

Religious Intertextuality In Students' Dissertations

Regina Mensah

University of Cape Coast, Ghana

Abstract

Intertextuality is a known concept about which several studies have been conducted. This study discusses the concept of religious intertextuality in academic discourse: students' dissertations. As an academic discourse, dissertations are not expected to carry much of religious inter text. The use of positioning theory and social identity theory enabled the comprehension of the identities the authors of the dissertations create about themselves. These identities are created consciously by the authors. It was revealed that while almost all authors situate themselves as religious people, they, at the same time, position the religious entity/ies as all powerful. Authors used more of the horizontal; socio-cultural objects and socio-textual practices intertextuality in incorporating the religious inter text in the academic discourse.

1. Introduction

Ghana is recognized with three main religions. These are Christianity, Islam and Traditionalism. Africans are noted to be highly religious. This is what Professor Mbiti remarked about as "Africans are *notoriously* religious, and each people [society in Africa] has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices." (Mbiti, 1969:1) He explained that religion in Africa pervades into all the aspects of life and, therefore, impossible to isolate it from other aspects of the African society and culture. A study of these religious systems is, therefore, a study of the people themselves in all the complexities of traditional and modern life. This presupposes that Ghanaians, who are Africans, may also exhibit such traits of religiosity even in extreme cases where there is not much need for the portrayal of one's religious background.

Academic discourses are believed to be serious documents that are usually offered or practised without regards to the religious background of the participants involved in the discourse. Rarely are academic documents a carrier of the religious backgrounds of the participants. Examples of such discourse include a lecture, a thesis defend or viva voce, academic board meetings, seminars, thesis and students' dissertations.

Students' dissertations are documents usually required to be presented by students in partial fulfillment for the awarding of their tertiary certificate. Having a discursive formation, a dissertation has sections that are prescribed by a school as its requirements for presentation and submission. Therefore, the discursive formations of dissertations are particular to every school. In the University of Cape Coast, the prescribed discursive formation of a dissertation has sections called Preliminaries (which is made up of front page, title page, declaration, abstract, acknowledgement, dedication, table of contents, list of tables and list of figures), Main Body (background to the study, literature review, methodology, discussion and analysis, conclusions, recommendations and references) and the Appendices as published in the school's *Guide for Writing and Presenting Project Work, Dissertation and Theses* (2015).

This study concentrates on the acknowledgment sections of some of these already submitted dissertations. That section allows students to name people they honor and appreciate for supporting or helping them in one way or the other to ensuring the completion of their works. The findings could either be a reaffirmation or not of Mbiti's assertion that Africans are notoriously religious. A confirmation of his words enabled answers to be found to questions like: what identities are created of the authors and the religious entity/ies named in the acknowledgements and how are these religious intertextuality incorporated and used in the collected texts that were analyzed?

2.0 The concept of Intertextuality

Every text is said to be dependent: it incorporates in itself other ideas from the content of other text. Teubert (2010) believes that intertextuality is a feature of discourses. These attestations highlight what Bakhti (1981) asserted: That there is no text which is new or independent but there exist some connection between a text under scrutiny and other texts. Texts are related with respects to topics or issues. This is because discourses can meld together (Gee, 1999). He argued that discourses created may

share similarities with previous and subsequent discourses; thus important parallels could be drawn from discourses. This is to say that there are no new discourses, rather, we join in already existing ones and we recreate or re-enact them for personal or social functions. It has been argued that the concept of intertextuality was coined by Kristeva (1960) and also can be traced to Bakhti (1981).

Bakhti stressed the dialogic qualities of texts, thus, how several voices are transformed and reused each time a new text is developed. Bakhtin (1981:294) wrote "... the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language; it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that a speaker gets his words but rather it exists in other peoples' mouths in other people's context, serving other peoples intentions". Kristeva used the term to associate the phenomenon by which communications are rather a build on of other texts and discourses. That is new communications are just patches of old or prior information. This idea relates to Bakhtin perception when he observed that languages or texts do not possess " a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into private property of the speaker's intention but it is populated, over populated with the intentions of others, expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents though a difficult and complicated process (1981:294)." Haberer (2005) summarized this by explaining that the life of a word is contained in the transfer from one mouth to another from one context to another context and from one social setting to another.

Three categories of intertextuality have been identified by Hatim (1997). They are the horizontal and vertical intertextuality; manifest and constitutive; sociocultural objects and socio textual practices of intertextuality. The horizontal types of intertextuality allows the explicit presentation of the inter text while the inter text of the vertical intertextuality is more implied from the host text. As classified by Fairclough (1992), manifest and constitutive intertextuality relate to the horizontal and vertical types respectively. Hatim explains that the manifest intertextuality is expressed explicitly in a text through surface textual qualities such as quotations and citations while the constitutive is more like the vertical type of intertextuality.

He also discusses the category of intertextuality which he assumes as the vehicle of intertextual elements. The socio- cultural object is the vehicle that occurs with a presentation of a single word or a phrase that has a special significance for a given culture at a given time of an existing text. Also,

the macro conventions and limitations that surrounds a given register, genre, discourse that make it recognizable as being a member of a wider universe of text is the vehicle of intertextuality of socio-textural practices.

3. Findings of other studies

Studies on intertextuality are enough to enable a complete comprehension of the concept. However, a yet to be seen study is presented in an area similar to this study. Intertextuality has been studied in the discourses of media, academic, literature, everyday speeches etc. This study focuses on the idea of religious intertextuality and its function in an academic discourse.

Toth (2011) has offered an illustration of the place of intertextuality in the cinematic production of Queutin Terantino. He summarized that movies dwell on other movies or literary works to conclude their seal. Juvan (2008) confirmed the work of Toth when he also explained that theories of intertextuality allow the vivid explanation of texts' influence in literature. She concluded that primary sources of literature are just intertextual transformations which are only dependent on cultural encyclopedia; a refinement by respecting cultural spaces, traditions and literary systems. Though these studies do not explicitly explain the aspect of religion which is the focus of the current study, they give evidences to substantiate the reality of intertextuality in several areas of studies.

Momami et al, (2010) argued that the identified types of intertextuality: horizontal and vertical intertextuality are dynamically used in the political discourses for war. They explained that opposing parties in some historical moments legitimized their wars against others in the name of God and these were confirmed through the religious intertextuality in their presentation of their ideological and cultural considerations.

Love (2010) also highlighted the interesting idea of religion in videogames. He identified the religious variety in some selected video games and upon discussion of the function of such identified religious intertextuality, he disclosed that religion in the video games operate as a cultural critique and to challenge the player to reflect on his/her identity to enable them to ethically evaluate their actions in the game world. Though the aspect of religious intertextuality were analyzed in both study, Momani et al discussed that as the reason for opponents to carry out their ideological ideas while Love summarized her as a way to allow a player of a video

game to ethically consider their personality in the game.

4. Social Constructionism and Positioning Theory

Andrew (2012) summarized that social constructionism originated as an attempt to come to terms with the nature of reality as developed in the society. It is believed that the idea is linked to the superficial doubt posed by one scholar called Bacon, thus, the concept about how observations are an accurate reflection of the world being observed (Murphy et al, 1998). However, the world and its construction or creation cannot be done without language or discourse because language is the most significant system by which reality can be constructed by humans. Discourse, significantly has been said to be constructed and constitutive. It is constructed in that it is a compilation of words, grammars and elements of a language. It is constitutive when discourses use these symbolic resources to create ways of understanding the world and reality (Potter and Hepburn, 2008). Using this analogy, Burr (1995) has claimed that the identities of people stem not only from the inside but from the social realm. Thus, through the use of language, thoughts, ideas and concepts are made to manifest. This use of language is socially shared and it is conserved. The conservation allows the significant possibility of maintaining, modifying and reconstructing a subjective reality. A reality that is compiled in an unproblematic shared meaning such that concepts and ideas need not be redefined in every similar conversation (Berger & Luckman, 1991). This idea of language and its reality creation is one important assumption of social constructionism.

One major constructionist oriented approach to understanding discourse within an interactional context is the positioning theory (Harre and van Lengenove, 1999). Andreouli, (2010) has affirmed that the positioning theory was developed by Harre and his colleagues. He defined the concept as enacting identities through talks or conversations. However, Harre and Davies (1999) defined the theory as a discursive process whereby people are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines. Positioning theory is manifested when people enact specific identities and perform roles that reflect others who occupy complementary identities and roles. Positions are the discursive affiliation that people adopt or are labeled with in their interactions. It is a metaphor to identifying the ways by which

speakers are situated or positioned within discursive encounters. According to Mckenzie and Carey (2000), Harre used positioning to mean the rhetorical devices by which one and other speakers are presented as occupying various kinds of relation which could be dominance, submission, ignorant, knowledgeable etc. Andreouli (2010) mentioned that positioning theory also incorporates the power dynamics that shape interactions and positioning processes through the concept of moral orders. By moral order, he explained that every position is equipped in it some moral quality in a manner that is associated with a list of rights and duties which shape what can be said or acted from a certain position during a specific context and towards a particular interlocutor. A character can be positioned through a reflective position: an act of stance done by oneself, or a character can be apportioned a position by another- interactive position. This is to say a participant's position which could be either reflective or interactive are taken or given in accordance to the changes in the storylines. Yamkawa et. al (2005) conceptualized that position theory prioritize a tri polar relationship among position, storyline and speech act (illocutionary force or the social significance of an utterance) in conversations. These are what van Langenhove and Harre (1999) explained as the interdependent background conditions which result in positioning.

In a nut shell, positioning theory acknowledges the force of discourse which is manifested and constituted in words and language units. The act of positioning is the association of parts or roles to participants or a character in discourse to make the person's utterance or activities intelligible and to be considered as a social act. This means that the roles that can be taken on or given to a participant is fluid depending on context and situations. In a context, where a participant is positioned a role, the participant could have the choice of accepting or denying such roles. However, texts which assign participants to specific positions in a moral order with rights and constraints give no opportunity for direct negotiation is what Harre and van Langenhove, (1999) call 'first order positioning'; how speakers situate himself and others within a social space.

5. The Social Identity Theory

Ellemer, Spears and Doosie (1999) claim that the social identity theory which was developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979 is related to self -

categorization theory. The theory posits that individuals can be identified with two principal identities; a nature unique of individual idiosyncratic information about themselves and a collective self which encompasses information about the groups to which they are associated with (Tajfel, 1972). Thus, people define themselves in terms of group membership and seek to have their group valued positively. People pride themselves in their associations and they enjoy some self-esteem. In order to increase one's image, the status of a group is enhanced (McLeod, 2008). Ellemers et al, 1999 argue that this group membership phenomenon is dependent on two main issues. These include permeability; group boundaries are permeable only when one cannot be identified as an individual who has advanced. The other reason is security: if one has the premonition that his present situation is either legitimate or inevitable, he will adapt without questioning, however, if the situation is illegitimate and there is a chance to envisage other better ways, then people will act collectively to question the status quo to bring about social change. These summarize the concept of social identity theory as the confession of one's association to a known group is not empty or neutral, rather, there are unobvious reasons of permeability or security that people enjoy or seek to find with their association with a group.

6. Methodology and Data

In an attempt to answer the research question, a search was done through some submitted dissertations of students to ascertain whether elements of religious intertextuality would be found. It was relieving to know that almost all students to some extent had incorporated aspects of religiosity in their acknowledgement section of their dissertation. As explained earlier in this paper, the acknowledgement section forms part of a discursive formation of students' dissertation. The University of Cape Coast, the 2015 Faculty of Education's *Guide for Writing and Presenting Project Works, Dissertation and Theses* makes it explicit that the acknowledgment section of students' works must provide details of the gratitude they owe people who directly assisted in the completion of their works. It also makes it clear that acknowledging any supernatural being is not official. Available in the school's department of Art and Social Sciences Education were dissertation that had been approved and submitted by students. Usually, very new dissertations are kept in the offices of the supervisors

and were usually inaccessible but a bit older ones had been freed to the department's library for other students' benefits. Upon realizing that almost all submitted and released works of students had aspects of religiosity in the acknowledgment sections, data was then picked at random.

An observation was made that all the acknowledgement sections only occupy a page in the entire document. The data was coded for easy identification. The coding has a numerical figure introducing the letters *a, c, k* and other figures. The figures before the letters represent the identification of the acknowledgement which are identified from 1-10. Followed by the identification '*a, c, k*' which represent the word 'acknowledgment' are the figures that show the number of religious intertextuality found in a particular acknowledgement. These are numbered as 001-100.

As a qualitative study, it focused on small number of cases to answer the research questions in an in-depth manner. The results provided are in a descriptive form other than prescriptive (Simpson and Tuson, 1995). This was aimed at gaining some level of understanding of the phenomenon under study. Qualitative study is concerned with the provision of a subjective overview of a social, emotional and similar phenomenon. Due to the nature of the study only ten different acknowledgements were picked from the entire copies available.

7. Presentation of Data and Discussion of Findings

- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, Philippians 4:13. (1ack001)
- We are so much grateful to God for the far he has brought us (1ack002)
- To God be the glory and honor for the protection and sustenance of our lives (2ack001)
- Never could we have come this far without God's grace and mercy (2ack002)
- Our sincere thanks go to the Almighty God for his sustenance guidance and direction through our four year study at the University of Cape Coast. (3ack001)
- May God bless you all (3ack002)
- It has been said that 'the debt of gratitude is often difficult to pay', for this reason we are sure we can never repay our creator, the Lord almighty by whose good manners we are still alive. (4ack001)

- He gave us part of his unbound wisdom and strength to write this piece of work. To him we offer our sacrifices of praise and worship (4ack002)
- Now thank we our God for great things he has done we could not have come this far for but for his providence. (5ack001)
- We give thanks to God for the life and strength, knowledge and understanding which enabled us to complete this work successfully. To him be the glory forever and ever. (6ack001)
- May God richly bless her and make her dreams and aspirations be fulfilled. Amen. (6ack002)
- To God almighty we express our deep appreciation. We are content for his endless grace and mercy. (7ack001)
- May the almighty God bless and keep you going stronger. (7ack002)
- God bless you and keep you to enjoy the benefits of your efforts. (7ack003)
- God richly bless you. (7ack004)
- We wish to express our profound gratitude to the one and only true God, the giver of good things including wisdom for his support in this work. (8ack001)
- Our utmost thanks go to God almighty for his strength, wisdom, knowledge and understanding it took to bring this work to a completion. (9ack001)
- Our sincere thanks and appreciation to the almighty God for the strength, wisdom, knowledge and protection granted us to be able to conduct this research successfully and subsequently graduate. (10ack001)

7.1 Identities Created for the Religious Entity and about the Authors of the Dissertation

An identity, referred by Mcleod (2008) is conceptualized as a discursive construct which could be associated with the attributes of a character, group membership and other meanings. This could be situated such that different circumstances and situations can allow a character to take on different identities (Gee, 1999). These identities are very recognizable in the society. This is because discourses enable the enactment of these identities and discourse is socially constructed. This is what Gee refers to as situated identities. By requirements, students through their dissertation are allowed by the society, school community, to situate themselves as

knowledgeable or people who can exhibit their research skills under the required circumstance. Also, the acknowledgment section provided for them to situate themselves as students who appreciate the efforts of other people for their contribution to students' final work. Though the content of the sampled dissertations were not considered to reveal if students did exhibit the identities of good researchers, it can be assumed that having been accepted by their supervisors whom by the university's standards are lecturers, the students might have constructed their identities as researchers adequately.

The acknowledgment section also revealed that the identities of the appreciative nature of the students were well constructed. Apart from the acknowledgment of their beings of worship, almost all of the students mentioned names of persons they deem to have helped them with the writing and completion of their research work. A confirmation can be made from the appendix of this study. However, while enacting their appreciative nature, students created other identities for themselves. They produced that they were people belonging to some special sect and are loyal to the sect. They presented themselves as religious people (Christians) who saw it necessary to thank, honor and glorify their God in all things. "Excerpt 1ack001" provides the knowledge that the author is a Christian. The use of a horizontal intertextuality provides readers this evidence. The author quotes directly from their holy book to refer to their belief. Also the mentioning of the name of their Supreme Being, God and Almighty God, which they carefully write with the beginning of a block letters give an indication of their respect for such beings.

- *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13). (1ack001)*
- *We are so much grateful to God for the far he has brought us (1ack002)*
- *To God be the glory and honor for the protection and sustenance of our lives (2ack001)*
- *Never could we have come this far without God's grace and mercy (2ack002)*
- *Our sincere thanks go to the Almighty God for his sustenance guidance and direction through our four year study at the University of Cape Coast. (3ack001)*
- *He gave us part of his unbound wisdom and strength to write this piece of work.*

To him we offer our sacrifices of praise and worship.

Through interactive positioning: the type of positioning that is done by oneself; the authors proudly associate themselves to roles and parts that show they are feeble. The ideas presented in the excerpts above show that the authors position themselves as incapable on their own, lacking knowledge, sustenance, protection, strength prior to their God's intervention. They honorably believe that their very existence is through the help and grace of their God. Therefore, without this God, they cannot be in existence, neither could they be capable, knowledgeable, directed and etc. However, it is assumed that these roles adopted by the authors are in relation to some complementary roles in the society Harre and Lengenrove, (1999). Again, the social constructionism philosophy explains that the character of one is to some extent dependent on culture and may be controlled by this same culture. Therefore, since discourse is shared and it is socially constructed, it explains that the manners these authors position themselves may be culturally accepted.

The authors also adopt a reflective positioning to situate the religious entity as a creator, one who gives strength, direction, sustenance, guidance, providence, life and he has wisdom, grace, favor and has the power to bless them and other people. They position their God as "all powerful, true, only and almighty". The authors used rhetorical devices to prescribe an occupying position of dominance for the religious entity (Mckenzie and Carey, 2000). The excerpts below explain the assertion in this paragraph.

- *Our utmost thanks go to God Almighty for strength, wisdom, knowledge and understanding it took to bring this work to a completion. (9ack001)*
- *Our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Almighty God for the strength, wisdom knowledge and protection granted us to be able to conduct this research successfully and subsequently graduate. (10ack001)*
- *May the Almighty God bless and keep you (in reference to their supervisor) going stronger. (7ack003)*
- *We wish to express our profound gratitude to the one and only true God, the giver of*

good things including wisdom for his support in this work. (8ack001)

The above excerpts position God as having the power and ability to provide the authors with their needs and the needs of others. Here, the religious entity cannot negotiate the identities created for him. Hence, he is positioned in a "first order" manner by the authors of the dissertation (Harre and Lengenrove, 1999).

7.2 How the Religious Intertextuality are Incorporated and Used

Hatim's, 1997 socio cultural object and socio textual practice category of intertextuality enable for the identification of the excerpts of the discussion as being religious inter text which belongs to a universal prior text. The socio cultural objects like "God, Lord, Almighty and Christ" link the excerpts directly to the Bible. Again, the conventions that surrounds the excerpts allow for its recognition as belonging to a universal text which still points to the Bible. The authors incorporate the elements of religious intertextuality through a more horizontal or manifest form. This assertion can be made because there are obvious citations and quotations from the bible. Most of the extracts are very explicit text from the Bible and other Christian documents. A very obvious instance is found in excerpts 1ack001 and 5ack001 below.

- *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. **Philippians 4:13.** 1ack001*
- ***"Now thank we our God, for the great things he has done."** We could not have come this far but for his providence. (5ack001).*

More so, it can be inferred from the excerpts as found in the acknowledgment sections that the authors use the religious inter texts provide a social identity for themselves. The ideas presented in the religious inter text provide an insight of the knowledge that the authors belong to the Christian religion. They explain the benefits that can be derived from such an association and also provide evidence why their membership should be valued positively. They give clues for their group association as one which enables them some benefits like sustenance, provision, grace, strength, blessings. These benefits of their social identities are what Ellemer et. al (1999) refer as the permeability of the group association.

- *To God almighty we express our deep appreciation. We are content for his endless grace and mercy. (7ack001)*
- *To God be the glory and honor for the protection and sustenance of our lives (2ack001)*
- *Never could we have come this far without God's grace and mercy (2ack002)*
- *Our sincere thanks go to the Almighty God for his sustenance guidance and direction through our four year study at the University of Cape Coast. (3ack001)*
- *May God bless you all (3ack002)*

Among others, the excerpts above give the indication that the religious group, which is also socially constructed, rests on a God who is all providing. This God does see to the needs and interests of the members of the group. The acknowledgements of the excerpts by the authors give readers insights into subjective explanations for their presence in such an academic discourse for which issues about religion are unacceptable.

8. 0 Summary of findings and conclusion

The intertextual properties of a discourse are achieved in it linguistic features and how the discourse draws from other texts. The data confirmed Professor Mbiti's statement that Africans are notoriously religious. Though the acknowledgement section of the discursive formation of an accepted dissertation allows for the appreciation of people who directly contributed to their works, however, students are not allowed to exhibit their religiosity. This, the authors do otherwise. Students used the religious inter text to position themselves and the religious entity they mention in their academic texts. The authors situated themselves as incapable while the religious entity as capable and powerful. Again, the excerpt provided the evidence that authors of the dissertation were members of the Christian religious sect.

The study concludes that though academic discourses may be said to be serious discourses that focus on academic issues with no deviations from course but the acknowledgement sections of students dissertation which is also an academic discourse exhibited inter text which were religious in nature.

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