:17). It is faith in the resurrection of Christ that inspires us Christians to hold firmly to the fact that, like the people of Israel, our dry bones shall rise again (Ez. 37: 11).

3: Our dear country, Nigeria, still totters and wobbles as we screech towards a dangerous and avoidable canyon of dry bones. Nonetheless, we still cling to hope, a hope in the resurrected Christ, knowing as St. Paul; said, 'this hope does not disappoint us' (Rm.5:5). Nigerians can no longer recognise their country which has been battered and buffeted by men and women from the dark womb of time. It is no longer necessary to ask how we got here. The real challenge is how to find the slippery rungs on the ladder of ascent so we can climb out. Yet, we ask, ascend to where? For us as Christians, ascent is to the loving embrace of the resurrected Christ who is Lord of history...

Conceptual Metaphor Analysis (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2002)

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphor is a fundamental cognitive mechanism through which human beings understand one domain of experience in terms of another. Kövecses (2002) extends this by showing how conceptual metaphors vary systematically across cultural and discourse contexts. Kukah names his own metaphor explicitly from the outset:

Easter is a metaphor for our lives as individuals, families, communities or nations. Easter is a metaphor for how shame, scandal, powerlessness, weakness, and opprobrium suddenly transform into glory, honour, pre-eminence, laudation and applause.

Kövecses (2002) would classify this as a structural metaphor in which the entire logical architecture of the Easter event functions as the master cognitive frame within which every subsequent claim in the sermon is embedded. The paschal movement from humiliation to glorification becomes the interpretive lens through which Nigeria's national suffering is understood. Kukah immediately grounds this master metaphor in the words of Christ: "Unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn. 12:24). Nigeria here is a dying grain of wheat whose present season of institutional failure and apparent national death is the necessary condition of future abundance. The entailments of this metaphor are generative rather than terminal: death in the agricultural domain is not the end of the grain's story but the precondition of its multiplication, countering national despair by reframing suffering as productive. "Those who sow in tears will sing when they reap" (Ps. 126:5), reinforces this logic, mapping present sorrow onto the seasonal rhythm of planting and harvest to suggest that suffering is the necessary investment in future joy.

The agricultural metaphors give way to an urgent physical metaphor when Kukah addresses Nigeria directly: "our dear country, Nigeria, still totters and wobbles as we screech towards a dangerous and avoidable canyon of dry bones." The nation is a physical body here, losing its balance and moving uncontrollably toward an edge. From within this crisis, Kukah states: "the real challenge is how to find the slippery rungs on the ladder of ascent so we can climb out. The qualifier "slippery" honestly acknowledges the genuine precariousness of the



path while maintaining the conviction that ascent remains possible. The rhetorical question “ascend to where?” performs a deliberate semantic suspension before the answer arrives: “for us as Christians, ascent is to the loving embrace of the resurrected Christ who is Lord of history.” This redefinition of the destination, from political recovery to resurrection embrace, is the theological climax of the sermon's entire metaphorical system.

Lexical Cohesion Analysis (Halliday & Hasan, 1976)

At the level of exact repetition, the lexeme “resurrection” and its semantic equivalents: “risen Christ,” “resurrected Christ,” “rise again,” “raised,” function as the sermon's primary semantic anchor, ensuring that however deeply the discourse engages with Nigeria's suffering, it always returns to resurrection as its controlling theological reference. The deliberate repetition of the metaphor in the message: “Easter is a metaphor for our lives,” “Easter is a metaphor for how shame transforms into glory,” and “the Easter metaphor” in the sermon's title, is analytically remarkable because it foregrounds the sermon's own linguistic strategy, inviting the audience to reflect on the cognitive work that metaphorical thinking performs. The lexeme “hope” recurs in “we still cling to hope,” “a hope in the resurrected Christ” and “this hope does not disappoint us,” a threefold reiteration that constructs hope not as vague sentiment but as a theologically grounded conviction anchored in the resurrection.

The sermon's most rhetorically deliberate use of near-synonymy appears in the Easter declaration of paragraph one, where five terms of defeat (shame, scandal, powerlessness, weakness, and opprobrium) are immediately answered by five terms of triumph (glory, honour, pre-eminence, laudation and applause). This structural doubling makes the depth of the fall and the height of the subsequent elevation equally comprehensive and mutually proportionate, so that the resurrection promise is quantitatively matched to the scale of the suffering it addresses. Nigeria's instability is similarly reiterated through “totters and wobbles,” “battered and buffeted,” “screech towards a canyon,” and “dry bones,” four near-synonymous expressions each adding a fresh dimension of national disintegration to the portrait of crisis.

The sermon's antonymic contrasts function as its primary cohesive hinges. The most central opposition is between death and resurrection: “falls on the ground and dies” as against “bears much fruit,” “crucifixion” versus “resurrection.” This establishes the paschal binary, the framework

through which all other oppositions are interpreted. A second opposition contrasts human wisdom and divine wisdom: “nonsense to the Gentiles,” “preposterous and incomprehensible” as against “wiser than human wisdom,” “stronger than human strength.” A third maps the paschal binary onto Nigeria: “totters and wobbles,” “canyon of dry bones” against “cling to hope,” “the loving embrace of the resurrected Christ,” ensuring that the audience holds both the depth of the national crisis and the height of the theological promise simultaneously in view.

The expression “dry bones” functions as a meronym of the complete human body reduced to its most irreversible form of death, representing the nation at its most fragile, while “the loving embrace of the resurrected Christ” functions as a meronym of Christ's full bodily presence, suggesting warmth and physical restoration. Together these two meronyms mirror the theological movement from crucifixion to resurrection, giving the cohesive structure of the text a formal correspondence to its theological content.

The cluster “battered and buffeted” habitually co-occurs in descriptions of objects subjected to sustained physical violence, its application to Nigeria importing connotations of helpless national exposure to overwhelming force. The pairing “totters and wobbles” draws on verbs that co-occur in descriptions of unstable movement (Udoka, Umoh & Etuk, 2020), creating a meaning of multi-directional instability that no single verb could convey.

A Comparative Analysis of Pastor Ibiyeomie and Bishop Kukah's Sermons

The comparative lexico-semantic analysis of the selected sermons of Pastor David Ibiyeomie and Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah reveals both significant convergences and sharp divergences that reflect not merely stylistic differences but fundamentally contrasting theological visions, social positionings, and understandings of the Christian vocation within contemporary Nigerian Christianity. The most fundamental divergence between the two preachers lies in their dominant semantic fields. Ibiyeomie's discourse is consistently organised around the prosperity-gospel semantic field, characterised by lexemes such as breakthrough, covenant rights, supernatural, invest, favour, and destiny, which collectively construct a theological universe in which the individual believer occupies the centre and God's blessings, are accessible to those who fulfil prescribed spiritual conditions. Kukah's discourse, by contrast, is organised around a prophetic-political semantic



field, characterised by lexemes such as justice, violence, darkness, resurrection, hope, and reconciliation, which construct a theological universe in which the nation occupies the centre and the Church's primary vocation is prophetic witness to justice, peace, and collective moral accountability.

Ibiyeomie's lexical register is colloquial, energetic, and populist, characterised by direct second person address: "you become a grand commander," "invest in your destiny." High-affect intensifiers: "supernatural," "unlimited," "grand," and commercial vocabulary drawn from the everyday economic experience of his congregation. Kukah's register is formal, analytical, and intellectually demanding, characterised by first person plural address: "we Nigerians," "we must," "we cannot," Latinate words (opprobrium, ameliorating, pre-eminence), and extended argumentative structures that address a broader public of citizens, politicians, and opinion.

Despite these divergences, the two preachers share several significant lexico-semantic features rooted in their common Christian tradition. Both deploy biblical quotation as a primary source of semantic authority. They exploit near-synonymy to create semantic density around their core theological claims. They use antonymic pairs as structural cohesive devices, and also employ hyponymy to move from abstract theological superordinates to specific, practically accessible hyponyms. Most significantly, both share the foundational conviction that language is not merely a transparent medium for communicating theological ideas but a constitutive force that shapes reality and mobilises human agency (Urujzian, 2018). The language of their sermons is not innocent: it is the precise, carefully engineered expression of two different ways of being Christian, two different diagnoses of Nigeria's condition, and two different visions of what God is doing in the world, and it is at the lexico-semantic level, above all others, that these differences become most visible, most precise, and most analytically revealing.

V. CONCLUSION

This study has undertaken a lexico-semantic analysis of selected sermons of Pastor David Ibiyeomie and Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah, drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory as extended by Kövecses (2002) and Halliday and Hasan's (1976) Theory of Lexical Cohesion. The analysis has

demonstrated that both preachers are sophisticated lexico-semantic craftsmen whose word choices are carefully engineered instruments of theological persuasion, social vision, and identity construction. Ibiyeomie's sermons are organised around a prosperity-gospel semantic field, with dominant metaphors drawn from the source domains of commerce, and natural energy, collectively constructing a theological universe in which the individual believer claims divine blessings through love. Kukah's sermons, by contrast, are organised around a prophetic-political semantic field, with dominant metaphors drawn from the source domains of national suffering, agricultural death and regeneration, constructing a theological universe in which the nation occupies the centre and the Church's vocation is collective prophetic witness to justice, peace, and resurrection hope.

Ultimately, the study reveals that the lexico-semantic patterns in the sermons of Pastor David Ibiyeomie and Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah not only reflect their distinct theological orientations and preaching styles but also demonstrate how language functions as a powerful tool for shaping religious consciousness, social identity, and contemporary Christian experience in Nigeria.

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