

# “Hallelujah”, “Iye”, “Hosannah”: Investigating the Conversational Dynamics in Prayers of the ESOCS Church

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## Abstract

This study utilises Conversational Analysis (CA) theory to examine the discourse and conversational dynamics in the prayers of the Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim (ESOCS) Church, a spiritually vibrant community known for its fervent, linguistically rich prayers. ESOCS prayers are rooted in distinctive traditions that incorporate scriptural references, ritualistic expressions, and emotional outpourings, offering a rich domain for linguistic analysis. The study analyses 4 prayer samples, selected from an initial pool of 45 prayer recordings collected across 22 ESOCS church branches worldwide, focusing on dialogicity, foregrounding, cohesion, adjacency pairs, and prosody. The findings reveal that an interactive exchange between linguistic structure, cultural practices, and spirituality characterises ESOCS prayer dialogue. Dialogicity, rhetorical strategies, and prosody play a significant role in fostering the congregation’s active engagement, unity, and reverence. Furthermore, cohesion techniques and the use of adjacency pairs reflect the cultural values that shape the prayer experience, enhancing both clarity and emotional depth. This investigation offers insights into the unique conversational dynamics of ESOCS prayers and contributes significantly to the growing literature on religious discourse analysis, particularly, in the context of prayers.

**Keywords:** Hallelujah, Iye, Hosanna, Discourse, Conversational Analysis Theory, Prayers, ESOCS.

## 1.1 Introduction

Prayer is a sacred and universal practice that transcends cultural and religious boundaries, providing a powerful means of communication between humans and the divine. Among the myriad of religious outfits in Nigeria, the Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim (ESOCS henceforth) church stands out as a vibrant and enigmatic spiritual community, known

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for its fervent and deeply evocative prayers. This study investigates the captivating discourse dynamics present in the prayers of the ESOCS church, seeking to unravel the profound linguistic nuances and cultural significance that underlie prayers in the ESOCS church.

The ESOCS Christian outfit has thrived for decades since its inception in 1925, leaving an indelible impact on its followers and admirers alike. Rooted in rich religious traditions and spiritual heritage, ESOCS prayers exude a rich blend of scriptural references, ritualistic expressions, and spontaneous emotional outpourings. “Hallelujah”, “Iye”, and “Hosanna” are just a few of the evocative utterances that punctuate their sacred prayers, each carrying deep layers of meanings that make for exhaustive linguistic investigation. Through this investigative approach, the study explores the historical, theological, and cultural contexts surrounding the ESOCS church, and how these factors have shaped the discourse dynamics within the context of their prayers. Understanding the linguistic patterns, emotional undertones, and the frequency of specific expressions in these prayers provides valuable insights into the congregants’ spiritual experiences and the church’s ethos.

Consequently, this study seeks to highlight the potential universality and divergence of prayer practices across various religious organizations. As it explores the discourse dynamics in ESOCS prayers, the study will highlight elements that resonate with other denominations or, conversely, identify aspects that set the ESOCS church apart in its praying style. Hence, this study examines the discourse dynamics in the prayers of members of the ESOCS church. The study investigates five (5) discourse features, namely: dialogicity, foregrounding, cohesion, adjacency pairing, and prosody. Previous studies conducted on religious discourse, particularly, and prayers, have not paid specific attention to the praying style of the ESOCS church. Therefore, this study capitalizes on the latency of research in this domain to carry out a linguistic investigation to bring to the fore, the uniqueness in the praying style of the ESOCS church. A study of this nature becomes expedient as it adds a new and fresh dimension and perspective to the analysis of prayers in religious discourse.

## 1.2 The ESOCS Church

The ESOCS church is a prominent African-instituted church. It can be argued ESOCS church is the first indigenous Pentecostal church in Africa with a rich history and a significant presence in Nigeria and across the world. Moses Idowu (2009) in his *More than a Prophet* described Orimolade as “the leading light of African Independent church movement in his era” (p. 11). The ESOCS church (first called The Cherubim and Seraphim Society) was established in 1925 by Moses Orimolade, who was born in Ikare Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria, to Ayibiri’s royal family in 1879 (Idowu, 2009). Ayegboyin and Ishola (2013) submit:

On the 18<sup>th</sup> June, 1925, Miss Christianah Akinsowon, a young girl aged fifteen had gone to the campus square in Lagos in company of some friends to witness that year’s Catholic Corpus Christi procession. She recalls that she saw a strange spectacle: an angel of the lord under the Corpus Christi canopy. As a result of

this, she became feverish and was rushed home. Almost immediately, she fell into a trance which continued for many days. (Ayeboyin and Ishola, 2013:p7)

Orimolade's alleged healing of Christiana Abiodun Akinsowon from the long-term trance that left her unable to hear or speak, caused him to receive significant media coverage and gain widespread attention. Following the healing event, Orimolade Tunolase and Abiodun Akinsowon teamed up as (adopted) daughter and father to offer healing and prayers for those affected by various ailments. This boisterous prayer partnership between these two ultimately gave birth to the ESOCS church, with Moses Orimolade becoming the first prelate or "Baba Aladura" of the church (Ayeboyin and Ishola, 2013). The title "Baba Aladura" (given to any individual who ascribes the position of the prelate) was first addressed to Moses Orimolade; while there is no documented evidence to substantiate the forgoing claim, it is believed and widely embraced that the term (Baba Aladura) was coined from the Yoruba phrase *baba ti o ngba dura* which roughly translates as "the father who prays" or "the praying father".

The methods and objects of worship in the ESOCS church are primarily based on the New Testament of the Bible, involving several references from the book of Revelations. The ESOCS church uses candles (alleged to be a representation of God's presence) to symbolise light, a claim which is drawn from Revelations 3:1-3. The ESOCS church also uses rods/staff as a symbol of authority. This practice is corroborated by the book of Revelations 2:26-27. The church also uses incense, which is believed to cleanse the soul, and create sanctity for the Holy Spirit to manifest.

The ESOCS church is one of many African-instituted churches, with its headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria and with a towering number of branches worldwide. The church is fondly referred to as "The Praying Band" by its members, and the prelate of the church also referred to as "The Praying Father". This largely foretells that the church takes seriously, the concept of praying. This is evident in the number of prayers conducted in a regular church service. The praying schema in the ESOCS church is presented below:

- Opening Prayer - (offered by the most senior male elder to officially begin the service)
- Three Members Prayers (seven or twenty-one members in peculiar instances) – said by three (seven or twenty-one) randomly selected members.
- Prayers for male and female testifiers. (done separately) – offered by specific altar/chancel elders
- Prayers before and after the sermon. (delivered by the preacher of the day)
- Prayers for the consecration of tithes and offerings (offered by specific male altar/chancel elder)
- Prayers before and after praise and worship (offered by the most senior male elder)
- Closing prayers (offered by the second most senior male elder)

All prayers offered in the ESOCS church are responsorial. This means that the individual saddled with the responsibility of praying at a particular time is in dialogue with the other members of the church who intermittently respond with a word or phrase appropriate to whatever is being said by the individual praying. The peculiarity of this praying style makes it a rich domain for linguistic investigation.

## 2.1 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The theoretical framework guiding the analysis of data is the Conversational Analysis theory, (CA). Sidnell (2001) suggested that CA is a concept that aims to describe, analyse and understand talk as a basic and constitutive feature of human social life (p. 1). Although CA is rooted in ethno-methodology, CA can be adapted “to study any kind of human action” (Seedhouse 2004: 13). The CA theory, formulated by Harvey Sacks and later modified by Emmanuel Schegloff in the early 1960s dealt with details of social action and interaction – owing to the centrality of language as an indispensable instrument in the actualisation of social actions. Recent studies consider CA a subfield in applied linguistics. Schiffrin (1994) further validates that “CA is like interactional sociolinguistics in its concern with the problem of social order, and how language both creates and is created by social context” (p. 232). This avowal was further amplified by Sidnell and Stivers (2013) as they maintained that CA “is a methodology for studying how people create and negotiate meaning through language in social interaction” (Sidnell and Stivers, 2013: 1). Sidnell and Stivers also opined that Conversation Analysis (CA) is a methodology for studying how people create and negotiate meaning through language in social interaction. This means that CA is an approach to the study of social interaction that focuses on how people use language to create and negotiate meaning in everyday life situations (Sidnell and Stivers, 2013: p. 1). CA is concerned with the mechanisms by which humans achieve mutual understanding and how they use language to accomplish social actions. It is a method for analysing the structure and organization of human communication with spoken language interactions as a focus. CA is an empirical method that investigates the details of social action and interaction, and it is used to understand how conversations are organised, how meanings are produced and negotiated, and how power and social relationships are maintained and challenged through language use (Heritage, 1984)

CA investigates how discussants in a discourse transaction negotiate or orient when they organise social actions through talk. This is corroborated by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson’s (1974) claim that CA is concerned with “examining how talk is organised and how social actions are accomplished through talk” (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974). Thus, CA seeks to understand how conversations are organised, how meanings are produced and negotiated, and how power and social relationships are maintained and challenged through language use. Furthermore, CA is also seen as “a method for analysing language use in social interaction with a focus on the structure and organization of talk-in-interaction” (Maynard & Clayman, 2015: 2). This justifies one of the key theoretical foundations of conversational

analysis, which is the concept of “sequential organisation”. Sequential organisation refers to how conversations are structured and ordered over time. According to this view, conversations follow a set of conventions and rules that dictate the order in which turns are taken and the types of responses that are appropriate, these rules are known as “conversational maxims” and include such principles as the maxims of relevance, quantity, and quality.

Another important concept in CA is the idea of “co-instruction” which refers to how meaning is created and negotiated through social interaction. Ten Have (2007) justifies this by stating that CA “is a way of studying how people talk to each other, with a particular focus on how they take turns in conversations and manage the flow of talk” (Ten Have, 2007: 5). This concept suggests that conversation is a dynamic and interactive process in which participants work together to construct and interpret meaning - through which, shared understandings and norms are established and maintained.

CA has also been influential in the study of power and social relationships in linguistics. Many scholars like Foucault (1975), Fairclough (1989), Teun van Dijk (2008), and Wodak (2009), among others, have argued that language use is a key site of struggle and contestation and that power dynamics are often played out through how conversations are organised and managed. For example, some scholars have argued that certain individuals or groups are more likely to dominate conversations and interrupt or talk over others while others are more likely to be interrupted or silenced. These patterns of interaction can reflect and reinforce larger social hierarchies and power dynamics.

Goodwin (1994) used CA to analyse the interaction between a pastor and his congregation during a church service. The study found that the pastor’s professional vision was shaped by his knowledge of the Bible and his understanding of the needs of his congregation. The pastor used various linguistic and non-linguistic resources to create a sense of community and to convey his message effectively.

Stokoe used CA to analyse the interaction between Jehovah’s Witnesses and non-members during door-to-door evangelism. The study found that the Jehovah’s Witnesses used various membership categorisations to establish their authority and to persuade non-members to join their faith. The study also found that non-members used various resistance strategies to reject the Witnesses’ message (Stokoe, 2012).

CA was deployed by Waring (2013) to analyse the interaction between members of a conservative Christian church during a Bible study group. The study found that the members used various linguistic and non-linguistic resources to construct and contest their religious identities. The study also found that the members used various interactional strategies to maintain social order and manage conflict. Similarly, Heritage (1984) adopted Conversation Analysis to analyse the interaction between members of a religious congregation during a church service. The study argues that the members used various linguistic and non-linguistic resources to create a sense of community and to convey their religious beliefs. The study also added that the members used various interactional strategies to manage conflict and maintain social order.

CA is a rich and complex field that has contributed significantly to our understanding of language use in social interaction. It has provided valuable insights into how language is operationalised to construct meaning, negotiate social relationships, and exercise power. As such, CA has significantly impacted a range of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, communication studies and linguistics. Since it focuses on how participants co-instruct discourse in real-time, highlighting patterns like call-and-response, pauses, overlaps, and repetitions that are essential features of interactional discourse, the present study deploys CA to examine the structure, interactional patterns and dynamics, and sequential organisation of prayers in the ESOCS church.

While CA has been used in various religious contexts (Goodwin, 1994; Waring, 2013), there has been limited application of CA to the analysis of African Pentecostal prayers, particularly within African-instituted churches like the ESOCS. Recent research on African Pentecostalism has focused on the role of language in constructing religious identity and authority. Particularly, Akhimien and Farotimi, (2018), analysed sermons by Pastor E.A. Adeboye to identify the discourse strategies and conversational features used. It explores how these elements influence audience perceptions and responses, helping the speaker achieve his intended objectives. Also, Okpeh and Amadi (2020) investigated the use of rhetorical strategies by Pastor Williams Kumuyi in his prayers. They submit that Pastor Kumuyi deploys this discourse and conversational strategies to enlist the participation of the congregation in the prayer interaction. These studies provide the backdrop for this analysis of the ESOCS church, where CA is used to explore how power, authority, and cultural practice, are negotiated through prayer interactions. This study thus provides a new application of CA to examine not just the structure of religious prayers, but the unique cultural and contextual factors influencing their performance in the ESOCS church. Recent studies, such as those by Wodak (2020) and van Dijk (2019), have further developed CA's applicability in understanding power dynamics in discourse, particularly in religious settings where authority is often negotiated through spoken interactions. These studies align with the current work's emphasis on analysing the conversational dynamics of prayer in the ESOCS church, where power relations and emotions, reverence and spirituality are mediated through prayer interactions.

### **3.1 Research Methodology**

The study adopts a qualitative research design and utilises CA to analyse the conversational dynamics in the prayers of members of the Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim (ESOCS) church. The study's target population comprises members of the ESOCS church globally, with a sample size of three (3) prayer sessions selected from an initial pool of forty-five (45) recordings retrieved from 22 branches of the ESOCS church worldwide. The study investigates five discourse features: dialogicity, foregrounding, cohesion, adjacency pairing, and prosody. These five discourse features have been purposively selected because they are integral to understanding the interactive, structured, and rhythmic nature of ESOCS church

prayers. They allow for a comprehensive analysis of how meaning is co-constructed, emphasised, and maintained in the flow of prayers. Data were gathered through audio and video recordings, and collection involved a mix of direct and third-party retrieval methods, conducted at the request of the researcher.

#### 4.1 Data Analysis

In this section, we explore various linguistic aspects that shed light on the interactive nature of the prayers, the rhetorical techniques employed to emphasise spiritual elements, the structured exchange of turns, and the prosodic elements that underpin their communicative style. This analysis provides valuable insights into the unique linguistic and cultural dimensions of ESOCS prayer practices.

##### 4.1.1 Dialogicity

Dialogicity refers to the interactive nature of prayers, mainly how participants take turns during prayer sessions at ESOCS. In prayer settings, taking turn to pray can reveal power dynamics, roles, and the flow of communication between the speaker (prayer leader) and the audience (congregation). Our focus here is to analyse the distribution of turns and overlaps in data.

Turn-taking is an essential aspect of dialogicity, and it refers to the orderly exchange of turns between speakers in a conversation. In the ESOCS prayer style, the individual praying, and the congregation takes turns to speak, with each turn building on the previous one to create a cohesive and meaningful exchange. The individual praying initiates each turn, and the congregation responds with “amen” or other appropriate responses as seen in the data samples. These turns are usually elicited with a slight pause or break initiated by the individual praying. This break signals the need for the congregation to come in with appropriate responses. The uniqueness of this style is that these breaks do not always come at the end of the sentence – they are sometimes initiated between clauses, such that the core meanings of whatever the individual praying is communicating have not been relayed. Below is an example of such breaks.

##### Example 1

Elder: Father in times of calamity and danger Oh Lord (**break**)  
 Congregation: Amen  
 Elder: Make the way of escape for us, in the name of Jesus!  
 Congregation: Amen

In the example above, the individual praying has not relayed his core message. But due to the break observed, the congregation is signaled to respond to what has been stated, whether or not it makes, partial or incomplete sense. The full thought, however, is expressed in the proceeding line where he is seen to have completed the otherwise incomplete sentence expressed previously.

Overlap is another aspect of turn-taking, and it refers to a situation where two or more speakers talk at the same time. In this ESOCS prayer dialogue, there are instances of overlap, such as when the individual praying raises supplications that bother on life and death, blessings, and salvation. In such instances, the congregation spontaneously interjects with appropriate responses, affirming the proposition raised by the person praying. Below is an example of overlap in the recorded data sample:

Example 2

Elder: Father, prosper our businesses... (The congregation cuts in before the last word is said)

Congregation: Amen!

Elder: Son, prosper our businesses... (congregation cuts in...)

Congregation: Amen!

Elder: Holy Spirit, prosper our businesses... (congregation cuts in...)

Congregation: Amen!

The overlap however does not disrupt the flow of the dialogue, it shows the excitement of the congregation at affirming the issues raised by the praying member. This practice is unique to a few churches where the praying exercise is unstructured and flexible. Members are at liberty to interject and respond before the individual concludes the phrase or sentence. For example, the instances of overlap might be quite minimal in the Catholic Church as they operate a very tightly closed and rigid praying system. In a Catholic Mass, there are specific prayers that involve congregational responses, such as the “Liturgy of the Word” and the “Liturgy of the Eucharist.” The congregational responses are typically synchronised and timely delivered. While there may be a few instances where some members of the congregation start their responses a bit earlier, causing a mild overlap in vocalization, it is not as consistent and recurring as that of the ESOCS church and other Christian denominations in Nigeria.

Nonetheless, this prayer dialogue is an excellent example of dialogicity in discourse analysis, with turn-taking and overlap playing essential roles in creating a cohesive and meaningful prayer. The use of appropriate responses by the congregation also shows their active participation in the prayer and willingness to engage in dialogic discourse with the individual praying.

#### 4.1.2 Foregrounding

Foregrounding in discourse refers to the linguistic and rhetorical technique used to emphasise or highlight specific elements, words, or ideas within a text or spoken discourse. It involves giving prominence to specific elements to draw the reader or listener’s attention and create a particular effect.

Foregrounding in religious discourse, especially in prayers, is a significant rhetorical and communicative technique used to emphasise and elevate the sacred or spiritual aspects of the



message. It serves to create a sense of reverence, piety, and connection with the divine. The prevalent foregrounded elements in the prayers of ESOCS members are repetition, metaphor, apostrophe, parallelism, and intertextuality.

*Repetition:* The repetition of phrases like “Emmanuel” and “Holy Father” are forms of foregrounding. These repetitions are used to emphasise the importance and holiness of God in the context of the prayers. By repeating these words, the praying member emphasises the need for the divine presence and manifestation of the spiritual entity being summoned.

*Metaphors:* Metaphors are often used in religious discourse to create vivid and memorable images that help to convey complex ideas and emotions. Some examples of metaphors are given below:

Example 3

Elder: Almighty **king of kings** . . .  
 Congregation: Holy (father)!

Example 4

Elder: For there’s none in heaven or on earth like thee  
 Congregation: Amen  
 Elder: You are **power** yourself  
 Congregation: Amen  
 Elder: You are **sovereign** yourself  
 Congregation: Amen

Example 5

Elder: Take hold our **shield and buckler**,  
 Congregation: amen

The pragmatic function of these metaphors is to emphasise the power, sovereignty, and protection of God in the context of the prayers. By using these metaphors, the individuals praying emphasise the need for the divine presence and manifestation of the spiritual entity being summoned. The metaphors serve to create a sense of reverence, piety, and connection with the divine, which is a significant rhetorical and communicative technique used to emphasise and elevate the sacred or spiritual aspects of the message. Metaphors in religious discourse can have various functions, such as descriptive, explanatory, category-creating, and heuristic. The functions can also be understood as true or patently literal in certain sentential contexts.

*Apostrophe:* Apostrophe is the use of direct address to a person, or in this case, a divine being that is not physically present. It establishes an intimate and personal connection between the congregation and God. This direct address highlights the reverence and emotional engagement of the congregation in their prayers. Provided below, are illustrations of apostrophes:

Example 6

Elder: Lord, arise and contend with those that contend with us

Congregation: Amen

Elder: Fight with them that fight us

Congregation: Amen

*Parallelism:* Parallelism in discourse analysis refers to the repetition of grammatical structures, words, phrases, or clauses within a sentence or series of sentences. It is a figure of speech that can be used to intensify the rhythm of language, draw comparisons, emphasise or elaborate on an idea, and create a better flow to whatever sentence it is applied to. Below are instances of parallelism in the data:

Example 7

*Elder:* Thou God of Cherubim,

*Congregation:* Amen

*Elder:* Thou God of Seraphim

*Congregation:* Amen

Example 8

*Elder:* Father, prosper our businesses... (congregation interjects)

*Congregation:* Amen!

*Elder:* Son, prosper our businesses... (congregation interjects)

*Congregation:* Amen!

*Elder:* Holy Spirit, prosper our businesses... (congregation interjects)

*Congregation:* Amen!

Example 9

*Elder:* We come against every spirit of distraction...

*Congregation:* Amen

*Elder:* We come against every spirit of forgetfulness

*Congregation:* Amen

Parallelism in the data above has been deployed to create rhythm, emphasis and cohesion in the prayer dialogue. It is a technique that members of ESOCS use to carry the congregation along while praying.

Intertextuality, according to Oyetimi (2024), is a concept of relatedness, where texts are part of a larger network that influences and shapes each other, fostering dialogue and meaning production through interaction. This explains that texts share a relationship, and one text is influenced by or references another text. This can be achieved through various compositional strategies such as quotation, allusion, calque, plagiarism, translation, pastiche, or parody. Below are instances of intertextuality in the data:

Table 1

Intertextual Reference	Source Domain
<i>“At the mention of your name, every knee shall bow”</i>	This phrase is a direct reference to Philippians 2:10-11, which states, “that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” This underscores the idea of the divine authority and reverence associated with the name of Jesus.
<i>“Emmanuel”</i>	“Emmanuel” is a direct reference to a prophetic passage in the Bible, specifically Isaiah 7:14, which states, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him <b>Immanuel</b> .” In Christian theology, “Emmanuel” is understood to mean “God with us,” emphasising the presence of God among His people
<i>“The Lord’s Prayer”</i>	“The Lord’s Prayer” is a well-known passage from the Bible found in Matthew 6:9-13, where Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray. The congregation reciting “The Lord’s Prayer” in the discourse is a direct reference to this biblical text.
<i>“Through Jesus Christ our Lord”</i>	This closing phrase is a common Christian practice that acknowledges Jesus Christ as the mediator between God and humanity. It reflects the biblical teaching found in various passages, such as Romans 5:1, which states, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” It emphasises the role of Jesus as the way to access God in prayer.
<i>“Almighty king of kings”</i>	This phrase is an intertextual reference to biblical titles for God, particularly “King of Kings.” It is found in the New Testament, specifically in Revelation 19:16, which says, “On his robe and his thigh, he has this name written: king of kings and lord of lords.” This title underscores God’s supreme authority.

These instances of intertextuality serve to connect the language and sentiments of the prayer dialogue with biblical themes and teachings, enriching the prayer with the depth of religious tradition and belief.

Foregrounding this religious discourse serves to elevate the religious and spiritual elements, making them prominent and central to the interaction. It emphasises the congregation’s devotion, requests, and engagement with their faith and God.

### 4.1.3 Adjacency Pairs

An adjacency pair is a unit of conversation that contains an exchange of one turn each by two speakers, with the second turn being a predictable or expected response to the first. The turns are functionally related to each other in such a fashion that the first turn requires a certain type or range of types of second turn. An adjacency pair is composed of two utterances by two speakers, one after the other. The speaking of the first utterance (the first-pair part, or the first turn) provokes a responding utterance (the second-pair part, or the second turn). Adjacency pairs are a component of pragmatic variation in the study of linguistics and are considered primarily to be evident in the “interactional” function of pragmatics. They exist in every language and vary in context and content among each, based on the cultural values held by speakers of the respective language.

There are certain utterances made by the individual praying that require specific responses from the congregation in the prayer of the ESOCS church. Granted, the conventional congregational response to prayers said across all denominations of Christendom is “amen”. While that is also the practice in the ESOCS church, there are instances unique to the church when the congregation responds with other lexical items appropriate to the textual initiation of the individual praying. Below are examples of adjacency pairs in the data:

#### Example 15

*Elder:* We pray and ask you to forgive us anyway and manner we have sinned against you  
{sic}

*Congregation:* Amen

*Elder:* Sin committed knowingly and unknowingly {sic} ...

*Congregation:* Amen

*Elder:* **Emmanuel!**...

*Congregation:* **Holy Father!**

#### Example 16

*Elder:* Every conspiracy to put this people in bondage and to silence them O God,

*Congregation:* Amen

*Elder:* Let them fail with the **Blood of Jesus** {sic}

*Congregation:* **Blood of Jesus**

Among members of the ESOCS church, it is a practice to respond with “holy father” whenever “Emmanuel” is mentioned in prayers. To them, it is believed that the response ascribes sanctity, reverence, and adoration to the divine being. These textual collocations have been standardised in ESOCS prayers over time, thus, highlighting the solemnity of divinity in their prayers.

#### 4.1.4 Cohesion

Cohesion is a crucial aspect of discourse that helps to create a sense of unity and free flow in spoken or written communication. It involves various linguistic devices and strategies that link different parts of a text or speech together. In the data under investigation, anaphoric reference and contrastive conjunctions are two aspects of cohesion observed.

*Anaphoric Reference:* Anaphoric reference in discourse is a linguistic phenomenon where a word or phrase in a sentence refers back to an entity previously mentioned in the discourse (i.e., the ongoing conversation or text). This reference is used to avoid monotonous repetitions and wordiness and maintain coherence and clarity in communication.

##### Example 17

*Elder:* Most gracious and most wonderful **God**

*Congregation:* Amen

*Elder:* We are grateful unto **you** for life given unto us {sic}

*Congregation:* Amen

*Elder:* We pray and ask **you** to forgive us anyway and manner we have sinned against **you** {sic}

*Congregation:* Amen

##### Example 18

*Elder:* Thou **God of Cherubim**,

*Congregation:* Amen

*Elder:* Thou **God of Seraphim**

*Congregation:* Amen

*Elder:* We thank **thee**, we honour **thee**, we worship **thy** name

*Congregation:* Amen

*Elder:* For there's none in heaven or on earth like **thee**

In example 17, “you” is the anaphoric referent of “God”, while in example 18, “thee” and “thy” are anaphoric referents of “God of cherubim/seraphim”. These examples demonstrate how anaphoric references help maintain coherence and clarity in religious discourse by connecting pronouns and phrases to previously mentioned concepts (in this case, the concept of God).

*Contrastive Conjunctions:* The Elder uses the phrase “That is neither cheating nor stealing...” to specify the type of actions they are seeking blessings for. The use of “neither...nor” provides a contrast, making the text more cohesive by clarifying the boundary of acceptable actions.

Summarily, the prayer of ESOCs members is marked with various cohesive devices such as anaphoric references and contrastive conjunctions that work together to create an interconnected and organised structure while fostering a sense of unity and collective participation among the congregation. Top of Form

#### 4.1.5 Prosody

Prosody refers to the rhythm, intonation, and stress patterns of speech. In the prayer dialogue provided, prosody plays a significant role in the communication between the individuals praying and the congregation. The use of intonation and stress patterns helps to convey the importance and urgency of the requests being made, and often times, this signals an equal response from the congregation as they respond with an “amen”.

In the ESOCS church, however, the prayers made are marked with various prosodic components. The prevalent prosodic marker in the prayers of the ESOCS church is stress. Stress, (word stress or lexical stress) pertains to the emphasis placed on certain syllables or words within a spoken utterance. Stress affects individual words or syllables, not entire sentences. Stressed syllables are pronounced with greater force, loudness, and higher pitch than unstressed syllables. The “amen” said by the congregation from the beginning of the prayer dialogue has the same stress pattern which marks continuity – showing that the individual prayer has not signaled the end. The stress pattern is typically /a – MEN/. This changes when the individual praying signals the end of the session by using any of the mutually intelligible and culturally shared discourse closings like “through Jesus Christ our Lord”, or “In Jesus’ name” – at this point, the congregation changes the stress pattern of the “amen” to /A- men/ to assert the closure of the session as initiated by the individual praying. Stress variation in prayers of the ESOCS church either shows continuity or closure. That is, certain stress placements signal to the congregation that the individual has concluded the prayers, while some stress placements show that the individual is expected to say more.

Another prosodic marker of prayers of ESOCS members is intonation. Intonation refers to the rise and fall in pitch of a person’s voice at the sentence or utterance level. It is used to convey the mood, meaning, and nuances of a whole sentence or phrase. Intonation patterns in a sentence can change the sentence’s interpretation, such as turning a statement into a question or indicating an emotional tone. In the ESOCS praying style, intonation serves to show continuity in the prayer session, indicates the end of the prayer, and shows heightened emotive assertions within the prayer session.

Rising intonation at the end of each sentence or phrase signals the congregation that the member praying is still on, so, they respond with the appropriately stressed “amen” /a – MEN/ to also confirm their continued progression. This is shown in the example below:

#### Example 19

*Elder:* Most gracious and most wonderful God

- - - - - 


*Congregation:* Amen

Similarly, falling intonation is used to signal the end of the prayer session or the completion of an incomplete utterance. As shown in the data, the ESOCS congregation usually cuts in with their responses before the completion of the utterance by the individual praying. When

this occurs, the individual praying maintains a rising intonation that eventually falls after the sentence has been fully expressed. Below is an example in the data:


Example 20

*Elder:* Anything we do to keep food on our table (...)

- - - - - 


*Congregation:* Amen

*Elder:* That is neither cheating or {sic} stealing (...)

- - - - - 

*Congregation:* Amen

*Elder:* Daddy prosper it for us.

- - - - 

*Congregation:* Amen

In the prayers of the ESOCS church, the falling intonation is deployed in the closure signaling the end of the prayer. Falling intonation is a linguistic and rhetorical technique used to complete a thought, and it is also used to signal the end of a prayer. ESOCS prayers are usually ended with culturally defined discourse closures, such as “through Jesus Christ our Lord,” “in Jesus’ name,” and “for Christ Jesus’ sake,” among others. When the member praying uses any of the aforementioned discourse closures with a falling intonation, the congregation is automatically summoned to respond with their last “amen,” which is usually different from the “amens” said in the course of the prayer dialogue.

This use of falling intonation in closure signaling serves to create a sense of finality and completeness in the prayer, emphasizing the importance of the discourse closures and the cultural significance of the prayer. It also serves to create a sense of unity and participation among the congregation, as they respond with a final “amen” to signal their agreement and participation in the prayer. Below is an example of this feature in the data under investigation:

Example 21

*Elder:* Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray

- - - - - ~'

*Congregation:* Amen

It is worth noting that there may be idiosyncratic variations in these linguistic manifestations, and some individuals may not be bound by the liturgical or doctrinal practice of the church to ascribe to a particular style. However, the study argues that while some individuals have their preferred style of praying, most members conform to these prosodic nuances in their prayers. These prosodic nuances are attributed to be systemic based on the data under analysis.

## Conclusion

The analysis of ESOCS prayer practices reveals a highly interactive and dynamic discourse marked by distinctive linguistic and cultural features. Key elements include dialogicity, where structured turn-taking and overlaps showcase a cohesive exchange between the prayer leader and congregation; foregrounding, which employs rhetorical devices like repetition, metaphor, apostrophe, parallelism, and intertextuality to emphasise sacred elements; and adjacency pairs that reflect unique call-and-response patterns. Additionally, cohesive devices such as anaphoric references and contrastive conjunctions, along with prosodic features like stress and intonation, reinforce unity, clarity, and emotional engagement in the prayer dialogue. Collectively, these elements underscore the rich linguistic culture of ESOCS prayer practices, demonstrating their cultural and spiritual significance.

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## Appendix A

Elder: In Jesus' name  
Congregation: Amen  
Elder: Most gracious and most wonderful God  
Congregation: Amen  
Elder: We are grateful unto you for life given unto us {sic}  
Congregation: Amen  
Elder: We pray and ask you to forgive us anyway and manner we have sinned against you  
{sic}  
Congregation: Amen  
Elder: Sin committed Knowingly and unknowingly {sic} ...  
Congregation: Amen  
Elder: Emmanuel!...  
Congregation: Holy Father!  
Elder: Emmanuel!  
Congregation: Holy Father!  
Elder: Emmanuel!  
Congregation: Holy Father  
Elder: Have mercy upon us and harken unto our prayers  
Congregation: Amen  
Elder: Father we commit the students to your able hands...  
Congregation: Amen  
Elder: Father give them the retentive memory to read and understand  
Congregation: Amen  
Elder: We come against every spirit of distraction...  
Congregation: Amen  
Elder: We come against every spirit of forgetfulness  
Congregation: Amen  
Elder: Daddy, keep them far from our children!  
Congregation: Amen  
Elder: almighty king of kings...  
Congregation: Holy (father)!  
Elder: The traders and business owners we commit into your holy hands...  
Congregation: Amen  
Elder: Father, prosper our businesses... (congregation cuts in)  
Congregation: Amen!  
Elder: Son, prosper our businesses... (congregation cuts in)

Congregation: Amen!  
Elder: Holy Spirit, prosper our businesses... (congregation cuts in)  
Congregation: Amen!  
Elder: Anything we do to keep food on our table...  
Congregation: Amen  
Elder: That is neither cheating or {sic}stealing...  
Congregation: Amen  
Elder: Daddy prosper it for us  
Congregation: Amen  
Elder: Do this and receive our thanks and praises  
Congregation: Amen  
Elder: Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray  
Congregation: Amen!

Transcript of an audio recording of three members' prayers, said by Supervising Apostle Richard Amadi. Retrieved on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November, 2022, at the Obio-Akpor Provincial Headquarters Branch of the ESOCS Church

## Appendix B

**Elder:** Almighty and Most Merciful Father  
**Congregation:** Amen  
**Elder:** Thou God of Cherubim,  
**Congregation:** amen  
**Elder:** Thou God of Seraphim  
**Congregation:** Amen  
**Elder:** We thank Thee, we honour thee, we worship thy name  
**Congregation:** Amen  
**Elder:** For there's none in heaven or on earth like thee  
**Congregation:** Amen  
**Elder:** You are power yourself  
**Congregation:** Amen  
**Elder:** You are sovereign yourself  
**Congregation:** Amen  
**Elder:** You exist by yourself  
**Congregation:** Amen  
**Elder:** You made all things and you're not made  
**Congregation:** Amen  
**Elder:** You win all battles and you're not won, be thou exalted  
**Congregation:** Amen!  
**Elder:** We commit your servant who has come this day to gather all the saints  
**Congregation:** Amen  
**Elder:** who have (sic) made a covenant with the with sacrifice to offer thanks unto thee

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** for the marriage anniversary and also for his birthday anniversary

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** Father accept his thanks

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** For the bible says he that giveth thee thanks, honours and worship you ,

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** And to such that giveth thee thanks you make way of escape

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** Father in times of calamity and danger Oh Lord,

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** Make way of escape for us, in the name of Jesus

**Congregation:** Amen!!

**Elder:** Father you said we shall not be afraid of the terror by night

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** or the arrow that flieth by day,

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** Nor the pestilence that walketh by noonday,

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** Lord spare thy servant in the name of Jesus

**Congregation:** Amen!!!

**Elder:** By this thanksgiving, O Lord God my father,

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** may his thanks of Joy be full in Jesus' name

**Congregation:** Amen!!

**Elder:** I pray by this thanksgiving Lord,

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** open way for him more O Lord, in every and any area of his need

**Congregation:** Amen!!!

**Elder:** May this thanksgiving bring out blessing in the name of Jesus

**Congregation:** Amen!!!

**Elder:** The best way for asking for more is giving thanks, (sic)

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** in giving thanks Father he has asked for more

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** Grant him in the name of Jesus

**Congregation:** Amen!!!

**Elder:** We bring this country Nigeria

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** We don't know how he came to be but thou knowest,

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** If it pleases you to add to make it good, add!

**Congregation:** Amen!!!

**Elder:** If it pleases you to remove it to make it good, remove it in the name of Jesus

**Congregation:** Amen!!!

**Elder:** Let the counsel of the enemies not prevail

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** Counsel in the Federal, state and local government,

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** Only the counsel of God will stand for this family

**Congregation:** Amen!!!

**Elder:** Every manipulation (congregation cuts in)

**Congregation:** ...destroy

**Elder:** In the waterways (congregation cuts in)

**Congregation:** *Conquer*

**Elder:** On the road junction (congregation cuts in)

**Congregation:** *Destroy*

**Elder:** Any manipulative force used to manipulate people and their efforts, vindicate them  
and put it upon the Lord

**Congregation:** Amen!!!

**Elder:** You said at the mention of your name, every knee shall now,

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** every conspiracy to put this people in bondage and to silence them O God,

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** let them fall with the Blood of Jesus

**Congregation:** Blood of Jesus

**Elder:** In the name of Jesus

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** If it will please you to add to make it good, add,

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** if it will please you to remove, to make it good, remove in the name of Jesus

**Congregation:** Amen!!

**Elder:** We pray thee o Lord

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** Let your will prevail

**Congregation:** Amen!!!!

**Elder:** People are crying, people are gnashing their teeth, people are wailing, people are  
dying Lord, for things they don't know about,

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** Lord I pray let their cries come unto thee

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** Spare the life of your people in Jesus' name

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** Every effort of the Jeroboam woman, to scatter your church, to make the church fall and more, I pray let the effort be turned upside down in the name of Jesus

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** Every effort of the Jeroboam woman within and without to suffer the church, Lord I pray thee, let your power prevail in the name of Jesus

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** We have no power of our own, O God to face a bad army against your children,

**Congregation;** amen

**Elder:** Lord, arise and contend with those that contend with us

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** Fight with them that fight us

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** Take hold our shield and buckler,

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** arise for our help lord

**Congregation:** Amen!!!!

**Elder:** We pray the service of today will bring deliverance to your children

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** We insist that no man that cometh here will go the same in the name of Jesus

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** Lord bless the church Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim,

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** Let your church grow from strength to strength

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** From power to power

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** From Victory to Victory

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** Every corrupt influence that will want to enter and corrupt your church,

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** may the voice of the blood of Jesus Christ silence them O Lord

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** You said on this righteous rock you will remain with us,

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** on this foot, you will remain with us

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** Bless your church,

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** Bless your servant Baba Aladura

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** that he will grow from strength to strength

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** Protect him and the family, it shall be well with your children

Congregation: Amen

**Elder:** Thank you, heavenly father,

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** Accept the prayers of your children

**Congregation:** amen

**Elder:** Through Christ our Lord

**Congregation:** Amen

**Elder:** Our Lord's prayer

**Congregation** recites "The Lord's Prayer" (from Matthew 6 vs 9-13)

Transcript of audio recording of three members' prayers, said by Special Senior Apostle Mike Uruakpa. Retrieved on the 3rd of August, 2023, at the Rumomasi Provincial Headquarters Branch of the ESOCS Church.

### Appendix C

Elder: In Jesus' name

Congregation: Amen

Elder: Mighty and most ever living God

Congregation: Amen

Elder: We thank you for the gift of a new day

Congregation: Amen

Elder: We are alive today, is not because of our righteousness (sic)

Congregation: Amen

Elder: but of your lovingkindness ad mercy...

Congregation: Amen

Elder: We say glory, honour, and adoration be ascribed unto your holy name...

Congregation: Amen!

Elder: Father, today being the peace of Jerusalem service (sic)

Congregation: Amen!

Elder: Father we ask for peace in our lives!

Congregation: Amen

Elder: we ask for peace in our families

Congregation: Amen

Elder: We ask for peace in our businesses ...

Congregation: Amen

Elder: We ask for peace in our country Nigeria

Congregation: Amen

Elder: Emmanuel!

Congregation: Holy Father!

Elder: We uproot the seed of confusion in or lives

Congregation: Amen

Elder: seed of confusion in our businesses

Congregation: Amen

Elder: In the country Nigeria

Congregation: Amen

Elder: father when there is peace in the land...

Congregation: Amen

Elder: there is prosperity

Congregation: Amen!

Elder: there is increase

Congregation: Amen!

Elder: there is development

Congregation: Amen!

Elder: and there is love

Congregation: Amen

Elder: therefore father, we pray for your peace

Congregation: Amen

Elder: that passeth all understading

Congregation: Amen

Elder: to abide in our midst today

Congregation: Amen

Elder: Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray

Congregation: Amen

*Transcript of an audio recording of three members' prayers, said by Supervising Apostle Habinuchi Ikegwuru. Retrieved on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November, 2022, at the Obio-Akpor Provincial Headquarters Branch of the ESOCs Church*