

Repent and Return to God: Pragmatic Behavior of Repentance in Biblical Texts

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Abstract

People recognize repentance as the most powerful religious practice for the preservation and enhancement of man's moral health. Repentance serves the apparent function of being a deterrent and atonement of sins and crimes. It is a sort of an ethical principle which entails returning to God after a period of disobedience. Pragmatically, the speech act of repentance implies committing a sin and repenting by confessing and seeking forgiveness of the mercy of Almighty God. Thus, this study endeavors to investigate the use of speech act of repentance as observed in Biblical sayings. Based on Austin (1962), Searle (1969, 1976) and Bach and Harnish (1979) treatments of speech acts, twenty Biblical extracts implying repentance are selected to be pragmatically analyzed. The paper concludes that pragmatically repentance is indirectly performed in all extracts and that it is felicitously achieved when the speaker confesses his sin before God and asks Him forgiveness.

Keywords: Repentance, Pragmatic analysis, Speech act, Biblical texts.

Introduction

No one is without sin, or is without the tendency to commit a fault. As a man grows in age, he cannot be controlled by good training and education. This impels him to perform more and more wicked actions and commit crimes and vices of all kinds. In this respect, moral teaching and religious education become mandatory. Repentance is recognized as the most powerful religious activity for the preservation and enhancement of man's moral health. It is thus not difficult to comprehend the necessity and significance of repentance, although it is tedious to do so. As a result, moral education and training are essential. Repentance serve the apparent function of being a deterrent and atonement of sins and crimes.

Repentance is a term that has been given to a person who repents to God. It is an ethical principle which entails returning to God after a period of disobedience. Committing a crime and repenting, confessing, and seeking forgiveness from God mercy. The best example of repentance is that of Adam and Eve, when they confessed to God their sin of eating from the forbidden fruit. "O our Lord!" he exclaims as he approaches the forbidden tree. "O our Lord! We did an injustice to our own selves. We would definitely be among the losers if You do not forgive us and have mercy on us" (Quran, Al-Aaraf, ,ayaa 23).

Language and Religion

Language is often taken to mean the cognitive capacity to understand and use dynamic information mechanisms in general. It has productivity, recursively, and displacement properties; it is completely based on social convention and learning. Language, according to Peng (2005:65), is a behavior that makes use of body parts: the vocal apparatus and auditory system for oral language; the brachial apparatus and visual system for sign language. Language is used for a variety of meanings and functions in a society. People uses language to convey information, to ask for things, to apologize, to swear, to deny to accept things ...etc. One main function and purpose is associated with religious context in which repentance is utilized.

Language and religion are interlinked; however, in the modern era, this connection is no longer consistent. Both may feed off of one another; language may serve as a replacement for religion, or religion may take precedence over language.

Precisely, religious language refers to a language that is "consistently used by religion" or within a religious field of language use (cf. Samarín, 1987: 85). Religious language, in this sense, is a type of language that is "especially" religious, "reserved for worship rituals and used for very little else, with the exception of perhaps kindergarten subject areas or academic and literary languages"

(Fasold, 1987: 77-78). However, the primary purpose of religious language is to help the learner, researcher, or scholar to connect with God and participate in religious rituals (for more information, see Baker 2000: 178-179).

Religious Language as Register

Register is characterized in linguistics as the way a speaker uses language differently in different situations. The vocabulary you use, your voice tone, and even your body language are involved in this type of function. When you are talking with a friend, you usually act very differently than when you may be at a formal dinner party or at a job interview. In linguistics, these differences in formality, also known as stylistic variations, are referred to as registers. They are influenced by a variety of factors, including the social occasion, meaning, intention, and audience.

In separating it from styles, register is "a type of language identified through usage in a social context, e.g. a register of science, religious or structured English" Crystal (1997: 327). In the same vein, Trudgill (1974: 104) considers register as the "occupational linguistic variations used by representatives of one particular career or trade, distinguished by unique organisms". Traugott and Pratt, (1980: 29) for the sake of distinction, view style as a conscious option taken by a speaker or author of some systems rather than others, accessible in a language.

For Halliday and Hasan (1976), register is best presented as "linguistic features that are usually correlated with a configuration of situational features – with particular values of the area, mode, and tenor...". They add that the function of the text in the event is defined as "the function of the text in the event, including both the channel taken by language – spoken or written, extempore or prepared – and its genre, rhetorical mode, such as narrative, didactic, persuasive, 'phatic communion,' and so on." Religious language in terms of the above discussion constitutes a specific register characterized by certain linguistic features which help people understand Godly messages.

Features of Religious Texts

Religious texts are tradition-related texts. They are differentiated from literary texts by the selection or debate of values, traditions, customs, commandments or regulations, ethical behaviour, the creation or advancement of moral aspirations and a religious culture. They are identified as scriptures are deemed essential to their sacred practices (Starasta, 2012: 20).

The overarching objective of religious texts is to have sense and/or intent, to establish relations with the heavens, to communicate religious values, to promote religious experience, to promote community identification, and to direct religious activities of person and community groups (Rüpke, 2016:170). Religious texts are exceptional for their features by consistency and briefness. The statements in religious text are furthermore directly linked to the everyday existence of all individuals and disclose to them truth and profit, leading to general facts regarding good deeds to be "obeyed and bad deeds" to be abandoned (Won-jun, 2016: 95).

With reference to Holy Bible, Biblical texts use compelling techniques in their speeches to persuade the addresses to receive expected messages. Therefore, other patterns must be met in every theological document, which are true to meaning or more correct and understandable to the reader and linked to the present one or, rather, intelligibility (Holter, 2007:101). In addition, religious texts often express the traditions or beliefs of a religious culture and may be viewed as a collection of guiding principles that regulate the physical, emotional, moral or historical elements that are essential to a particular religion (Bakker, 2012: 37).

The Bible

The term 'Bible' is etymologically a translation from the Greek phrase "good news". One of the key considerations of a New Testament analysis would be to assess what positive news has been received through analyzing "the content of the New Testament" in a historical sense (Pulbrook, 1959:114). The original text is composed of four Gospels: "Mark, Matthew, Luke as well as John". The word of Jesus Christ is mainly concerned, but it includes several other items of considerable importance (Camp et al., 2013: 256). They tell stories about the connection between "Jesus Christ and his followers"; they explain much about the existence and practices of times; they clarify

methods of teaching; they describe certain heritage; they characterize the witness of events and try to portray them; they can be interpreted and read literally (Timmer, 2014:140).

The disciples of Jesus Christ embraced the immediacy and recollection of His acts and expression. Over time, his words and behavior appear to have to be registered and his history and teaching analyzed (Agadjanian and Yabiku, 2015: 461). They believe that these thoughts and actions deserve to be written down. These terms and acts are written in books interpreted into several languages (Day, 1941:107).

The King James Approved Edition is an English translation of the Christian Bible from the Church of England, started in 1604 and finished in 1611 (Clowes, 1941). This was the third formal English version printed at a time by the King's Printer Robert Barker; the first was the Great Bible ordered by the Church of England at the time of King Henry VIII, as well as the second was the Bibles of the Bishop in 1568 (Perlo, 2007 :146).

King James of England organized the Hampton Court Conference in January 1604, where a modern English edition was conceived as a solution to the alleged issue of the Puritans, an English branch, in the past (Abdul Jalil, 2017: 97). King James directs the translators to ensure that the current edition is ecclesiologically compatible and represents the episcopal nature of the Church in England as well as its confidence in an ordained priesthood (Bush, 2013). 47 scholars, all representatives of the Church of England, rendered the translation. The New Testament has been translated from Greek language, along with most other versions from the period, while the Old Testament has been translated into Hebrew (Muers and Grant, 2017:41).

Pragmatics of Repentance

Pragmatically, the speech act of repentance is an expressive act which is concerned with humanity feelings even to the point of suffering emotional pain. Repentance is defined by Olsztyn (1989: 156-7) as "an act of speaking intended to give support to the listener" who has been or is likely to be affected by the violation. In the speaker's repentance, the speaker is willing to put himself down to the extent that repentance is an act of preserving the listener and an act that threatens the face of the speaker. The excuses are found in the verbs of expressive speech. For the repentance to have an effect on the listener. The act of repentance has certain elements (Brown and Ettardo, 2000: 11). These include:

1. Overcoming sin is a life time effort.
2. Repentance to feel sorry, regret remorse or change.
3. Turning or withdrawing from past sinful and evil activities –firmly resolving to abstain from them in the future.
4. Telling someone that you are sorry for doing something .That has caused him or her trouble or misery.
5. An act of speaking intended to give support to the listener, who has been or is likely to be affected by the violation.

Repentance is not only a mental task that affects only the subconscious, nor is salvation an effort to curry forgiveness by committing acts of penance. The divine standards of repentance are not met by simple regret or the stirring of emotions. Repentance for being caught is more than guilt, remorse, regrets, or fear of retribution.

Felicity Conditions of Repentance

For a speech act to fulfill its aim, there are requirements and standards that must be fulfilled. In particular, these conditions and criteria are referred to as conditions of felicitation in speech act theory. The Oxford philosopher Searle invented the term satisfaction conditions by which a certain speech act is said to be performed happily. Several kinds of congratulatory conditions have been identified in the literature available, namely: an essential condition (whether a speaker intends the addressee to act on an utterance); a condition of sincerity (whether the speech act is seriously performed and whether the speech act is seriously performed honestly); a state of readiness

(whether the authority of the speaker and the circumstances of the speech act are appropriate to its being performed successfully) (Jacobs, 1989: 365).

In English and Arabic, a speech act is performed felicitously, only and only if they follow those conditions. Pragmatically, to be done properly, an utterance must not only be grammatical in order to be executed correctly, it must also be pragmatically and socially happy. Being content allows such things to be valid in terms of the sense in which actions of speech are pronounced (ibid).

The necessary and sufficient conditions for specifying a certain speech act as Repentance can be formulated: repentance becomes a religious and theological trigger for genuinely repenting to God and thereby consciously striving to change and gain His pleasure and forgiveness. In comparison, authentic guilt may only be induced in someone who loves and knows Allah. These two main qualities of spirituality are not obviously external characteristics or acts — but they guide us to search for the direction of “self-preservation” (ibid.), Based on Searle’s (1969, 1975, 1979) felicity conditions, the following are the conditions by which a specific speech act is realized as the illocutionary act of repentance.

1. Propositional Content Conditions

- a) The act, specified in the proposition, indicates that the speaker has committed a fault / sin.
- b) The speaker anticipates a future act of the hearer (God).

2. Preparatory Conditions

- a) The speaker should be in a position to express his/her fault/ sin and request for repentance.
- b) The speaker believes that the hearer (God) is able to perform the act.
- c) The speaker should promise not to repeat the fault / sin.
- d) The speaker should believe the hearer (God) will accept his/her repentance, and that his faulty deed is worth-repenting.

3. Sincerity Conditions: The speaker wishes his act to be accepted by the hearer (God).

4. Essential Conditions: The speaker’s utterance should be taken as a repentance to God.

Linguistic Features

Repentance is a sincere acknowledgment of blame, wrongdoing, sin, mourning the offense. This interpretation refers to a domestic understanding. Repentance is a powerful relational experience that is connected to with his/her own sense of guilt. Syntactically when people need to repent to Almighty God, they use certain strategies such as, repeating words, insisting, begging, and even crying to God as petition.

In this respect, the formulas of repentance are not "orders" but "requests" and include the request of the addressee. In both English and Arabic, the singular and the plural pronouns (I, we) are used to refer to the speaker/ speakers (repentant(s)) and (you) to refer to God. A repentant must be considered humble and small before God and uses words such as "slave" and "servant" or "sinner", and uses “forgive me and I am a sinner” or even only “forgive me”, “forgive me the wrongdoer”. Another strategy in the verbal style of repentance is to mention the high position of the addressee. In repentance, man confesses his sinfulness, regrets it, and acknowledges the greatness of God and praises Him. In the application of such speeches the speaker, directly or indirectly, refers to God's attribute of "forgiveness". Mostly repentance (particularly Divine one) is not verbal and convey, unlike the normal forms of repentance, divine virtues and implicitly a way of calling for the mercy of Heaven and the human request for forgiving his/her sin.

"Repentance" refers primarily to a sense of sorrow, contrition or regret for something that one has either done or left undone. It predicts a feeling of disappointment, sadness, remorse, or even torture. According to the classical lexical authorities, repentance can be taken to refer to either a "return from sin to God," a "return from something to God," a "return to God," a "return to obedience after sin," or simply a "return from sin". (Etzioni, 2000:11).

Modal of analysis

The model followed in the study (based on the speech act classifications of Austin, 1962, Searle 1969, 1976 and Bach and Harnish 1979) is used in terms of two levels to carry out the

analysis; pragmatic behavior and syntactic realization to analyze the chosen verses. Each portion of this chapter therefore provides a thorough study of the speech actions of repentance, reflecting on their pragmatic and systemic behavior. An empirically relevant model is necessary for the identification of speech act in terms of its inherent attributes and realization of its linguistic realization in order to get a congruent pragmatic study of speech acts in English Biblical sayings. This model then consists of: pragmatic identification: behaviour of repentance and linguistic (syntactic and semantic) realization.

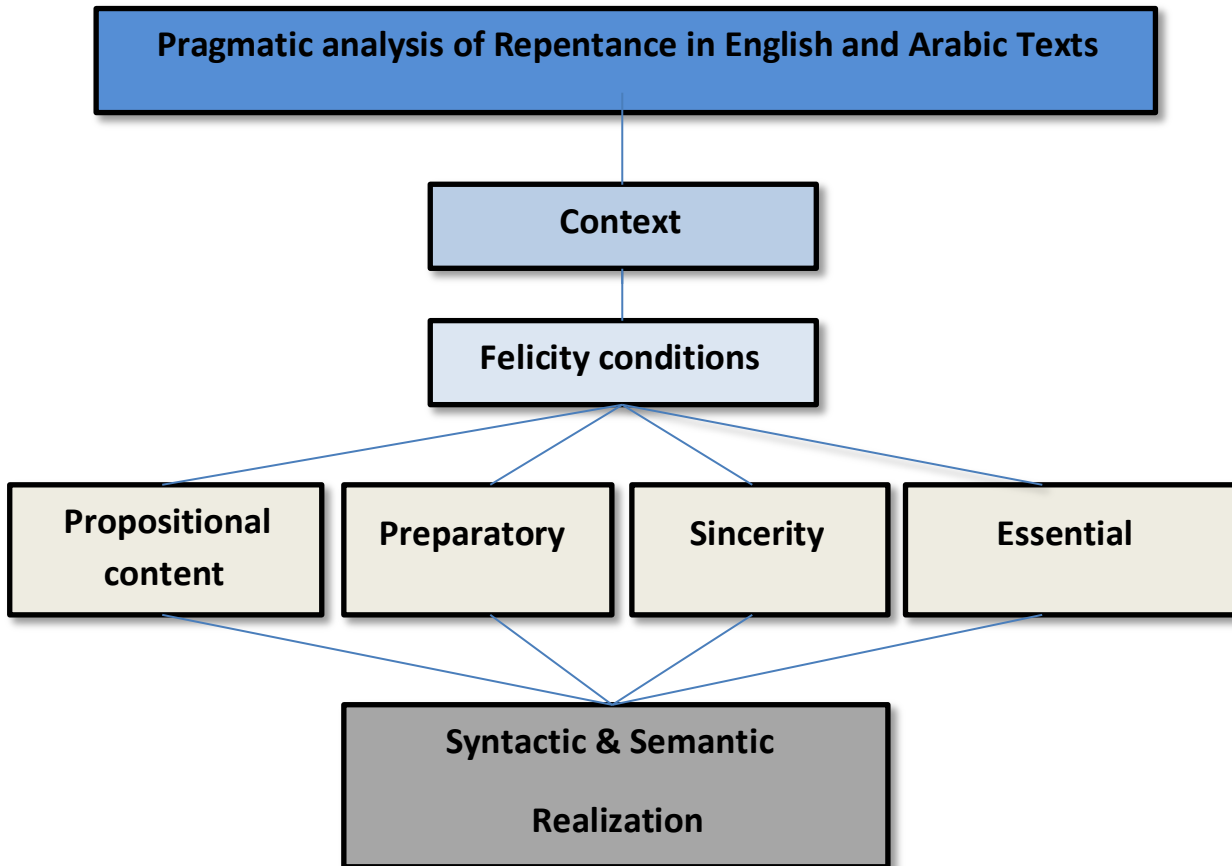


Figure 1: Proposed Model

Twenty extracts are selected to be analyzed qualitatively in terms of the model proposed in chapter three. These extracts are taken from (James (4:8), Acts (8:22), Peter (3:9), Zechariah 1:3, Psalm 38: 18, Matthew 4:17, II Corinthians 7:10, Psalm 51: 13, Acts 3:19, Acts 3:21, Mathew 10:32, John 1:9, Matthew 3:8, Psalm 32:5, James 5:16, Proverbs 28:13, Acts 2:38, Peter 3:9, John 1:9). The following section offers a detailed analysis of the speech acts of repentance concentrating on their pragmatic and structural behavior.

1 James (4:8)

Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded

Continuing his teaching on the immoral consequences of life visions and views, James explicates why one should fight his/her “selfish ambition” and the excessive spiritual motives. In this respect, Zerr, (1952) maintains that “some Christians are constantly looking for more power, increased possessions and higher status”. In James, verse 8, the Apostle, James directs people to follow the path of God “come near to God” i.e. to come closer to Him, particularly when one has committed a sin/fault, and repents for it. If he/she does so, his/her repentance will be accepted by God (“you wash your hands you sinners and purify your hearts you double-minded”). In fact, James

here metaphorically orders sinners to wash their mouths from vice (i.e. purify up our souls) and to get away from the mischievous sprite and not to be “dual minded” to all together follow the path of God and the path of devil. Actually, James emphasizes the idea of repentance and proceeds to explain how a sinner should confess his/her sin, by submitting to God (Bible Hub, 2004).

Out of this extract, it is clear that this text is enunciated to issue the speech act or repentance. Pragmatically, there is a sinner who has committed a sin/fault and wishes to repent. Then, he/she must confess his/her sin before God. He/she believes that God will accept his repentance. Furthermore, he/she believes in God’s greatness and mercy, Who would accept his/her repentance. Confessing a sin and asking repentance is a step toward the path of the righteous, the path of God. Concisely, Knowing-Jesus.com (2021) affirms the idea of repentance stating that:

“There should be a deep cleansing of the inner heart; a separation from the world and a positive choice to single-mindedly keep Jesus Christ as our singular focus. We should approach him in worship, prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. We should examine ourselves to discover any failure, and quickly confess our fault to our Father as instructed - for God resists those that are proud but gives grace to those that are humble.”

James’s expressive illocutionary act of repentance is indirectly realized by the triple imperative verbs come, wash and purify; they are used to indicate commands to people to obey regulations of repentance, (i.e. to come closer to God, clean up themselves from evil and purge their hearts). This speech act is structurally constructed through the use of the compound sentence consisting of imperative followed by declarative sentence denoting futurity (He will come near you). This declarative sentence is employed to give a consequence of coming near God. It is conjoined through the coordinating conjunction and which emphasizes the closeness relation between the one who intends to repent and God.

2 Acts (8:22)

Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.

This verse informs the idea that the Samaritans are embracing the Christ, and the church messengers are present to witness the Holy Spirit’s descent on them. They all believe that God is more impressed by repentant, submissive hearts than by earthly popularity or riches. God’s command is clear as Jesus instructs (Bible Hub, 2004):

“I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish,” (Luke 13:3, KJV.)

This excerpt clearly shows that this text is being enunciated in order to issue the speech act of repentance. In terms of pragmatics, there is a sinner who has committed a transgression and wishes to confess, prompting Peter’s rebuke. Simon, “you will not be a member of our ministry because your heart is not in the right place. Therefore, repent of your sins and pray to the Lord. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness and ask God if maybe the thought of thine heart could be forgiven thee that’s correct”. That is why Simon the sorcerer did not receive the Holy Spirit. Since he had not repented his sins, he, like everyone else, was still thinking about making money and wielding power to manipulate people and build a broad reputation.

Further to Pragmatics, a sinner must confess his/her sin to God. He/she must be polite and asks forgiveness indirectly. He or she must be convinced that God will tolerate his repentance. He/she still believes in God’s goodness and grace, and that God will tolerate his/her repentance. Confessing a sin and requesting forgiveness is a step toward the righteous path, the path of God. All these conditions ensure the existence of the speech act of repentance.

Jesus's expressive illocutionary act of repentance is realized by the utilization of the imperative verbs, repent and pray, which are used to evince commands to people to obey regulations of repentance, This speech act is structurally constructed through the use of the compound sentence consisting of imperative followed by declarative sentence denoting futurity. This construction tends to manipulate indirect strategies in this setting to reveal a high degree of politeness, to mitigate and minimize the impact of request on people. In addition, the declarative sentence is utilized here to

elaborate the idea of the consequence of repenting and praying to God (i.e. forgiving one who has an upright thought in his/her heart).

Results

The pragmatic study of the speech acts of repentance of the twenty English texts involve the following: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; The Apostolic Acts; The Epistle to the Romans of Paul the Apostle ,The Epistle of the Apostle to the Ephesians, The First Epistle General to the Apostles ,The Epistle of Saint John the Divine. The following table shows the number of verses concerned, the type of sentence employed, lexical items and sentence mood may be summarized.

Table (1): Result of Repentance in English Biblical Texts

Verse No.	Type of SA	Sentence type	Lexical items	Mood
1. James (4:8) Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.	Indirect	Compound-complex	Awash your hands Purify your heart	Declarative
2. Acts 8:22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.	Indirect	Compound-complex	Pray to the lord Forgive you	Declarative and Imperative
3. Peter 3:9 As Peter wrote, God is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”	Indirect	Compound-complex	Not willing to any to perish	Declarative
4. Zechariah 1:3 ‘Return to me,’ declares the Lord Almighty, ‘and I will return to you,’ says the Lord Almighty	Indirect	Compound-	Return to me Return to you	Imperative
5 Psalm 38: 18 Repent therefore and turn again that your sins may be blotted out.	Indirect	Compound-	Turn again	Imperative
6. Matthew 4:17 From that, time on	Indirect	Compound-	Repent	Imperative

Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”				
7.2 Corinthians 7:10 Jesus Christ. Said " The sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation,	Indirect	Compound-	The sorrow that is according to the will of God	Declarative
8. Psalm 51: 13 then I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will return to you.	Indirect	Compound	I will teach the transgressors your ways	Declarative
9. Acts 3:19 So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.	Indirect	Compound	They went out and proclaimed	Declarative
10. Acts 3:21 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.	Indirect	Compound-complex	Repent Turn Wiped-out and come	Declarative
11. Mathew 10:32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.	Indirect	Complex	confess	Declarative
12. John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness	Indirect	Compound-complex	Confess our sin Forgive and purify us	Declarative
13. Matthew 3:8 Produce fruit in keeping with	Indirect	Compound-	Produce fruit	Imperative

repentance.				
14. Psalm 32:5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.” And you forgave the guilt of sin.	Indirect	Compound	Confess acknowledges	Declarative
15. James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.	Indirect	Compound- Complex	Confess pray	Declarative
16. Proverbs 28:13 He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.	Indirect	Complex	Confess and renounces	Imperative
17. Acts 2:38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.	Indirect	Compound	Repent and baptized	Imperative
18 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not Slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness instead he is patient with you not wanting anyone to Perish but everyone to come	Indirect	Compound	Perish and come near God come to repent	Declarative

to repentance second come near to God and He will come near				
19. John 1:9 If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.	Indirect	Compound – Complex	Confess Forgive purify	Declarative
20. Ezekiel 18:32 For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live.	Indirect	Compound- Complex	“Repent and live”.	Declarative

Data analysis shows that the pragmatic analysis of the speech act of repentance is indirectly performed, simply because indirectness is more effective and more polite. The presented Biblical texts reveal that an act of repentance is felicitously performed when there is a sinner who has committed a crime or a sin and is ready to confess his/her sin to God asking forgiveness, believing that God will accept his apology and forgive him. This forgiveness sets out from the idea that God is Most Compassionate and Most Merciful who would never reject a plea from His creatures.

Repentance in religious literature acts pragmatically when both the benefit and the cost of performing the repentance deed are tied to the hearer, leaving the speaker with little choice but to act as a mediator between the rewarder and the rewarded individuals. In religious literature, repentance is a conditional promise that necessitates per-conditions and the assured conduct. As a result, it should be expressed in complicated or compound-complex words rather than simple ones. The evidence from both English texts shows that utterances used to indicate repentance are expressed in compound or complicated sentences.

Syntactically, data analysis of English Biblical texts has shown that the act of repentance is expressed in various grammatical constructions; compound, complicated or complex sentences. Twenty). Mostly repentance is realized in complex and/or complex, conditional sentence structures, simply because with the use of such types more information can be added or reason and consequence can be attached. No case of simple sentence has been noticed in the data. All the Biblical texts are presented in declarative sentences which are mostly used to transfer information (from God to humans).

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