

Decision Prompt in Charismatic Sermon Discourse: A Rhetoro-discursive Analysis of Pastor E.A. Adeboye's Holy Ghost Service Peroratio

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Abstract

This study undertakes a rhetoro-discursive analysis of decision prompts in the sermon Peroratio, with specific reference to the Holy Ghost Service (HGS) sermons of Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Nigeria. Situated at the intersection of rhetoric, discourse analysis, and religious communication, the study interrogates how decision prompts function as strategic communicative devices that guide sermon audiences toward specific behavioural and spiritual commitments. Drawing on three purposively selected sermon extracts (2006, 2009, and 2012), the research adopts a qualitative textual-analytic methodology grounded in discourse segmentation and rhetorical move analysis. The findings demonstrate that decision prompts are not spontaneous or incidental elements of sermonic discourse but are systematically embedded within the Sermon Closure Discourse (SCD), particularly within the *Finis*, where they operate as climactic persuasive mechanisms. These prompts are shown to structure audience cognition through binary oppositions, conditional reasoning, and temporal urgency, thereby creating a rhetorically engineered decision environment. Furthermore, the study reveals that decision prompts function as preparatory discourse acts that precede and enable the altar call, reinforcing the performative and action-oriented nature of Charismatic Christian preaching. By integrating insights from recent scholarship on religious discourse, pragmatics, and rhetoric, this study contributes to ongoing debates on the nature of sermonic persuasion in contemporary religious contexts. It also provides a comparative perspective by situating Christian sermonic strategies alongside analogous practices in Islamic *khutbah* discourse. Ultimately, the study advances the argument that sermons are decision-oriented discursive artefacts in which language is deployed to transform belief into action through carefully orchestrated rhetorical design.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis, Sermon Rhetoric, Decision Prompts, Peroratio, Holy Ghost Service, Charismatic Christianity

Introduction

Sermons are inherently decision-oriented discursive artefacts in which language is deployed not merely to inform or inspire, but to provoke, guide, and ultimately secure commitment to particular courses of action (Omoniyi & Fishman, 2006). Within the broader ecology of religious communication, the sermon occupies a central position as a structured, persuasive, and performative genre through which belief systems are articulated, reinforced, and enacted. In contemporary Charismatic Christianity-particularly within the Nigerian religious landscape-the sermon has evolved into a highly sophisticated communicative event, combining rhetorical finesse, theological framing, and performative intensity to achieve specific spiritual and behavioural outcomes (Adetunji, 2021; Ukah, 2022; Adeyanju, 2023a; Broadus, 1926).

This study focuses on a critical yet under-examined component of sermonic discourse: decision prompts. These are linguistically and rhetorically structured cues through which preachers guide their audiences toward making explicit, often immediate, decisions, such as accepting salvation, committing to moral reform, or participating in ritual actions. While previous studies have examined persuasion in sermons broadly, insufficient attention has been paid to the micro-discursive mechanisms through which such decisions are elicited, particularly within the climactic segment of the sermon: the Peroratio.

The Peroratio, traditionally understood in classical rhetoric as the concluding segment of a speech, serves as the site of emotional intensification and persuasive culmination (Aristotle, trans. 2007). In sermonic discourse, this segment is especially significant because it is where the preacher consolidates prior arguments and channels them toward actionable outcomes. In the context of the Holy Ghost Service (HGS) sermons analysed in this study, the Peroratio is realised as the Sermon Closure Discourse (SCD), within which the Finis (F) functions as the terminal yet highly dynamic component. It is within this Finis that decision prompts are most densely concentrated and strategically deployed.

Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye as the focal subject of this research

The empirical focus of this study is on the sermons of Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye, a central figure in global Pentecostalism and the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Lagos, Nigeria (Bible-Edwards, 2009; Ojo, 1997, 2001; Ukah, 2002, 2003). Pastor Adeboye's sermons, particularly those delivered during the

monthly Holy Ghost Service HGS, provide a rich corpus for analysing contemporary charismatic preaching due to their global reach, structured rhetorical organisation, and consistent emphasis on audience participation and decision-making (Ukah, 2022; Marshall, 2021; Adeyanju, 2024b). His sermons are not merely theological expositions; they are carefully crafted communicative performances designed to produce measurable spiritual and behavioural responses.

The selection of Pastor Adeboye as the focal subject of this research is both empirically and theoretically motivated. Empirically, the HGS represents one of the largest recurring religious gatherings globally, attracting millions of participants both physically and via digital platforms. The scale and consistency of these events make them a valuable site for examining patterned discourse practices. Theoretically, Adeboye's sermons exemplify key features of charismatic discourse, including performativity, immediacy, and the integration of rational, emotional, and spiritual appeals. As such, they provide an ideal context for investigating how decision prompts function within a highly structured yet dynamic rhetorical environment.

The Sermon as Specialised Communication

The term 'sermon' derives from the Latin *sermō* ('discourse'), underscoring its fundamentally communicative nature. Historically and contemporarily, the pulpit serves as a locus of ideological and spiritual influence (Butler, 1997). As far back as the 17th Century, sermons were not only heard at church, but often copied and read in homes, where they were the subject of reflection and meditation. This practice has not waned even today with cutting-edge technological, communication and scientific advancement. Rather, preachers have adeptly appropriated advances in information and communication technologies to gain physical and online membership, proselytise and offer counselling and other forms of support, seek funding or other forms of support, and to disseminate their messages via multimedia resources (Hadden & Cowan, N.D.; Babatunde, N.D).

Rhetorical manipulation, therefore, is not incidental but constitutive of sermonic practice (Cicero, 1970; Craddock, 1985; Buttrick, 1987). Thus, the "pulpit" has been reconstituted as a virtual communicative domain, where sermonic discourse remains simultaneously popular and elevated (Brooks, 1989). Sermons, as argued in contemporary discourse studies, constitute one of the most pervasive media for shaping public

consciousness and influencing belief systems (Ilie, 2021; Adeyanju, 2024a; Omartian, 2001).

Particularly, we are motivated to study sermon discourse since the need for researching specialised communication has become increasingly important in linguistics and other ancillary disciplines (Bhatia, 2021; Hyland, 2022; Adeyanju, 2025; Mekiliuwa, 2009). Thus, generally, we are interested in both the organisation and structure of the sermon and its varied micro-genres. For this study, specifically, the subject of the research is Enoch Adejare Adeboye and the Holy Ghost Service (HGS) sermons from the preeminent ritual event of the RCCG, believing that these yield tremendous research dividends within African religious discourse studies (Afolayan, 2023; Marshall, 2021; Adeyanju, 2023b).

We conceive of the sermon as a series of persuasive ideas and images (discourse and religious moves) consistently expressed in bundles of language to generate a certain nuance or shade of meaning as predetermined by the preacher, registering in the emotive calculus of the audience (Robinson & Larson, 2005). To gain an objective idea of the complexity of a sermon event, the analyst must interrogate the communicative act through four WH-headed questions:

- (a) Who has preached what?
- (b) To whom?
- (c) By what means? and
- (d) to what effect?

These correspond broadly to classical rhetorical inquiry and modern discourse-functional analysis (Aristotle, trans. 2007; Grice, 1975; Foss, 1996; Hyons, 1996; Ilie, 2021; Plato, 1952, N.D, Prickett, 1986; Richards, 1936).

The answers reveal that sermons are subtle, carefully structured discourse formations in which each patterned sermonic move builds upon the emotive and cognitive effect created through preceding moves, heightening psycho-religious engagement until, at closure, a determined meaning or intuitive conviction is achieved. Thus, the sermon is both a persuasive discourse construction and a religious co-operative event (Bhatia, 2021).

It may be safely hazarded that sermons and religious texts correlate with the growth and development of literacy and publishing traditions, with historical evidence showing that sermons were widely circulated, read, and meditated upon (Medhurst, 2007). This practice has not waned in contemporary times; rather, technological advancement has transformed the pulpit into a hybrid physical-digital communicative

space. Preachers now appropriate information and communication technologies to expand reach, mobilise audiences, and disseminate doctrine globally (Ojo, 2022; Afolayan, 2023; Adeyanju, 2024b).

Sermons can no longer be considered as isolated linguo-religious artefacts, but as part of an ongoing and organic whole. In the opinion of Medhurst, starting from the city-states of ancient Greece, to the Medieval churchmen, to the English Puritans arriving on the shores of New England, and even till today, sermons or “civil-religious rhetoric ” have flowed and ebbed, but never disappeared” (289). Thus, it is always a part of society. In Islam, sermonisation is the major duty of khatibs, who lead prayers in the mosque and deliver the formal khutbah, while in Christianity, by whatever titular appellation he/she goes by, the sermoner performs the same function. However, in Islam, as in Christianity, the task of proselytising is the responsibility of all genuine adherents, and the sermonisation, of course, may not necessarily be limited to either the mosque or the church setting. Sermons provide guidance to the adherents, facilitated through reason and persuasion to the ‘straight path’. Sermonisation is central to both Christianity and Islam. In Islam, the khutbah functions as a structured rhetorical act delivered by a khatib, while in Christianity, preaching performs analogous functions of exhortation and doctrinal dissemination (Alkhateeb, 2021; Adeyanju, 2025). However, Charismatic Christian sermons differ in their heightened emphasis on immediacy, experiential validation, and decision-making urgency, particularly through altar calls and performative response mechanisms (Taiwo, 2022). For example, the commandment to Muslims in both the Qur'an and Medinite Sūrahs is to:

Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best who have strayed from His Path and who receive guidance. (Qur'an 16:125) Yusuf Ali Translation

Similar injunctions are also found in the Bible. In fact, the Christian mandate or ‘Great Commission’ is anchored on preaching. Thus, Christians are commanded:

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. Mark 16:15

Similarly, the Christian is also admonished thus:

preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 2 Timothy 4:2

Thus, sermons are the great rhetorical power behind all the missionary religions.

It is to achieve the lofty aims of ideological and spiritual education and behavioural alteration, as well as to foster human consciousness and understanding, that religion and especially, the practice of sermonisation, arose. And language is invaluable to achieving this. Preaching involves a highly complex, multi-layered rhetorical communication as preachers address their audience's mind and heart and seek assent and action from them. Most literary discourses feature appeals to morality that seem indistinguishable from a sermon. Even many rhetorical events, such as the impassioned pleas that parents and teachers often make as they try to influence younger generations to make good decisions, are today commonly referred to as 'preaching' (Hart, 1993; Janvier, 2002; Robinson, 2002). And indeed, it can be classified as such because the preacher mingles with divinity and draws from it a worldview to influence a congregation, like parents and teachers similarly attempt to influence to achieve a predetermined goal. An element of the 'unseen' is involved: belief in an unseen God within the human experience, who has acted and does act, is inevitable to religious communication, while the child's future becomes the unseen element in parent-teachers' impassioned pleas. Also, notable that passion is involved in both instances to qualify them as sermons. Again, belief is at the core and acts as motivation to preach.

The three-tiered classificatory role for sermons proposed is said to consist of:

- (i) Preaching involves information and doctrine.
- (ii) It has an aspect of 'formation', a seeking of assent by the preacher, in his word that preaching "aims at shaping persons and communities" through an invitation to reflection
- (iii) Preaching is provocation, a call to service and action of some kind by the audience. (Indermark, 2004)

One of the chief problems of discourse, generally and particularly the sermon as a discourse genre, would be the lack of progression, which makes it dull (Swale, 1990; Taylor, 1961; Scarcella, 1984; Brown, 1983). Sermon progression must be correlated with substance. Simply, progression must involve the taxis or pace of the sermonic discourse. The sermon's taxis or arrangement may be thought of in terms of the distinct stages or parts of the sermon (Coulthard, 1985, 1987; Hoey, 1983). It is at the heuristic phase or planning stage that preachers carefully design the 'what, how and why' of the sequence of the sermon, its various parts. The five canons of rhetoric include invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery. There were discrepancies amongst classical orators as to the number of parts into which a speech might be divided; just so it is amongst preachers as to the number of parts into which a sermon might be appropriately divided (Foss, 1996; Edmonson, 1986). The question of what type of appeal might be effective in each part (of speech or sermon) has similarly provoked controversy.

Discussing the three primary modes of persuasion, Aristotle distinguishes:

- (a) *logos*: appeal to reason, or the logic of the message
- (b) *pathos*: appeal to emotion-the audience's emotions and sentiments;
- (c) *ethos*: appeal to the rhetor's authority and credibility (Aristotle, trans. 2007).

These categories remain foundational in analysing sermonic discourse, particularly within charismatic contexts where emotional intensification and authority construction are pronounced (Ilie, 2021; Adeyanju, 2024b).

The Sermon's Rhetorical Parts

Classical rhetoric identifies structural divisions in discourse. Aristotle proposes a four-part rhetorical structure comprising the introduction, narrative, proof, and conclusion (Aristotle, trans. 2007). Subsequent rhetorical scholarship, however, expands this framework. For instance, Charteris-Black (2014) advances a five-part model consisting of a prologue (introduction), narration, proof, refutation, and epilogue (conclusion), thereby explicitly incorporating refutation as a distinct argumentative stage. In contrast, other scholars revert to a four-part division, albeit with modified terminology; for example, Pipes (2009) outlines a structure comprising the introduction, statement, discussion, and conclusion. Despite terminological variation, these models converge on a shared rhetorical logic: the systematic progression from opening orientation through development and substantiation to closure.

The introduction often involves the reading of a scripture passage. The statement usually comes from the Bible. Pipes also argues that the discussion “merely has the appearance of organisation, for it is often a series of digressions aimed to arouse the emotions of the audience”. He notes that “the more highly-educated minister” typically uses a more logical organisation. Finally, according to Pipes, the sermon conclusion is often absent when the emotional climax of the sermon is so intense as “to make articulate speech impossible” (157).

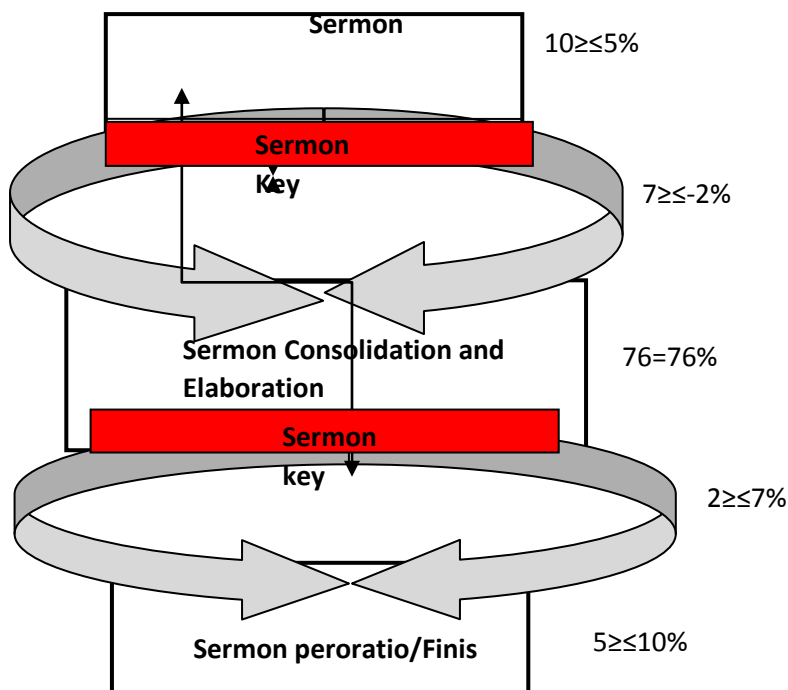
We, however, in Table 1 below, take a compromise position by outlining a three-part rhetorical division of a sermon:

Table 1: Rhetorical Division of the Sermon

Rhetorical Division of the Sermon
(a) The Sermon Exordium (Introduction)
(b) Sermon Consolidation and Elaboration (Main Sermon)
(c) The Sermon Peroratio/Epilogue (Conclusion)

From the above table, it is logical to conclude that each rhetorical part of the sermon will, therefore, be realised by specific Moves and sermon acts realised within the Moves (Kinneavy, 1987, 1971; Medhurst, 1991; Malmstrom, 2016; Mitchell, 1975, Sangster, 1951). The relations between the sermon’s rhetorical parts can be diagrammatically illustrated thus:

Figure 1: The Relations between the Sermon's Rhetorical Parts



We conceive of the structure of the HGS Christian sermon discourse texts as consisting of three-part elements: the Sermon Exordium or 'Compass Mapping Discourse', CMD; the main sermon or Sermon Development Discourse, SDD; and lastly the Sermon Peroratio or Sermon Closure Discourse, SCD. The concerns in the study are centred on Decision Prompts, which are strictly located at the HGS SCD; specifically, with the Sermon Finis (F), the element that signifies that the HGS sermon has come to a fitting end. Both the Altar-Call and the Sinner's Prayers are typically tagged to the periphery of the Finis of the sermon. It is with the Finis that Pastor Adeboye ends his HGS sermon while the audience still wants more. Like the Peroratio of which it is a constituent, rhetorically, the sermon Finis is also complexly patterned and conflated.

The Sermon Finis and Decision Prompts

The Finis is the climactic closure sermon segment where multiple sub-moves converge. Importantly, this study advances the argument that

decision prompts are structurally embedded within the Finis, functioning as directive discourse acts that precede altar calls. This aligns with findings in recent scholarship that sermon conclusions serve as decision zones where persuasion culminates in action (Ilie, 2021; Taiwo, 2022; Adeyanju, 2024a; Trosborg, 1997).

However, the Finis of the sermon is variably composed. In the main, the following sub-Moves are conflated in the Finis:

- a. Data collection (counselling and prayer for the penitents)
- b. The congregational prayer
- c. Thanksgiving
- d. Testimony
- e. Announcement
- f. Benediction

This aligns with modern genre theory, where discourse is realised through moves and steps (Bhatia, 2021; Adeyanju, 2025). The relations between these steps are diagrammatically presented as Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Radial Diagram of the Sermon Finis



As always, Pastor Adeboye's HGS sermon *Finis* ends seriously, not with a joke or some silly reference. Creativity works in both Adeboye's HGS sermon *Exordium* and much more so in the HGS sermon *Peroratio*. Thus, the *Finis*, as a section in the HGS sermon genre, cannot be an optional element. All the sermons have to end somehow. The entire HGS sermons *Finis* are not abrupt. Pastor Adeboye always ends his sermons intentionally, and his doing that takes careful planning as our study would reveal. Hence, Adeboye carefully and thoroughly plans his sermon *Finis*, or sermon *dismount*, as he does his HGS sermon *takeoff*. He always uniquely ends his sermons positively, not haranguing the audience but calling them to greater Christian commitment.

Decision Prompts as Rhetoro-Discursive Strategies in the Sermon Finis

Within the rhetorical architecture of the sermon, the *Peroratio*, realised in this study as the *Sermon Closure Discourse (SCD)*, constitutes the climactic site of persuasive intensification where discourse converges toward action (Aristotle, trans. 2007; Charteris-Black, 2014). In the context of the Holy Ghost Service (HGS), this climactic segment is instantiated as the *Finis (F)*, within which decision prompts function as deliberate rhetoro-discursive triggers designed to move the audience from contemplation to commitment (Shami, 2017).

Decision prompts in the HGS sermon *Finis* are not merely rhetorical embellishments; rather, they are structured illocutionary acts that align with what Pragmatics identifies as directive speech acts, compelling hearers toward specific behavioural uptake (Searle, 1969; Ilie, 2021). These prompts are embedded within a broader persuasive schema that integrates *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*, thereby ensuring that decision-making is framed simultaneously as rational, affective, and morally sanctioned (Hyland, 2022).

Recent studies on religious discourse have emphasised that sermonic persuasion, especially within charismatic traditions, is inherently performative and action-oriented, with linguistic strategies calibrated to produce immediate audience response (Adetunji, 2021; Ukah, 2022). In this regard, Pastor Adeboye's deployment of decision prompts reflects a highly ritualised communicative pattern, where the audience is progressively guided toward a predetermined interpretive and behavioural endpoint.

Materials and Methods

Transcribed text extracts from 3 (three) HGS sermons (preached in 2006, 2009 and 2012) by Pastor Adeboye were purposively selected for the study. The HGS is held on the first Friday of every month, while every month of March, on the anniversary of the HGS, a 3-day special HGS is held. Insofar as the present study represents a descriptive and exploratory study, this (3) HGS sermons sample is deemed appropriate to provide data that could be reasonably handled in this study. Textual analysis is employed as the primary method due to its capacity to describe and interpret specialised communicative practices. Given the descriptive and exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative research design was deemed pertinent. The analysis is conducted using discourse segments, reflecting naturally occurring spoken units rather than strictly syntactic units, consistent with discourse-analytic methodology (Hyland, 2022; Adeyanju, 2023a). In other words, rather than via a clausal analysis, the analysis was as heard as ‘units’ in spoken discourse and so transcribed. In writing, these discourse segments sometimes approximate ‘paragraphs’, and sometimes they do not approximate paragraphs. Overall, the type of discourse moves and the classes of sermonic acts of HGS sermons would be identified and analysed.

Analysis

The decision prompt is obligatory in Christian Charismatic sermons (Bunton, 2005). A close examination of the selected Pastor E. A. Adeboye’s HGS sermon extracts reveals that decision prompts can be categorised into three interrelated types:

- (a) binary decision structuring,
- (b) conditional promissory prompts, and
- (c) urgency and temporal compression. Below, we consider each of these three typologies and the excerpts illustrating them:

Binary Decision Structuring

One of the most salient strategies in Adeboye’s discourse is the reduction of complex existential realities into binary oppositions: salvation vs. damnation, obedience vs. disobedience, life vs. death. This aligns with findings in contemporary sermon studies that religious rhetoric often simplifies cognitive processing by structuring choices into dichotomous frameworks (Kalu, 2021; Nwoye, 2023):

1. How many of you will be willing to pay the price? God will help you in Jesus Name! ...²How do I move from one level to the other? Simple! Accept His invitation. He said, come unto me, I'm up there, you are down there. Come up to me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest. Accept His invitation. That's all. I know some of you had given your life to Jesus Christ but some of you came late. ³So, if you haven't given your life to Jesus Christ, in your own interests come and do so because if you don't give your life to Jesus Christ one day you will end up in the bottomless pit. But if you come to Him today not only will He rescue you from the bottomless pit, He will keep on lifting you higher and higher and higher because Jesus said, and if I be lifted up from here, I will draw all men unto me. ⁴So, it doesn't matter which level you are; He will keep drawing you higher and higher. ⁵If you have not yet given your life to Jesus, there may be only a few of you here, I want to give you the opportunity, come quickly.

The method of inducing the rational decision-making behaviour from the audience in Excerpt 1 by Pastor Adeboye is via an appeal to the audience, which hints at the fact that one careless decision by anyone can lead to long-term consequences. The decision-making strategies fashioned and deployed by Pastor Adeboye are three-pronged:

(a) Agonizing: In the sermon, Pastor Adeboye accumulates so much information that analysing the options becomes overwhelming for the audience:

³So, if you haven't given your life to Jesus Christ, in your own interests come and do so because if you don't give your life to Jesus Christ one day you will end up in the bottomless pit.

(b) Intention: The audience is led by Pastor Adeboye to choosing an option that will be spiritually, intellectually and emotionally satisfying now and in the Hereafter:

But if you come to Him today not only will He rescue you from the bottomless pit, He will keep on lifting you higher and higher and higher because Jesus said, and if I be lifted up from here, I will draw all men unto me.

(c) Desire: Pastor Adeboye urges the audience to effect the decision to be ‘born again’ driven by a high priority:

⁴So, it doesn’t matter which level you are, He will keep drawing you higher and higher. ⁵If you have not yet given your life to Jesus, there may be only a few of you here, I want to give you the opportunity, come quickly ...

According to Pastor Adeboye dire consequences, which last even after death, await anyone in the audience who does not make the only right decision by “**accepting His invitation’ or ‘salvation’**”.

2. That is why I want to appeal to those of you who are there who are not yet born again, those of you who have not surrendered your life to Jesus. If you want a taste of heaven you must surrender your life to Jesus first. Now, in this huge arena there are 36 altars. If you look around you will see the one that is very close to you because I know some of you are very, very, very far away.

Pastor Adeboye references his experience and spiritual maturity in Excerpt 2 in order to lead the audience into the decision-making process. The appeal for decision is based on:

i. Now a “‘mature and wise person’”, having been once confronted with making similar decision and he had decided for God, Adeboye provides a helpful insight for the audience in order ‘to have a taste of heaven’:

...I want to appeal to those of you who are there who are not yet born again, those of you who have not surrendered your life to Jesus

ii That the audience carefully takes the decision: In the tradition of good counsellors, Pastor Adeboye does not attempt to coerce the audience into a decision against their will. He only attempts to help the audience to arrive at the right decision:

...If you want a taste of heaven you must surrender your life to Jesus first.

Thus, since decision prompters are always precedent to ‘invitation for salvation’ or ‘altar call’, Pastor Adeboye immediately enacts an altar call consequent upon the deployment of this prompt.

Such binary structuring as in excerpts 1 to 2 above operates as a cognitive heuristic, limiting interpretive ambiguity and compelling the audience toward a singular “correct” choice. From a discourse-pragmatic perspective, this strategy reduces processing load while amplifying decision urgency (Ilie, 2021; Barth, 1991).

Furthermore, similar binary constructions are observable in Islamic khutbah discourse, where the dichotomy between haqq (truth) and batil (falsehood) is frequently invoked to guide moral decision-making (Hassan, 2022). This suggests a cross-religious rhetorical convergence in the use of decision prompts as moral polarisation devices.

Conditional Promissory Prompts

A second category involves conditional constructions: “if...then...” formulations that link audience action to divine consequence. These structures resonate with what discourse analysts identify as conditional speech acts, which project future states contingent upon present decisions (Hyland, 2022; Austin, 1962). It is about this typology that, in excerpts 3 and 4 below:

3. Now I can conclude thank you Father Hallelujah! You cannot shine if you are covered in sin. Thank God for all of you who have given your lives to Jesus Christ tonight! Please don't go back in sin. Those of you who are already born again, you are going to cry to God for ability to live Holy. It is in Holiness that you can begin to shine. You are going to pray a very short prayer now before we move to the next thing God wants us to do and let me hear somebody shout a very big Hallelujah!

For instance, somewhere within the body of the HGS sermon from which Excerpt 3 was sampled, Pastor Adeboye had earlier enacted both the decision prompter and altar call moves. Thus, Excerpt 3 above is not only functionally a ‘decision re-iteration prompt’ but is nestled between serial conclusion prompts. The decision-prompt in Excerpt 3 serves mainly “discourse-anaphoric reference” purposes:

...You cannot shine if you are covered in sin. Thank God for all of you who have given your lives to Jesus Christ tonight! Please don't go back in sin. Those of you who are already born again, you are going to cry to God for ability to live Holy. It is in Holiness that you can begin to shine. You are going to pray a very short prayer now

before we move to the next thing God wants us to do and let me hear somebody shout a very big Hallelujah!

Also, in Excerpt 4 below, the two-pronged strategies adopted by Pastor Adeboye in leading the audience into decision-making are avoidance and security:

4. So, before we pray tonight, make up your mind; I am asking You to reign in my life, with the understanding, **that from now on, You will be in charge, whatever You ask me to do, that is what I will do, ask me to sit down; I will sit down, ask me to stand; I will stand, ask me to pray; I will pray. Ask me to fast; I will fast, ask me to tithe; I will tithe, ask me to give an offering; I will give it cheerfully. Ask me to study the Bible; I will study the Bible, ask me to witness; I will witness. When I ask You to come and reign in my life, I understand what I am saying; I am saying come and take absolute control.** If you mean that tonight, for the rest of your life you will remember tonight as the turning point, when everything changes for the better, I can assure you of that. HGS 4, Dec 2009

- i. **Avoidance:** Pastor Adeboye makes recourse to an appeal to individuals in the audience to choose only the option that is most likely to avoid the worst possible results now and in the future. The prompt directs the audience's decision-making process thus:

I am asking You to reign in my life, with the understanding, **that from now on, You will be in charge, whatever You ask me to do, that is what I will do, ask me to sit down; I will sit down, ask me to stand; I will stand, ask me to pray; I will pray. Ask me to fast; I will fast, ask me to tithe; I will tithe, ask me to give an offering; I will give it cheerfully. Ask me to study the Bible; I will study the Bible, ask me to witness; I will witness.**

The implicature is that although there is a price to be paid for yielding to whomever one yields his/her life to control, whether God or the devil; but more consequential price will be paid, if one's life is under the control of the devil

- ii. **Security:** Premium security for the individual members of the audience is, according to Pastor Adeboye, choosing the option that offers the most success and poses the least risk:

When I ask You to come and reign in my life, I understand what I am saying; I am saying come and take absolute control.

In Adeboye's sermons, such decision prompts frequently encode:

- Divine reward (healing, prosperity, salvation)
- Divine sanction (loss, suffering, eternal separation)

This aligns with the broader theological framing of Pentecostal and Charismatic preaching in Nigeria, where sermons often function as transactional discourse systems connecting faith actions with tangible outcomes (Ukah, 2022; Marshall, 2021; Cotterell & Turner, 1989).

Importantly, these prompts are not merely theological assertions; they are rhetorically calibrated to simulate rational decision-making. By presenting consequences as predictable and logically sequenced, the preacher constructs what appears to be a reason-based decision environment, even though the underlying framework is faith-based.

Urgency and Temporal Compression

Finally, with fine-grained details, such as in excerpts 5 and 6, Pastor Adeboye attempts to persuade the audience to again make the life-changing decision to be 'immersed in the Fire of God'. Thus, the third prominent strategy: the creation of temporal urgency, whereby decision prompts are framed as requiring immediate action. Expressions such as "now," "today," or "before it is too late" compress temporal horizons and heighten psychological pressure.

From a rhetorical standpoint, this corresponds to what classical theorists describe as Kairos: the opportune moment for persuasion (Aristotle, trans. 2007; Buttrick, 1987). Contemporary discourse studies further indicate that urgency markers function to override deliberative hesitation, thereby accelerating compliance (Ilie, 2021; Craddock, 1985; Crystal, 1966; Levinson, 1983; Lakoff, 1982; Lucas, 1992; Bhatia, 2004).

5. ¹Let me move out of the way so that the Holy Spirit can do what he wants to do. ²**When the fire falls, what it does depends on whom it falls. When the fire falls it either turns what it fell upon to fire or**

turn it to ashes. You put a piece of wood in fire; the good part of the wood, will also become fire, the bad part of the wood will become ashes. ³When the fire of God falls, if you are not a child of God, if you are not on the side of God, if you are leaving a life of sin, it is a dangerous thing to ask the fire of God to fall. Because if it falls on you and you are not one of His children, it will only destroy you. Let God arise and His enemies be scattered and Jesus Christ says those who are not for me are against me, if you are not born again, if all your sins have not been washed away by the blood of the lamb and you say let the fire fall, how are you going to handle it? ⁴Tonight, we are going to pray in a moment, we are going to call on the fire of God to fall, it is already falling but it is about to fall down even heavier.

Adeboye sets about this task via a three-pronged approach as below:

a. He carefully details for the audience things they must understand in order to make the decision:

²When the fire falls, what it does depends on whom it falls. When the fire falls it either turns what it fell upon to fire or turn it to ashes. You put a piece of wood in fire; the good part of the wood, will also become fire, the bad part of the wood will become ashes

The significance of this is that using the metaphor of ‘fire’, Pastor Adeboye thereby carefully provides for the audience illustrative examples to know, before anyone decides to call on the ‘Fire of God’ upon himself or herself.

The fine-grained examples provide information such as:

i. That everyone has to accept the consequences of his/her decision or choice:

³When the fire of God falls, if you are not a child of God, if you are not on the side of God, if you are leaving a life of sin, it is a dangerous thing to ask the fire of God to fall...

ii. That everyone has the power to make the decision that the ‘Fire falls’:

Because if it falls on you and you are not one of His children, it will only destroy you...Let God arise and His enemies be scattered and Jesus Christ says those who are not for me are against me, if you are

not born again, if all your sins have not been washed away by the blood of the lamb and you say let the fire fall, how are you going to handle it?

iii. That everyone has to know enough in order to decide:

⁴Tonight, we are going to pray in a moment, we are going to call on the fire of God to fall, it is already falling but it is about to fall down even heavier.

These steps to decision-making, designed and implemented by Pastor Adeboye in the HGS sermon Peroration, are important because, when it comes to the issue of one's 'soul' and 'the Hereafter', the task is compounded by the persistent questioning of how anyone can plausibly know the best choice to make. Thus, Pastor Adeboye implies that before anyone makes such a major decision and prays that the 'Fire Falls', one must first truly be 'born again'. Thus, Adeboye provides all the needed practical information for the audience.

6. People have asked me why do you keep hammering on holiness? Holiness is the master key. That is the master key to signs and wonder. That is why I want to encourage you tonight, because you are going to pray in a moment and whatever prayer you pray here tonight, God is going to answer it. Be it unto you according to your faith. **Before we pray, get out of your sins! Give your life to Jesus Christ, let His blood wash you clean, let His blood wipe away your sins and then you can cry to him and he will hear. David said, if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me, the Bible says the Hand of the Lord is not shortened that He cannot save, neither is His Ear is heavy that He cannot hear, but He said sin can block the way between you and your God, that even when you are crying, He won't hear, if He doesn't hear, how can he answer?**

Pastor Adeboye, in Excerpt 6, nestles the decision prompt between two steps which he identifies for the audience to effect their decision-making on:

1. weighing the evidence (s): do not underestimate the power of a right decision-

David said, if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me, the Bible says the Hand of the Lord is not shorten that He cannot save, neither is His Ear is heavy that He cannot hear, but He said sin can block the way between you and your God, that even when you are crying, He won't hear, if He doesn't hear, how can he answer?

Thus, Adeboye submits that David, a Biblical character, as well the invoked authority of the Bible, should combine to guide the audience into the right decision. The decision prompt here aims to guide the audience to take some positive actions by beginning to implement the alternative they have been persuaded to choose by Pastor Adeboye.

2. Select only the alternative that is assumed to be the best decision: As everyone is constantly on the verge of making decisions one way or the other, there is a compelling reason to weigh all the evidence, and then to select only the alternative that seems to be best. Pastor Adeboye persuasively argues that once one decides for God by being ‘**washed in the blood**’ or ‘**born again**’, God activates His power to do the miraculous for one as “**you can cry to Him and He will hear**”:

...Before we pray, get out of your sins! Give your life to Jesus Christ, let His blood wash you clean, let His blood wipe away your sins and then you can cry to Him and He will hear.

In other words, everyone has the power to decide whether to “‘give or not to give one’s life to Jesus”’. Once such a decision is made, each alone, of necessity, determines and bears the consequences that go along with the decision. Our study of decision prompts in Pastor Adeboye’s HGS sermon Peroratio foregrounds that reason and logic are the sine qua non of intelligent decision-making:

- a. That while decisions would always be made by the sermon audience themselves, inevitably, Pastor Adeboye’s guidance and direction are most crucial in the management of the overall decisions taken by the audience in the sermon performances (Brown & Yule, 1983);
- b. That ultimately the decision(s) made by the audience are consciously designed and implemented by Pastor Adeboye, not to be spontaneous, but to always be met with applause by all the participants (Adeyanju, 2004a).

In the Nigerian sermon contexts, urgency framed within the decision prompts is often intensified by eschatological references: death, judgment, eternity, thus situating the decision within a cosmic temporal frame (Black, Barnwell & Levinsohn, 1992; Dzameshie, 1992; Janvier, 2002; Keller, 2002; Bunton, 2005). Comparable strategies are also documented in Islamic preaching, where reminders of Yawm al-Qiyamah (Day of Judgment) serve similar persuasive ends (Hassan, 2022).

Conclusion

A critical finding of this study is that while decision prompts ostensibly foreground individual agency, they are simultaneously structured to constrain interpretive freedom. That is, the audience is presented with the illusion of autonomous choice, yet the discourse design channels them toward a predetermined outcome. Without the pervasive use of decision prompts by Pastor Adeboye, it is arguable if the HGS sermon would yet be a sermon, as the oracular performance genre is centred principally on eliciting a pre-determined decision-making process. Decision prompts indeed characterise all the HGS corpora. The study findings also indicate that Pastor Adeboye enacts altar calls immediately after the decision prompts. Within the HGS sermon macro-structure, decision prompts are precedent to 'the invitation for salvation' or the 'altar call'. One of the most intriguing aspects of the HGS sermon is the way Pastor Adeboye, through decision prompts, explains how God is believed to deal with the audience, giving it the privilege, responsibility, opportunity, and obligation to choose its eternal destiny. This aligns with recent scholarship on religious discourse, which argues that sermonic communication often involves guided agency, in which participants are "free" to choose but only within rhetorically bounded options (Ukah, 2022; Nwoye, 2023; Adeyanju, 2024a; Hoefler, 1984; Hesselgrave, 1978; Helon, 1973). Pastor Adeboye's sermons exemplify this dynamic through:

- Sequential layering of arguments
- Emotional intensification (pathos)
- Invocation of divine authority (ethos)

Together, these elements create what may be termed a rhetorically engineered decision environment, where the audience's eventual response is both voluntary and discursively orchestrated. The analysis further confirms that decision prompts serve as preparatory mechanisms that lead directly into the altar call, a central ritual in Charismatic

Christian practice. In this sense, decision prompts are not terminal acts, but transitional discourse moves that bridge persuasion and ritual action. This finding corroborates earlier studies on Pentecostal preaching, which identify the altar call as the culmination of a carefully staged persuasive sequence (Marshall, 2021; Adetunji, 2021; Adeyanju, 2025; Larsen, 1999). The decision prompts thus operate as discursive thresholds, ensuring that the audience is cognitively and emotionally primed for the performative act of coming forward. Notably, similar preparatory structures exist in Islamic sermonisation, where exhortative segments precede communal supplication (du'a), reinforcing the argument that religious discourse across traditions shares functional rhetorical parallels despite doctrinal differences (Steps towards Peace, ND; Adeyanju, 2024b; Overstreet, 2002; Robinson, 1951; Shami, 2017; Sleeth, 1981).

Finally, the *Finis* in Adeboye's HGS sermons is characterised by a conflation of multiple discourse moves, including:

- Decision prompters
- Prayer
- Testimony
- Benediction

This conflation creates a multi-layered communicative environment in which persuasion, ritual, and communal participation intersect. From a discourse-analytic perspective, this reflects a genre hybridisation, where boundaries between speech acts become fluid (Hyland, 2022; Adeyanju, 2023a; Smith, 1960; Searle, 1969; Wharry, 2003). Crucially, decision prompts remain the structural anchor within this complexity. They organise the flow of discourse and ensure that all subsequent moves, particularly prayer and altar call, are interpreted as responses to a prior decision.

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that decision prompts in Pastor Adeboye's HGS sermons are:

1. Strategically embedded within the *Peroratio/Finis* as climactic persuasive devices
2. Structurally patterned through binary oppositions, conditional logic, and temporal urgency
3. Discursively engineered to balance perceived agency with guided outcomes
4. Functionally preparatory, leading into the altar call and subsequent ritual acts

5. Consistent with broader patterns in both Christian and Islamic sermonic traditions

Thus, decision prompts are not incidental rhetorical features but constitute the core mechanism through which sermonic discourse achieves its ultimate goal: the transformation of belief into action.

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