

In Search of Contact: Rhetorical Questions in the Communicative Frame of the Funeral Sermon

by

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Abstract

Moving from the view of discourse as context-bound or a local level process, this study examines interactions within the funeral sermon, one of the crises rituals that dramatize transition related to death. Specifically the use of verbal communicative devices is examined via shared beliefs about death drawn into discourse with participant attention sought and commitment of their shared beliefs synchronized and confirmed, using principles from interactional social linguistics and frame analysis to show how by using the verbal device of a rhetorical question, the priest establishes a link with participants with respect to their shared 'contextual information', mainly focused on the Christian ideas of immortality evident in the Christian tradition and in the deceased's life. The findings contribute to the discussions on the discursive use of rhetorical questions and how people conduct themselves in interactional settings.

Key Words: Rhetorical questions, contextualization, communicative devices

Introduction

In the context of death, through the use of face-to-face interaction, which minimizes the disruptive effects of death (Willmott 2000:4), people communicate ideas and feelings about loss via the funeral event or ritual, which consist of a host of verbal and non-verbal practices clustering around the practice of burial. To this description of the funeral ritual, I add that these verbal and non-verbal practices vary in religious orientation, duration, the number of people involved, the nature of interaction taking place therein and the time and manner of occurrence, with some coming before burial and others after burial and with some occurring independently and with some overlapping (Nganga forthcoming).

Such verbal and non-verbal practices, which are themselves rituals (Van Gennep 1960; Turner, 1967), play a crucial role in the context of death, at least among the members of the community familiar with the norms governing interactions within such 'conventionalized settings'. Thus, as essential communicative actions that enable participants to 'achieve their communicative goals in real life situations' (Gumperz 1999:454) the rituals are for scholars recognizable, accessible and analyzable.

With regard to face-to-face communication in the funeral event, which includes participants drawn from the Christian religion, some of the most important practices or contexts, where such interactions take place, is the visits to the bereaved and the 'highly ritualized' setting of mass (Nganga forthcoming). Their differences notwithstanding, what the two interactional settings seem to share is the fact that they allow the participants to witness the revelation Christ's death and resurrection by referring to the history of salvation and to incorporate this reality in their circumstances. The witness to Christ's death and resurrection and its subsequent application to the participants' circumstances has been discussed under the two-dimensional preaching: horizontal and vertical (Church 1970). Horizontal preaching involves witnessing Christ's life, death and resurrection while vertical preaching follows from Christ's command to the witnesses: 'to preach to the people' (Church 1970:43-4). Horizontal and vertical preaching are motivated by - and indeed build on - the understanding that 'apostles had a direct experience of the risen Lord.' They 'at the same time drew on the tradition of the past' (Church 1970:44). While during the visits to the bereaved family participants witness and speak about Christ's death and resurrection without the intervention of a specialist, in mass participants witness death and resurrection of presided over by as specialist i.e. a priest or a bishop. Mass comprises of fixed parts and parts that can be said to be 'flexible.' For example, prayers and the sermon are critical to the religious service.

The sermon, the focus here seems to be the most complex of the 'open spaces' in mass (Werlen, 1984). Following the mandatory two biblical readings (the first reading and the gospel) and lasting between twenty minutes and one hour, the sermon has a definite structure of the beginning, development and conclusion (Nganga forthcoming). Defined as a discourse on the scripture together with a practical application, the sermon 1) 'proclaims the word as has been read' and 2) 'enables those present to share in the mystery of ' available in mass (Church 1970:54), the salvation history, the lives of the participants. In this sense, the principal feature of the sermon is persuasion; it bridges the 'objective' or 'real' side and the 'subjective' or 'personal' side (Church, 1970:54) and in a context such as the Bukusu funeral among the Bukusu people of western Kenya that brings together participants from diverse religions such as Christian, Traditional Bukusu religion and Islam it can be used to proselytize (Nganga forthcoming).

What makes the sermon particularly persuasive is its ability to connect with the local context of the participants, a practice, which at least in the funeral context among the Bukusu people who number about 1.5 million and speak Lubukusu, is important in terms of spreading the message, persuading the participants to change their way of believing, and consoling the bereaved with the message of hope based on Christ's death and resurrection.

More specifically, my experience as a Catholic, and as a participant in funerals, has shown me that there seems to be a pattern regarding how the priest - against the background of the scripture and the lives of the deceased and the bereaved - connects with the participants in the sermon (including the bereaved).

The point of departure for this essay was my observation that, during the delivery of the sermon, the priest uses verbal devices in the search for contact with the participants- who may not necessarily be members of the Christian religion - with respect to Christ present in the salvation history (detailed in the Bible), the lives of the bereaved and the life of the deceased. In this sense, the verbally invoked shared background of Christ's life, death and resurrection present in the Bible, and the life of the bereaved and the deceased is at the same time via using certain linguistic means was initiated into the circumstances of the participants. In light of this, the focus of this article is the analysis of how the priest uses rhetorical questions, and what data tells us about when they are used and why they are used. Thus, there is a review of the rhetorical questions in the literature, a report on the data and methods used herein, and a conclusion, with discussion.

Rhetorical Questions in Literature

While there is little literature on how rhetorical questions or more broadly reversed polarity questions are used discursively (exceptions include Ilie, 1994; Karhanova, 2005 and Koshik, 2005), the question of the use of rhetorical questions in naturally occurring talk is one which has attracted a lot of attention in the last few decades. Approaches to rhetorical questions have clearly changed over time in the literature. This is expected given the development from approaches to rhetorical questions which used intuitive data to analyze the structural aspects (Lee, 1995) to approaches which make use of empirical data and, therefore, aim at showing how rhetorical questions function in discourse (Karhanova, 2005; Koshik, 2005). Contemporary literature emphasizes the use-side of rhetorical questions, and has moved away from arguments that rhetorical questions are redundant interrogatives that are mainly ornamental. Instead it is argued that rhetorical questions are 'intended to fulfil at the same time one or several more discursive functions, such as reproach, a warning an objection, a promise, a self-exculpation, an accusation etc' (Ilie 1994:45-6). Hence, context plays a central role in the identification and interpretation of a rhetorical question (Karhanova, 2005:341). In this sense, it has been shown that there is need to get beyond the surface properties to the question of what rhetorical questions accomplish in real life interactions (Estes, 2013:35).

But this shift in perspective notwithstanding, a number of studies on the general use of questions have tended to give rhetorical questions a cursory treatment, preferring to discuss rhetorical questions only when the need to distinguish them from other question-types arises. For instance, in order to distinguish rhetorical questions from information seeking questions, Archer (2005:28) begins by observing that form as a standard for delimiting question types cannot account for rhetorical questions, since rhetorical questions are 'interrogative in structure, but ... [have] the force of an assertion rather than a question'. This argument resonates with Searle's (1969) understanding of an indirect illocution.

Hence a rhetorical question as discourse element performs a number of functions in discourse. The superficial treatment of rhetorical questions has also been occasioned by their multifunctional nature. For instance, Frank (1990:723) argues that the difficulty in the identification and determination rhetorical questions in talk has been compounded by the fact that they are multifunctional in nature: rhetorical questions augment assertions and soften criticisms (Frank 1990), can be used as a politeness strategy (Brown and Levinson 1978:228) and are in nature persuasive (Anzilotti, 1982).

The persuasive aspect, that is in part the main theme of this article, has discussed further by Estes (2013:14) [now an adjunct professor of New Testament at Western Seminary-San Jose and Lead Pastor at Berryessa Valley Church in San Jose, California] who in explaining how Jesus uses questions in the gospel according to John, begins by arguing that the need to understand how questions function is integral to the pursuit of 'what questions are'. On the basis of this, Estes (2013) distinguishes between informational and rhetorical questions and observing that in executing their functions questions from the two categories overlap, he goes beyond the traditional binary system that informs the classification and focuses on the qualities of questions. The rhetorical quality, argues Estes (2013:54) 'correlate(s) with the asker's desire to impart something [and it] may be simple as a mild implicit encouragement to consider the asker's point of view or it may be as complex as a strong threat to obey the asker's wishes'. Though Estes focuses mainly on information seeking questions and only briefly discusses rhetorical questions, he manages to show that the persuasive task of rhetorical questions is realizable especially since rhetorical questions present 'tension between the literal reading and the figurative reading' (Estes' 2013:54). Estes' argument, however, foregrounds one of the key characteristic of rhetorical questions: ambiguity. This attribute raises the need for a case by case - and even context by context - analysis of rhetorical questions.

For Koshik (2005:36) without context or pragmatic factors (Karhanova 2005:344) a rhetorical question will be 'heard as asking a question i.e. seeking information.' Interactional settings constitute discourse types that can be analysed as genres (Karhanova 2005:344). Interacting with the interactional context is a broader context of generally accepted values, evaluative attitudes and norms that form the background. Koshik, (2005:150) observes, in reference to Heritage (2002), that some contexts such as broadcast news interviews can be characterised by competing norms that specify conditions for the use of rhetorical questions: some norms demand objectivity, impartiality from the interviewers while others demand 'adversarialness' from the interviewers'.

While rhetorical questions appeal to the broader context, 'the rules of the genre determine the usage of genuine questions' and specify participant roles, setting apart those 'whose role is to ask' from those 'whose role is to answer them' (Karhanova 2005:344). But, rhetorical questions can challenge 'the background of values and knowledge, which are taken for granted by the speaker', and in such cases the challenge can be understood as 're-specification, redefinition, or a negation of the established connection between [the shared] background and the issue being discussed (Karhanova 2005:352).

In pedagogical interactions, as Koshik (2005: 153) explains, rhetorical questions can be used in error corrections in that they not only reveal the asymmetry with respect to the 'epistemic authority' i.e. the teacher has greater claim to knowledge' but they also 'recall violated norms, one that a student is supposed to know'. That is, with rhetorical questions 'teachers diagnose problems and suggest solutions by associating a problematic portion of student text with an academic discourse norm' (Ibid). Apart from signalling violated norms in pedagogical settings, rhetorical questions also mitigate criticisms thereby 'inadvertently [...] performing another dispreferred action' (Koshik, 2005:156). In this sense, a rhetorical question suggests that since 'students already know what they have done wrong, they should not have done the mistake in the first place' (Koshik, 2005:157). Appeal to violated norms makes rhetorical questions a powerful disciplinary tool among the Kaluli (Schieffelin, 1990), and this is made possible by the fact that rhetorical questions 'refer to violated norms and the answer should be obvious to all present, including the sanctioned child' (Koshik 2005:152). In broadcast news interviews, rhetorical questions appeal to the two competing norms enabling the interviewer to 'maintain' what Koshik (2005:150) calls a 'fiction of neutrality'.

But rhetorical questions can also be used as a challenge to talk by participants present in the interactional setting or absent. Koshik (2005:24) explains that 'an absentee third party' is invoked 'into the current sequence of talk as reported speech and then subsequently challenged with' a rhetorical question. Rhetorical questions in the resultant polyphonic settings (Bakhtin 1981) can be used affiliatively or disaffiliatively i.e. they can be used to align with or to challenge co-present parties' (Koshik, 2005:24). Koshik (2005:26) further explains that when 'used affiliatively, rhetorical questions 'can challenge non-present parties [or be used] disaffiliatively to challenge co-present parties'. While adopting the view that, as a resource in establishing contact among interactants, rhetorical questions can be used affiliatively or disaffiliatively with reference to talk by other persons, this presentation further shows that rhetorical questions can also be used affiliatively or disaffiliatively with reference to excerpts from a text i.e. the Bible. Thus, within the verbal context, rhetorical questions make reference to the preceding utterances that constitute 'contexts [...] which would make the answer to these questions obvious' [or] support the implied answer in the rhetorical question (Karhanova 2005:354). The subsequent verbal context, as Karhanova (2005:347) writes, 'is relevant for implying the intended or preferred answer'. The subsequent and preceding contexts take part in what Gumperz (2003:21) in reference to Bateson calls framing: they 'relate the ongoing interaction to broader classes of encounters and make what transpires intelligible in terms of prior experience'. Thus while both the preceding and subsequent contexts provide a 'context relevant for the recognition of a rhetorical question', the context of the question itself is crucial since, as Karhanova (2005:347) observes, some questions such as disjunctive questions 'evidently prefer one of the suggested alternatives' and the preferred alternatives are 'indicated by the use of evaluative terms or by various features of context'.

Contrary to the view that rhetorical questions do not seek answers since the answers are obvious, discussions above imply that rhetorical questions 'do sometimes get answers' (Koshik, 2005:2). Since, data here is mainly a monologue, we argue that the answers that rhetorical questions get are in the sense of Grice (1989) implied; a rhetorical question constitutes the surface form that is also the basis for interpretation.

In this way, a rhetorical questions ‘constitutes a basic communicative resource that’ in the context of the sermon ‘serves as a communicative strategy to achieve specific interpretive effects’ (Gumperz 2003:221) i.e. to indicate attempt by the priest to establish contact with the other participants.

In this article, we take Karhanova (2005) and Koshik (2005) work as a starting point, and set to explore the use of rhetorical questions in 7 sermons performed shortly before burial in 7 different Bukusu funeral events among the Bukusu people of Kenya. On the basis of the research by Karhanova (2005) and Koshik (2005) we expect to find the use of rhetorical questions as contextually determined. While Karhanova (2005) focuses on conversational data from televised debates, Koshik (2005) focuses on conversational data from a variety of settings including broadcast news interviews, pedagogical settings and mundane conversational settings. Contrary to this, the focus on a non-conversational data of the sermon which we view, in the sense of Gumperz (1982) as an event or a frame, ‘embodying presuppositions associated with ideologies and principles of communicative conduct that in a way bracket the talk, and that thereby affect the way in which we assess or interpret what transpires in the course of an encounter’ (Gumperz 2003:219). In this article, together with Gumperz (2003:219), we carry out an ‘indepth discourse-level analysis’ and in this we view rhetorical questions as devices that function to ‘evoke contextual presuppositions that affect interpretations’. We, thus, view rhetorical questions as ‘contextualization cues’ and they are, therefore, interactional resources ‘by which speakers signal and listeners interpret what the activity is, how [it] ...is to be understood’ (Gumperz 1982:131). While Karhanova (2005) views context as essential in the recognition and interpretation of rhetorical questions, our study views rhetorical questions as linguistic resources that make context available, and in this way trigger the process of interpretation. Koshik’s (2005) analysis of rhetorical questions - or more broadly reversed polarity questions - aims at establishing whether rhetorical questions can be universal communicative techniques in certain discourses. As our article shows, our results will support Gumperz’s (1982) view that the aim of a linguistic study is to establish and account for linguistic and cultural diversity.

In sum, Karhanova (2005) and Koshik (2005) provide a useful starting point with which to analyse the use of rhetorical questions. Our analysis is similar to both studies, in that context seems to be a central parameter in the identification, use and interpretation of rhetorical questions. However, the present study makes a crucial point that in order to account for the use of rhetorical questions in real-life interactional settings we need to view rhetorical questions as resources invoking and interacting with context by analysing their use in a different context i.e. the context of the Bukusu funeral.

Data and Methods

As part of ongoing discussions on how interactants make the context appropriate for interactions available (Gumperz 1982), the focus of this exercise is how the priest uses rhetorical questions during his delivery of the sermon. Four video recordings of the sermon collected in 2012 from Bungoma district of western Kenya form the data for this study.

The video recordings of sermons performed by different priests last between 20 and 40 minutes; and the Bungoma district was selected because this is where the Bukusu people are found and also because the aim was to analyze the interactions within the Bukusu funeral event, and more specifically within the sermon. Supplementing the videos of sermons, performed in Kiswahili language (and in which the priest incorporates Lubukusu and English languages), are interviews with priests. For ethical reasons, we seek the consent of the bereaved and the priests before collecting and publishing data. During analysis and publication of data we also treat the participants in the sermon as anonymous.

As the analytical tool for this article, transcribed data enriched with ethnographic information is used. Following Gumperz (2003), we analyze data at the level of content and prosodic features in order to identify rhetorical questions. This is followed by a close analysis of data to determine which rhetorical questions as well as where and why they are used. In doing this, we share in Goodwin and Duranti's (1992:46-7) view of context as dynamic i.e. context and talk mutually invoke each other. In this work there is a reorganization of the complementary role of the non-verbal devices in the performance of the sermon, but we do not closely examine them. Instead we focus on the verbal device of the rhetorical question.

Rhetorical Questions in the Funeral Sermon

Let us now turn to the analysis of data that is spoken mainly in Kiswahili; there are also a few stretches in Lubukusu language, the language predominantly used in Bungoma district. Stretches in Lubukusu are in bold. We provide a gloss after every line. Transcription symbols are provided at the end of this article. Since it is not possible to discuss the whole data in the space of this article, we analyze a few examples to illustrate my point. We begin with rhetorical questions that follow citations from the Bible.

Rhetorical Questions with Reference to a Biblical Reading

Excerpt 1 is a continuation of citation on beatitudes, and the priest uses a number of rhetorical questions:

Excerpt 1

- 01 *na HERI WENYE moyo safi- (.) kwa sababu gani-*
And blessed are the pure in heart why
- 02 *watamwona mu[ngu]*
They will see God
- 03 *[watamwona mungu; (2.5) hebu jiulize*
They will see God. ask yourself
- 04 *mwenyewe na mimi nijiulize MWENYEWE – (.) mimi nina moyo*
And I ask myself: what kind of heart
- 05 *wa namna gani; (1.0) nina uhusChristiano gani na wenzangu; (0.6)*
do I have? What kind of relationship do I have with my mates?
- 06 *ninaishi vipi na wengine;*
How do I live with others?

The shared beliefs about being a Christian are indicated by the use of citation: *HERI WENYE moyo safi kwa sababu...watamwona mungu* ‘blessed are the pure in heart ... they will see God’ (lines 1-2). Embedded in citation is the analogy between *moyo safi* ‘pure heart’ and God’s holiness; citation therefore sets a condition for participation in God’s holiness: purity of heart.

Framing the citation as an expository rhetorical question *HERI WENYE moyo safi kwa sababu gani*- ‘blessed are the pure in heart, why?’ the priest firstly evokes the participants interest, making them, as Estes 2013:108) writes ‘more reflective about’ the topic of purity of the heart. Secondly, the priest ‘preface(s) [the] answer.’ Thirdly, the priest ‘sets up further exposition within the discourse’ (Estes 2013:108) that forms the basis for three related reflective rhetorical questions introduced by *hebu jiulize mwenyewe na mimi niujiulize MWENYEWE* ‘ask yourself and I ask myself’. With the question *mimi nina moyo wa namna gani* ‘what type of heart do I have?’ (lines 4-5) the priest asks the participants to reflect on the nature of their ‘hearts’ using the scripture as their basis. The question *nina uhusiano gani na wenzangu* ‘how do I relate with other?’ invite the participants to reflect specifically on the theme of ‘purity of heart’ through relations with the ‘other’. The third question *ninaishi vipi na wenzangu* ‘how do I live with others?’ draws the participant attention to general aim of Christian living: living with others. While the first question calls the participant attention to the analogy *moyo* ‘heart’, the two questions give parameters in the determination of the purity of the heart: relations and life with others shown by *uhusiano na wengine* ‘relations with others’ and *ninaishi...na wengine* ‘I live with others’. In this way, the rhetorical questions seek to establish a link between what is cited and the believer’s knowledge, by drawing on concrete life situations. By seeking to confirm the participants’ knowledge and commitment to shared beliefs, the rhetorical question also frames the relation between the priest and the participants.

With an expository question, the priest, in excerpt 2, demonstrates the fact that most human beings do not know the purpose of their life:

Excerpt 2

- 01 *bamaayi musikaale nende bakuukhu:- (0.5) YEsu aboola ali- (0.3)*
 Mothers who are left behind and grandmothers, Jesus says that
 02 *OSUTA KUMUSIKO kwoo okhole oriena,*
 You carry your cross and do what?
 03 *OCHE KHU KRISTU; (0.9) kumusiko KUNO kuli sinaanu;*
 You go to Christ. what is this luggage?

The priest paraphrases the biblical quotation: *YEsu abo:la ali- (0.3) OSUTE KUMUSIKO kwoo okhole oriena, ...oche khu kristo* ‘ says that ‘you should carry your luggage and follow’. The quote margin *yesu abo:la* ‘Jesus says’ introduces the citation and the complementizer is *ali* ‘that’.

The quote content is *osute kumusiko kwoo oche khu kristu* ‘carry your luggage and follow’. Embedded in citation is analogy; Christ is the analogy of the Bible: Christ speaks through the Bible. *Kumusiko* ‘luggage’ is the analogy of sin; with the use of luggage, the priest reveals the practice of faith in terms of a ‘journey’, with Christ as a traveller and Christians as fellow travellers. Hence, Christ relieves ‘fellow’ travellers of their ‘luggage’. The verb *ochie* ‘you go’ reveals the initiation of a relationship with Christ in terms of a ‘journey’ to; it is the believer to ‘journey’ to Christ.

The priest structures the entire citation as an expository rhetorical question *YEsu abo:la ali- (0.3) OSUTE KUMUSIKO kwowo okhole oriema*, ‘jesus says that you (should) carry your ‘burden’ and do what?’ to seek contact with participants by drawing their ‘emotional interest in the subject’ of as the reliever of ‘burdens’ (Estes 2013:108). Constructed as a variable question, the expository rhetorical question introduces the next rhetorical question that is also expository in nature *kumusiko KUNO kuli sina* ‘what is this luggage?’, that both seeks the participants’ attention and a confirmation of their understanding with respect to the shared view of the relation between a ‘luggage’ and sin. The appeal to the shared association of Christ and a ‘journey’ and sin and a ‘luggage’ persuades the participants to initiate the relationship with Christ who is represented by the priest. Having examined rhetorical questions that follow biblical citations we now turn to rhetorical questions that follow quotations from participants in the sermon.

Rhetorical Questions with Reference to Participants in the Context of the Sermon

The basis of rhetorical questions in excerpt 3 - that is also expository - is the difficulty of discipleship as illustrated by the deceased’s life:

Excerpt 3

- 01 *Tunaambiwa ya kwamba mama Margaret alipokuwa hospitalini*
We are told that when mother, Margaret was in hospital
- 02 *Nairobi – (.) aliwambia watoto wake jamani kama mimi*
In Nairobi, she told her children ‘friends if I
- 03 *Ningalikuwa nyumbani:- (.) wakristu wenzangu wangukuja*
Were at home, other ChristChristChristians would have come
- 04 *Kuniombe,*
To pray for me
- 05 *Wangukuja kuniombea wangukuja kusali pamoja nami; (0.3)*
Would have come to pray for me. They would have come to pray with me
- 06 *Wangukuja kunitembelea; (1.6) na wewe unapenda kuwa mahali*
They would have come to visit me. And do you like to be where
- 07 *Wengine wako-*
Others are?

First, the priest quotes the deceased who addresses people who visit her at the hospital. The quote margin *aliwambia watoto wake* ‘she told her children’ (line 2) introduces the reported speech that lacks the complementizer. The quote content is *jamani kama mimi ningekuwa nyumbani... wangukuja kunitembelea* ‘friends, were I home... they would have come to visit me’ (lines 5-6). Within the Christian cosmology, each individual is an analogy of the body of Christ and so is the community of Christians; thus, the verb *wangukuja* ‘they would have come’ contextualizes gathering around - and in - the body of Christ in terms of a ‘journey.’ As a prayer, Christian communion has roots in the events at the Lord’s Supper, an event that anticipates a ‘perfect’ event at apocalypse (Durrwell (1964/2004).

The quote is embedded in an expository rhetorical question *tunaambiwa ya kwamba mama Margaret alipokuwa hospitalini... wakristu wenzangu wangukuja kuniombe*, (we are told that when mother, Margaret was in hospital... fellow Christians would have come to (do what?))’ that is syntactically formed by a verb together with rising intonation. The question is aimed at seeking contact with participants by drawing their interest in - and by inviting them to reflect on - the deceased’s desire for communion built upon Christ’s model. The question also prefaces an explanation of - and bids participants to reflect on - communion: prayer for (signalled by *kuniombea* ‘to pray for me’), prayer together (shown by *kusali nami* ‘to pray with me’) and visiting each other (indicated by *kunitembelea* ‘to visit me’). The expository rhetorical question then forms the basis for a polar question that is also decisive in nature *na wewe unapenda kuwa mahali wengine wako* ‘and do you like to go where others are? With polar rhetorical question the priest searches for contact with participants by ‘calling [them] to a decision’ (Estes, 2013:114) to emulate the deceased.

Within the Christian cosmology, communion is founded by during the last supper (Durrwell (1964/2004); bids his disciples to commune in his memory. The communion of Christians anticipates a greater communion in the fullness of time. Thus, the rhetorical question *wewe unapenda kuwa mahali wengine wako kweli*; ‘do you like to be where others are?’ is used to search for contact with the participants with respect to communion of Christians. The next example is also a polar rhetorical question that comes at the beginning of the sermon.

Excerpt 4

- 01 *Mwenye ametuleta hapa:- (1.5) anaitwa :- (.) marehemu James sindiyo*
The one who brought us here is called the deceased James; is that so?

The example makes reference to the deceased: the centre around which the participants gather. The deceased is an analogy of Christ and the gathering is a communion reminiscent of communion at the Lord’s Supper. Thus, the deceased is an analogy of Christ who draws the participants to communion. This forms the basis for the rhetorical question *sindiyo* ‘is that not so?’ The polar question used here is decisive in the sense that it both serves to narrow the topic as well as to ‘encourage a decision’ (Estes 2013:116), it is used to search for contact with respect to the relationship between the deceased and the participants.

The question contains a bias, which is that the priest expects the participants to agree with his assertion that the reason for the communion at the funeral is the deceased. The ‘built-in presumption’ carried by this question is that ‘the audience knows the answer’ and the answer is that the model convenor of gatherings at the moment of death is Christ himself and that funeral gatherings are carried out following his example and motivated by the possibility of a future gathering.

The rhetorical question in the next excerpt is similar to the one in excerpt 4, but it comes after a characterization of the gathering.

Excerpt 5

- 01 na sisi ambao tumebaki hapa:- (0.7) ambao tuko kwenye
And we who have remained here, who are here at
02 hii shere- hii sherehe- (0.7) tunaitwa marehemu, (.) watarajiwa
This cere- this ceremony are called the deceased to be
03 Sindiyo;
Is that so?

In the excerpt, *tumebaki* ‘we have remained’ (line 1) reveals a metaphorical association of life and death in terms of a journey; thus, metaphorically, the dead are ‘in front’ and the bereaved ‘behind’. The word *sherehe* ‘ceremony’ (line 2) analogically refers to the communion at the Lord’s supper; hence, *watarajiwa* ‘to be’ metaphorically reveals communion at anticipated individual deaths and the anticipated communion at the end of time within the Christian religion. In this way, the rhetorical question *sindiyo* ‘is that not so?’ seeks confirmation from the participants whether the preceding argument is true or false. The rhetorical question in excerpt 6 follows an explanation of the relationship between the deceased and God; it is a question directed at the speaker (including the participants).

Excerpt 6

- 01 mwenyezi mungu alifunulia tayari:- (0.6)
Already the almighty God already ‘opened’ to her
02 ine MAMBO haya; (.) akamwamini:- (0.8)
these issues; she believed him
03 na sasa amemwita, (0.7)
and now he has called her
04 tunamwomba kwamba aingie binguni
We pray to him that she enters heaven
05 efwe khuramire enyuma khulaba waena
Where shall we –who are left behind- be?

The word *alifunulia* ‘he opened for’ characterizes the word of God metaphorically in terms of something ‘closed’ and ‘open’; in this instance God ‘opens’ and this suggests the incapability of human beings to understand God’s message without his assistance. The word *MAMBO* ‘issues’ uttered loudly and emphatically reveals the metaphorical association of God’s word and an ‘issue’. *Amwemwita* ‘he has called her’ shows the Christian association of death with a journey (and a call) initiated by God. The word *tunamwomba* ‘we pray to him’ analogically indicates the funeral service as a prayer (this refers to mass as a prayer initiated at the Lord’s supper). With the word *aingie* ‘she enters’, the narrow passage way to heaven is signalled and the basis of this is the analogical association of heaven with perfection or the sacred and the earth with imperfection or the profane in the Christian religion (Nganga forthcoming). On this basis, the priest code switches to Lubukusu to identify Bukusu participants and uses a deliberative rhetorical question *efwe khuramire enyuma khulaba waena* ‘Where shall we – who are left behind- be?’ to ‘encourage decision-making’ (Estes 2013:124).

Conclusion and Discussions

The data shows that rhetorical questions are not redundant, but they serve crucial discourse functions. That is, they establish a connection between discourse parts on the one hand and the speaker and the listener on the other hand. In the sermon, apart from seeking contact with participants and encouraging decision-making, as is the case with polar and deliberative questions, rhetorical questions play a role in the organization of discourse that contextualizes them. With the use of expository questions, the priest ‘persuades [the] audience into being interested in the answer that [he] wishes to provide for them’ (Estes 2013:107). But expository rhetorical questions also establish contact with participants by evoking what has been described by Estes, (2013:107) as ‘interest in the [participants], whether or not the [participant] wants to be interested in the topic’. This bias is signalled by the use of communicative devices such as metaphor, analogy and prosodic features such as loudness that underlie rhetorical questions.

This article focused mainly on rhetorical questions and it anticipates a study on rhetorical questions in a discourse context that involve ‘real life’ data. An examination of the relationship between rhetorical questions and other devices and especially non-verbal devices in the sermon also deserves further attention.

Transcription Symbols

Capital	loudness
[]	overlap
(2.5)	duration in seconds
(.)	duration in time less than 0.5 sec
(-)	level intonation
(:)	lengthening of a vowel
(,)	rising intonation
(;)	falling intonation

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